



LIVES OF CHANGE:
An Ethnographic Evaluation
of Two Learner Centred
Literacy Programs
Executive Summary

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An Ethnographic Evaluation of Two Learner Centred Literacy Programs**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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April, 1994

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The Research Team

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Hanna Fingeret

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Allison Tom

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Pat Dyer

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Anne Morley

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Deborah Lee

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Mark McCue

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Marina Niks

Table of Contents

[Introduction](#)

[Framework for the Study](#)

[Learner-centred literacy and self-directed learning](#)

[The process approach to writing instruction](#)

[Second language literacy teaching and learning](#)

[Workplace literacy](#)

[Method](#)

[Introducing Invergarry Literacy](#)

[The Instructional Program at Invergarry](#)

[Introducing The Vancouver Municipal Workplace Language Program](#)

[VMWLP Instructional Program](#)

[Impacts of Participation on Literacy Practices and Culture](#)

[Writing, Reading and Attitudes](#)

[New Literacy Practices Outside the Program](#)

[Culture, Gender and Language](#)

[Freedom, Learning and Limits](#)

[Invergarry Adult Learning Centre](#)

[Vancouver Municipal Workplace Language Program](#)

[Instruction: Competing Sources of Authority](#)

[Invergarry Adult Learning Centre](#)

[Vancouver Municipal Workplace Language Program](#)

[Conclusions and Recommendations](#)

[Programmatic Conclusions and Recommendations](#)

[Specific Recommendations](#)

[Recommendations for the Field](#)

[References](#)

Introduction

Developing literacy and language abilities is of urgent importance to many adults living in Canada today. This is a study of the impact of participation in two programs that help Canadian adults develop these abilities: the Invergarry Adult Learning Centre Literacy program in Surrey, British Columbia, and the Vancouver Municipal Workplace Language Program (VMWLP). Both programs are provided free to adults through a variety of funding mechanisms and sponsorships, and are committed to a learner centred approach to literacy work. Beyond these structural and philosophical similarities the programs differ greatly in many aspects. However, they each illustrate, in their own way, what can be accomplished when sincere, dedicated practitioners work in an open, collaborative way with each other and with students.

We found that each program is effective for those adults who are willing and able to become engaged in the learner centred approach as it is implemented in each setting. Many learners in these programs begin with questions about their abilities, about learning, and about the importance of their own prior knowledge and experience. Sometimes these questions are the result of prior schooling experiences in which these adults experienced failure; for adults whose native language is other than English, these questions can arise from feeling inadequate when interacting with predominantly English-speaking Canadians. In either case, learners need to feel that their experience is valued, and that they are capable of learning and growing. As they begin to feel stronger and more confident through their participation in these programs, adults are able to learn more efficiently and a positive cycle is created of growth and learning.

Learner centred literacy education is not easy; it entails discomfort and it can look messy as teachers and students struggle together with the tensions inherent in the model. Everyone is making choices all the time, working out issues about authority and control. But the struggle is worth it -- as a result, learning is deeply rooted in students' culture and experience, and serves as a strong foundation for continuing growth. We found that learners and staff members in both programs experience a positive impact from the process of struggling with learner centred literacy as it is implemented in these programs. Students also develop enhanced literacy abilities and associated changes in their lives.

This project is a national demonstration designed to develop qualitative, collaborative evaluation methods, and to examine, in depth, the instructional process as it occurs in each program and the ways in which participation makes some difference in the lives of students and, to a lesser extent, teachers and staff. It is an ethnographic, collaborative research project involving researchers; university graduate students; literacy program teachers, staff, volunteers and students; and a national advisory committee.

The project has produced two reports. This report presents the findings and conclusions of the evaluation; it responds to four questions:

1. What are the characteristics of the programs and their organizations?
2. What are the important characteristics of instruction in each program?
3. What are the major impacts of participation in each program?

4. What is the role of culture in the conduct and impact of each program?

The second report focuses on the processes through which the research was developed and conducted, providing guidance for others who wish to conduct ethnographic, collaborative program evaluations.

This project has been longer and more demanding than any of us expected when we first began. The result of this work is a set of reports that provides detailed, in-depth insights into the process of learner centred literacy education and collaborative ethnographic evaluation. Learner centred education will always appear messy and riddled with issues; the tensions inherent in learner centred education are portrayed in the Technical Report at a level of detail that is rarely shared. The details in the Technical Report are a tribute to the learners, teachers, volunteers and administrators who had the courage and dedication to embrace this project in their midst.

Framework for the Study

We tried to understand how each program implements its own philosophy to accomplish its goals. Therefore, the mission and philosophy of the Invergarry Adult Learning Centre Literacy program and the Vancouver Municipal Workplace Language program provide the framework within which we explore the programs' impacts on learners.

Learner-centred literacy and self-directed learning

The literacy programs involved in this study are based on a learner centred philosophy. They value learners' prior experience, language background, and culture; students are the source of the curriculum and instruction is designed to build on strengths and work toward learners' goals. These programs also believe that literacy is a social function, rooted in communication and, therefore, that dialogue is central to teaching and learning. The staff believe that the student, rather than the teacher or the content, is central to the learning process. Staff in both programs view literacy development as an, ongoing process rather than as remediation; teachers and learners should work together to share their knowledge rather than in hierarchical relationships in which there are experts and "blank slates."

Learner centred education addresses students' goals, needs and interests. Students come with their own set of definitions about literacy; it is important to examine the extent to which their definitions differ from or are consistent with those of the staff. To the extent that there is some distance between students' and staffs interpretations of literacy and appropriate goals for literacy education, there will be tension. Learner centred education provides an arena for dealing with those tensions constructively. This report examines the extent to which those tensions exist and, when they do, explores how the tensions are resolved and the impact of that process of negotiation.

The process approach to writing instruction

The curriculum at Invergarry and VMWLP is individually negotiated rather than pre-determined; learners are expected to become increasingly self-directed, and to take on increasing amounts of

responsibility for their own learning. Both Invergarry and VMWLP are writing-based programs; their directors believe that "the process of learners discovering their voices as writers is the most dramatic step toward becoming literate" (Pharness and Weinstein, 1988, p.37). Writing is a way for students to speak to themselves as well as to others.

The "process" approach to writing is based on studies of good writers; it encourages writing for communication and it emphasizes writing as a continuing process of clarifying the author's thoughts. Therefore, the process of writing is valued, rather than only the product. Students are encouraged to think about their ideas, to share them with other students, to write freely, and to get feedback from other students as to whether the ideas are clear. This report examines the way in which the staff at Invergarry and VMWLP integrate the process approach to writing with learner centred literacy education; the staff have to address the role of culture and language in teaching and learning interactions.

Second language literacy teaching and learning

A majority of students in Invergarry and VMWLP are developing English language abilities at the same time as they are learning reading and writing abilities. Some students in the programs are literate in their native language, while others are literate in no language. The instructional needs of each of these groups differs from each other, and both differ from the instructional needs of native English speakers. The literature in second language instruction presents theoretical models that are similar to those found in literacy instructional literature for native English speakers. The most recent literature, and that grounded in research findings, supports an emphasis on literacy as a process of constructing meaning, and the integration of reading, writing, speaking and listening. Many ESL authors talk about "communicative competence" as a way of addressing the importance of learners being able to use their knowledge about their new language competently, in social situations, rather than simply being able to understand rules intellectually.

Staff at Invergarry and VMWLP have to integrate attention to learner centred instruction with knowledge about second language acquisition for the majority of their students. Thus, our assessment framework develops another dimension as the staff applies the program's philosophy to working with adults who are not native English speakers and are in class with native speakers. This report explores the role of students' native culture in relation to the philosophy of learner centred education as it is implemented in each program. It also explores the impact of participation on students' culture, and the ways in which students appear to embrace or resist certain aspects of the programs.

Workplace literacy

The Vancouver Municipal Workplace Language program is a workplace literacy education program; Invergarry contributes to workforce development in a less direct way. Workplace literacy programs vary greatly in North America. They can be tightly tied to workplace literacy demands, training employees in the specific reading, writing, speaking, listening and problem solving practices needed on their jobs. On the other hand, workplace literacy programs can address literacy more generally, assuming that there will be some transfer into the workplace.

Burnaby, Harper and Peirce (1992) point out that workplace language training is important because it often provides immigrants' only access to language training. Many immigrants immediately begin working wherever they can find a job, and "once established in the kinds of jobs that are available to people who have little official language fluency, they are often too committed to the demands of their work and family to find the time to take language classes" (p. 305). In addition, Burnaby, Harper and Peirce point out, many highly skilled immigrants are not able to participate in the labor market at the level of their skill due to their lack of proficiency in the official languages. Thus, workplace language training is a crucial aspect of Canadian workforce development; VMWLP is attempting to respond directly to the need.

Method

We chose evaluation methods and developed a design collaboratively with the programs. Allison Tom, Assistant Professor at the University of British Columbia, Vancouver, was the project director as well as one of the co-principal investigators. She was responsible for the project administration and daily management, which included supervision of the research team and data management. Hanna Arlene Fingeret, Executive Director of Literacy South in Durham, North Carolina, USA, was the other co-principal investigator.

Activities during the first six months of the research project (November, 1991 to April, 1992), primarily focused on *planning and building a research team*. This included identifying graduate students who would be fieldworkers, and identifying a staff member from each of the two literacy programs who would join the research team as fieldworkers and liaisons between the project and the programs. The following graduate students joined the team at the beginning of the project: Lex Baas, Jane Dawson, Pat Dyer, Lynette Harper, and Marina Niks; Lex Baas left soon after the project began and Anne Morley joined. Mark McCue joined the team as the liaison person for the Invergarry Adult Learning Centre Literacy Program, and Deborah Lee joined as the liaison for the Vancouver Municipal Workplace Language Program. In addition, Cathie Dunlop worked as an administrative staff person for the project; she left during the second year and Tom Nesbit joined in that position. This period also included some training for the research team. We also met with students and teachers in each of the programs during this phase to clarify the research questions and to refine the design.

An Advisory Committee was formed during this phase that included the following persons: Shirley Brice Heath, Department of Linguistics, Stanford University; Barbara Burnaby, Chair, Department of Adult Education, Ontario Institute for the Study of Education; Mayor Gordon Campbell, City of Vancouver; Cathy Chapman, National Literacy Secretariat; Al Etmanski, P.L.A.N., Burnaby, British Columbia; Barbara Holmes, Surrey School District, British Columbia; Deborah Lee, Hastings Institute; Mark McCue, Invergarry Learning Centre; Gary Pharness, Hastings Institute; Lee Weinstein, Invergarry Learning Centre; and Joyce White, Continuing Education and Training Technology, Ottawa. The Advisory Committee helped the project connect to local issues, national research perspectives, and the broader concerns of the practitioner community.

The next eight months (April to December, 1992) became predominantly concerned with *collecting data*. This included observing at both programs, interviewing individuals at the

programs and at their homes, telephoning some students who had stopped attending to ask them about their experience, and collecting documents at both programs. Interviews were taped and transcribed onto disk; the transcriptions were corrected by the interviewer. Fieldnotes were typed onto disk by each fieldworker. Documents were filed in the project office. We collected the following data:

Individual interviews (taped and transcribed, at home and at programs)

34 students

28 staff

8 students who left programs

12 other

Group meetings and events (taped and transcribed or fieldnotes): 97 hours

General observation at programs: 21 hours

Observation of instruction at the program sites: 145 hours

Other data (e.g., journals, copies of students' writing, program documents)

These numbers represent only formal interviews and observations; they represent only a fraction of the students and staff who were actually involved in the study.

The last period of the project was *data analysis and writing*. All of the interviews and transcripts were analyzed inductively by some of the members of the research team. There have been a number of rounds of feedback on various drafts of this report to *insure validity, accuracy and appropriate respect for confidentiality*. The first draft was circulated among the research team members; the revised report, Draft 2, was sent to the Program Directors, Gary Pharness and Lee Weinstein. Gary and Lee supported the overall analysis of the report and requested specific clarifications. Lee was concerned that it might be difficult for a reader to get a sense of the overall context into which the Literacy Program fits. He contributed a map of Invergarry that clarifies the physical relationship between Literacy and other programs and services. Gary was concerned about the fieldworkers' lack of involvement in the training he conducts to prepare teachers. Although the team originally had agreed to examine training, it was not included in the fieldwork and, as a result, we missed those opportunities to hear Gary and the teachers discussing program philosophy and beliefs.

Lee and Gary's feedback was incorporated into Draft 3 which was shared with the Advisory Committee members and representatives of the funding agency in the Canadian government. The major findings, conclusions, and recommendations were shared with the consulting groups at Invergarry (which include staff and students) and a group of staff and students at VMWLP. Research team members also spoke with everyone who is quoted in the report to make sure that they are comfortable with how their words are used. General response to the report was very favorable. However, VMWLP teachers felt that their experience with groups was not adequately represented in the report. In order to respond to their feedback, Hanna went back to the original data and re-analyzed fieldnotes and interview transcripts from VMWLP. She found that the data supported the teachers' descriptions of their experience and the final report incorporates this finding.

Introducing Invergarry Literacy

The Invergarry Learning Centre provides learners with a range of programs. The Schoolbridge program serves beginning ESL learners. When learners acquire enough spoken English to be understood, they move into the Literacy Program during the day or the evening. When they are ready, they may progress to the Adult Basic Education (ABE) program and the Secondary School Completion (ASSC) program (Grade 12) if they wish.

The Invergarry Literacy program's physical space includes a big classroom and several smaller classrooms, as well as shared space such as the staff lounge and student lounge. Teachers work one-to-one with learners in the big classroom and, with the exception of the volunteer co-ordinator, they teach groups of about eight or ten learners in conversation, reading, and writing classes in the smaller classrooms.

The day and evening programs are each administered by a full-time co-ordinator, chosen by his or her peers. The co-ordinators are responsible to Invergarry's Administrative Officer, who reports to the Director of Continuing Education of the Surrey School District's Continuing Education Department. At the beginning of this study a co-ordinator and eight teachers were assigned to each program. A co-ordinator of volunteers (who is also an instructor), a part-time special-needs teacher, volunteers, counselors, and a supervisory aide also work for the day program. Volunteers work in the evening program in lower numbers.

The teachers at Invergarry Adult Learning Centre belong to the Surrey local of the British Columbia Teacher's Federation. In the Literacy program, only one teacher is classified as unit one; he has an ongoing appointment, accrued seniority and all the benefits of any other full-time teacher in the district. The other teachers are all unit two teachers; they are not permitted to work more than 25 hours a week, their employment is dependent upon enrollment, they are not paid for preparation time, and there is no guarantee of employment from session to session. In response to the high numbers of enrollments, the evening teachers were supplemented by three teachers from the Schoolbridge Program. They originally were ESL learners, and then they were volunteers, before being hired as teachers.

The day program co-ordinator estimated that 620 learners were enrolled in the Literacy program during the period covered by this study, and that approximately the same numbers of learners were enrolled in the day and evening programs. He estimated that 35% of those enrolled in the first semester returned for the second one. Approximately 27% of the learners speak English as their first language. Included in this group are most of the 17% of people who are Special Needs Learners. Most of the Special Needs Learners attend in the daytime but approximately 5% of the evening program learners are Special Needs people.

Adults come to Invergarry for a variety of reasons. One retired man now has time to improve and enjoy his literacy skills, while other students believe that improved literacy is essential for their work or training. Some students spoke about wanting to share in their children's learning. Adults whose native languages are other than English often come to Invergarry to learn English in order to deal with daily life. Another group of learners, particularly immigrant women, look to Invergarry to fill a personal and social need; at home they are occupied caring for their children

and have few contacts with people who speak English. And for some women, the program is a sanctuary where they escape oppression experienced in their homes. The lack of childcare in the evening means that only one parent can attend or that whole families come, if their children can occupy themselves and not require attention from teachers.

The Instructional Program at Invergarry

The Literacy program area at Invergarry is usually a very busy place. People are sitting at round tables in the big room, meeting in groups in other small classrooms, working on computers in the computer room, socializing in the lounge or in the outdoor smoking areas, or moving about from one place to another. In an attempt to set a climate of equality and cooperation, there are no obvious ways of determining each person's role; this makes it difficult for new students to identify teachers.

Learners are interviewed early in their attendance at Invergarry and directed toward learning activities which teachers think are most appropriate. Students attend on a semi-drop-in basis, and structure their own activities each day according to the time they have available, classes they have chosen to attend, or work they wish to do in the big classroom with the possible assistance of teachers and volunteers. Many students spend most of their time at a table in the big classroom, working one-to-one with a teacher. Small group classes vary a great deal, depending on the teacher, the learners, and the purpose of the class. They often develop a sense of community and mutual support. Learners are encouraged to write something very early on and told about writing as the key to learning language.

Writing is the central activity at Invergarry. Students working at a table in the big classroom choose their own topics for writing, and then a teacher or volunteer reviews the writing with the student. If students are unable to write, the teacher might ask them to tell a story from their lives which the teacher will print and use for reading and writing. Students are also directed to available reading materials which might interest them and provide a source of vocabulary for their learning.

Learners with special needs are noticeable at Invergarry, particularly during the day program. Teachers are interested and willing to work with students who have all sorts of barriers to learning, but the teachers do not necessarily have special training or expertise in working with adults with learning disabilities. Teachers usually must rely on experience, intuition, and sensitivity to the learner. Special Needs learners are integrated into the room, but are not necessarily directly included in social interaction with other learners. The Neil Squire Foundation and Capilano College have made SARAW (Speech-assisted reading and writing) computer software available at Invergarry to support Invergarry's commitment to serving Special Needs learners. This approach to computer-assisted instruction appears to be important in the learning and teaching experience for severely disabled learners. Introducing

Introducing The Vancouver Municipal Workplace Language Program

The Vancouver Municipal Workplace Language Program is woven into the fabric of the city's employer and employee relationships, embodied in the city's supervisory and managerial system

and the workers' unions, the Canadian Union of Public Employees, (CUPE), and the Vancouver Municipal and Regional Employees Union (VRMEU). The program was initiated in 1989 by its present director, Gary Pharness, a literacy worker. It operates under the auspices of a partnership between the City of Vancouver, the Vancouver School Board, The Canadian Union of Public Employees and other unions, and the Hastings Institute. The mayor is on the Hastings Institute's board. In addition to VMWLP classes, the Hastings Institute offers a number of other educational opportunities for city workers.

The program's learners are, or have been, city employees. Some non-city workers are allowed to attend according to some union regulations. The city provides classroom space in the board room at City Hall and at the Trout Lake Community Centre. CUPE provides a classroom in the union hall close to the Manitoba Works Yard, the hub for the city's outside workers. The city also contributes three of the learners' working hours and the learners give three hours of their own time to the program's classes which they are committed to attending for six hours a week for 12 weeks. Learners can attend on their own time as well. When learners wish to remain in the program after the first session, the city will contribute one and one-half hours of the learners' work time for a second session. After that, workers are welcome to attend on their own time. Classes are organized in three twelve week blocks starting in January, April, and September. In order to accommodate the work schedules of city employees, the program offers learners a choice of three schedules and three sites.

Nine teachers were working for VMWLP during the period we collected data. English is the native language for eight of the teachers; Chinese is the native language for the ninth teacher. At the time of this study, the latter's agreement with the Vancouver School Board limited teachers to 25 hours a week; at VMWLP the teachers' hours range from three to 25. All of the teachers have successfully completed the tutor training course taught by Gary Pharness. This consists of a six-week course followed by a six-month practicum in a specified learning centre, usually the Vancouver School Board/Little Mountain Neighborhood House. The program emphasizes a "whole language" approach to becoming literate. It stresses the value of writing, grounded in the learners' life experience and feelings, and using this learner-generated material as the foundation for reading, speaking and further writing.

At the time of this study, 46 men and 22 women were enrolled in the program's three sessions. Thirty three were new enrollees. All of the learners are employees of the City of Vancouver. They work in a variety of departments: Engineering, Parks Board, Finance, Library, Housing and Properties, Planning, and Permits and Licenses. Learners come from many different ethnic backgrounds. The largest groups are Chinese, 25%; Italian, 13%; Portuguese, 9%; Indo-Canadian, 7%; Filipino, 7%; and Canadian, 6%.

Learners hear about the program through a workplace communications network; they may get a notice with their payroll cheques, talk to a fellow worker or see a posted notice. Supervisors are the essential link. Many supervisors are supportive, and some have been instrumental in helping workers get involved in the program. Workers whose native language is other than English often enter the program to improve their English language skills.

VMWLP Instructional Program

Writing is also the central activity at VMWLP. At each VMWLP site a number of teachers work with learners as a group. Groups go through a process of building trust and cohesion and provide the structure within which learning takes place. The instructional process has relatively consistent components. First, learners write on their own; they are encouraged to write about whatever they care about. When learners have a draft or need assistance, they work one-to-one with a teacher. The finished piece of writing is copied over and turned in for typing. Learners then read out loud the stories they wrote the week before and discuss the stories with the rest of the class. Students give each other feedback on the content of the writing and on word choice and other writing mechanics.

Everything at VMWLP is structured around writing; learners can practice English conversation during discussions about their writing or during the reading time, but they are expected to produce a piece of writing each session. There is a dynamic interaction among teachers and learners within the writing and reading periods. The discussion during the reading part of each class session provides an opportunity for sharing cultural backgrounds and related prior experiences. It also is a chance to ask questions and engage in English conversation. Through these activities, students work on their reading, speaking and listening skills in addition to their writing.

Impacts of Participation on Literacy Practices and Culture

Invergarry and VMWLP differ significantly in how they operate. However, both programs ask students to participate in a learner centred approach with writing as its focus; as a result, many of their impacts are similar, arising from the struggles of participation in learner centred education and reflecting the extensive use of writing. Learners in both programs have improved their reading and writing abilities, and attest to positive changes in attitudes. Learners use their new abilities in their lives, often describing new literacy practices in areas such as work and shopping. In addition, participation leads to culture-related impacts, including changes in the culture of families and gender-related changes in behavior. In this section, we discuss the programs' impacts in more detail, organized by the type of impact.

Writing, Reading and Attitudes

Students in both programs have improved their English reading, writing, and speaking abilities. Their writing abilities particularly have changed; students point to a greater facility with writing generally as well as more technical ability. There is almost a therapeutic aspect to writing about one's life, and students in both programs respond to that potential, making connections between writing and emotional growth, for example. Students also attest to feeling more confident about their writing, and using writing as a way of clarifying their thoughts and dealing with some difficult and painful material, such as dealing with an alcoholic father or losing a family member to AIDS. Learners describe positive changes in self-concept in relation to language and literacy, and new insights into the relationship between reading and writing. Working with the computers at Invergarry also builds confidence among the Special Needs learners.

New Literacy Practices Outside the Program

In addition to improved abilities inside the program, students in both programs attest to changes in their literacy practices -- their use of literacy in their lives. They talk about shopping and eating in restaurants, in particular, as arenas in which they have been able to change their lives; they also describe new activities such as writing a book, joining the board of a housing co-op and making a speech at a writers' conference. Learners sometimes share their writing with family members and close friends; this provides an opportunity to share their pride in their accomplishments as well as a chance to share the content of the piece. In this way, writing and sharing writing become a mechanism to further develop relationships with people outside the program.

VMWLP is workplace-related and one of the major areas of impact for participants is related to their jobs. Some participants have experienced discrimination in their workplaces because of their problems with English reading, writing and speaking. Other workers hope participation in the program will help them qualify for new jobs. VMWLP is designed to help workers develop their voices and build their self-confidence as well as their skills so that they can have some job mobility within the city employment structure. Staff in VMWLP document numerous workers who have participated in the program and moved from auxiliary to permanent job status in the city, been promoted, moved to another department and more desirable jobs, looked for and found new positions in the city, and participated in further training or schooling. Supervisors also attest to changes that improve job performance and verbal communication.

Invergarry's connection to work is more indirect; nonetheless, many students address their work goals at Invergarry, including preparing for certification exams or getting assistance filling in applications for new jobs.

Culture, Gender and Language

Both programs try to create physical and social environments in which people feel welcome across cultures and backgrounds. Social events such as potluck dinners and graduation ceremonies try to incorporate recognition of various cultural customs. In addition, students' cultures often are discussed during instruction. For example, many students describe cultural events in their writing and then discuss them with their teachers or with other students in their groups. Program staff (and, sometimes, learners) are involved in many sensitive cultural decisions, such as choosing which holidays will be celebrated in what ways. Some students develop a deeper appreciation of other cultures through their participation in these programs; however, in one instance at least, negative attitudes about race were exacerbated, partly reflecting students' competition for seating and teachers' attention at Invergarry.

One of the most pervasive areas of impact for participants in both programs is on the culture of learners' families. As students develop new literacy practices that involve their spouses, children, or other family members, the family's culture shifts to accommodate (or, at times, to reject) these new patterns. One of the first changes may be simply reading to a child; changes in the relationships between children and their parents or caregivers reflect subtle changes in power relationships and roles. Children's literacy practices sometimes change, particularly when

children are involved in reading their parents' writing and doing more writing themselves. Some adults have become more active in their children's schools. And some siblings have more childcare responsibilities for younger siblings as a result of their parents spending more time in school.

Many learners who are developing English language skills are concerned about the preservation of their native language and culture, particularly for their children. They often distinguish between times and places for using English, such as school or work, and times and places for their native languages, such as at home with their children. They are concerned that their children, who are immersed in an English-speaking environment all day in school, will lose their native language and, with it, their cultural identity. Adult literacy teachers often approach developing English language skills as simply a positive change; for learners it is much more complicated.

Sometimes elders are concerned about preservation of the native culture, particularly when it comes to women. Sometimes fathers, uncles or other male relatives come to Invergarry to supervise a woman's studies. They are concerned about the values that the woman is learning in this setting. They understand that literacy is a way to manipulate information and to control communication, affecting the power relationships among the family members. Choices about using English or a native language are political choices; they reflect power relationships, cultural background, and responses to concrete situations. Women can use their developing literacy abilities to get access to more information, to get a job, and to change their role in the family. However, language skills alone will not necessarily make the difference for these immigrant women, particularly when it comes to employment.

Learning English and developing literacy skills is traditionally a path to mobility and to increased possibilities that can disrupt the web of social relationships of men and women. However, it can conflict with traditional roles of women more often than with traditional roles of men in many cultures. There is a tension, sometimes, between preserving native culture and participating in a program that encourages independent women. This tension can be seen among native English speaking Canadian women as well as women of other ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Most adults in these programs have been experiencing this tension in relation to work or adjusting to life in Canada; the literacy program provides another arena.

The fundamental value of independence and personal power at Invergarry and VMWLP is a cultural, gender-related issue. Learner centred adult literacy education is a cultural intervention. The values and beliefs that underlie learner centred work are predominantly Western. Both programs' approaches to learner centred literacy value assertiveness, independence, mutual respect and communication. Even within Western cultures, these values are interpreted in widely diverse ways, and the sociocultural conditions for women, in particular, vary widely. Learners in both programs are engaged in making decisions about how they want to preserve their culture, and how they want to change. Their participation in the process of learning to make decisions about their own learning and taking responsibility for their own progress is participation in cultural change. Development of new literacy abilities enables change in how the learners participate in the social world outside their programs.

Change is not simple; it has to be managed. Learners make choices every day that they participate in these programs -- what should they write about, which teachers should they talk with, where should they sit, and so on. In addition, they make choices every day when they leave the program -- which writing opportunity in their lives should they attempt in a new way, which reading practice should they do independently or ask for help, where should they use English rather than a native language, how should they relate to their children's grasp of English, and so on. Students' new abilities provide new resources for managing their lives, but they also raise new issues and problems. We found extensive mutual support among students and relationships with teachers that are characterised by trust and mutual respect; these are essential for helping students negotiate lives of change.

Freedom, Learning and Limits:

The Internal Tensions in Learner Centred Instruction

The impacts that we see in skills, tasks, practices, confidence and attitudes are partly due to dealing with the tensions of working in a learner centred program. Learner centred instruction usually pushes everyone to re-examine many of their assumptions and beliefs about learning, and to create new ways of working together. This is because learner centred instruction requires that teachers and learners negotiate new power relationships, bringing together their differing domains of experience and knowledge. At the same time, the fundamental decision to provide learner centred instruction has been made by the teachers, unilaterally. Patterns of tensions emerge as teachers, staff and learners work together in an environment characterized by ambiguity, in many ways, and circumscribed by the commitment to learner centred education.

This struggle often stimulates learning. Students who find the programs satisfying learn to take more responsibility for their own learning and to produce pieces of writing that come from their own experience and interests. We cannot separate the heightened confidence derived from negotiating the tensions inherent in the programs, from the confidence derived from enhanced English literacy and language abilities. The next two sections explore these tensions in relation to program organization and instruction.

The Invergarry Adult Learning Centre

Weekly staff meetings are the main forum in which the daytime staff tries to develop shared definitions of terms such as "self-directed learning" and "learner centred instruction." Their discussions about philosophy often are grounded in conversations about how best to serve specific students. These case conferences often lead to raising larger philosophical questions, as well as policy issues. The evening program staff meet briefly at the end of the evening, sharing information and dealing with issues as they clean up and shut down the Centre.

When we began data collection at Invergarry, there were few limits around who would be served and which of their needs and interests would be addressed. Learner centred literacy instruction was interpreted to mean that there would be an open-door policy, essentially, and that the staff was responsible to meet as many needs as possible of everyone who walked in. As the program grew, this became impossible. There were too many people with too many needs to be met by

the resources available at Invergarry. Therefore, during the year that we worked with Invergarry, we were able to observe the staff and students struggling with creating new limits.

In order to deal with setting enrollment limits, the staff created the waiting list. Students are supposed to sign an attendance log each time they come. When students do not come for a period of time, those on the waiting list are contacted to take their place. It gets a little more complicated, however; the Invergarry staff have a commitment to meeting students' needs. When students do not come, the staff is faced with a choice about how to use the scarce resource of their time; they can call people to try to bring them back or they can call people on the waiting list to come in. At what point should they stop pouring energy into people already on the rolls and invest in new people from the waiting list?

The waiting list depends on a number of factors, particularly staff who are willing and able to tell adults that they must wait. It also depends on accurate monitoring of attendance and its relationship to staff workload. In order to make decisions based on this information, staff must have some insight into what constitutes an "appropriate" workload, rather than overload or under-utilization of their time. In addition, there must be clear communication between the day and evening program, because this system means that students cannot simply choose to come whenever -- day or evening -- they choose. These are complex and difficult issues for staff who are used to working without clear limits, and who exist in a larger environment in which enrollment is rewarded with additional funding.

The teachers and volunteers at Invergarry try to reach out to students, asking them what they want to learn and trying to be responsive. Students experience this concern as a positive characteristic of the program. However, one of the ways students set some limits around their involvement in Invergarry is to identify one or two teachers or volunteers with whom they want to work, rather than accepting the help of everyone who walks up to them. As a result, however, **there is a tension between the cultural value of being polite and choosing to work primarily with specific teachers and volunteers.** Students also have to deal with extensive competing demands on their teachers' time. The fieldnotes contain numerous examples of students waiting for help from specific teachers for extended periods of time. The teachers often are either unaware of the students' waiting or are so busy working with other students that they are unable to get to the other side of the room.

Teachers struggle over how they make decisions about which students they work with. They are aware that some students take more time than others, and some students are more enjoyable for some teachers. **They are concerned when students complain about a lack of assistance, but that also competes with their belief in adults as self-directed and assertive participants at Invergarry.** The tension about time for students is particularly difficult when it came to Special Needs learners; these learners' needs for extensive time were discussed at almost every staff meeting. Teachers also have to allocate time to competing responsibilities such as attending meetings and doing various administrative roles.

Learners at Invergarry have to take a lot of responsibility for their own education. Students have to decide where to sit, who to work with, whether they want to attend small classes in addition to their work with teachers individually in the big classroom, what they will write about, and so on.

Many students also make decisions about language use. **Invergarry's approach to learner centred instruction can be difficult for people who are not used to viewing their lives as a series of choices.** This amount of freedom and flexibility can feel overwhelming to adults who do not have the skills and experience that support making academic learning decisions for themselves. It also requires a lot of work for students to muster the courage and the energy to figure out the environment and begin to get what they need.

Invergarry's freedom and flexibility are appealing to many students, despite the problems and challenges. The teachers and volunteers struggle continually to support learners in taking responsibility for their own learning. At the same time, however, **learners often feel mixed about their desire for an authority person -- a teacher -- to tell them what to do while enjoying the experience of deciding for themselves.**

The teachers developed a process they called " portfolio assessment" during the time we were collecting data as one response to the students' (and the teachers') requests for help in creating structure and making choices. This is similar to a case load system in which each staff member has a group of learners they supervise. Each learner is supposed to identify a set of goals that is written in the portfolio folder, and a time frame within which some benchmark will be attained. The staff member periodically checks on progress with each student. **Tensions arise when students resist the goal setting process, however, or do not make the same decisions about their learning plan that teachers want them to make.**

There also are tensions about competing sources of authority for program management.

The staff embody a range of opinions about the relationship between the staffs and students' appropriate roles in relation to governance. Support and resources are provided to help students move into positions of more power; for example, some staff members and students took an advocacy course and some people took a peer counseling course. Follow-up is slow, however, as staff and students try to develop a clear role for student advocacy.

The Friends of Invergarry was a student group that was formed during a time when the future of the school was threatened. It provided a mechanism for students to get involved in advocating for the school and, at the same time, learning about advocacy more generally. The crisis over the future of the school provided a focus for student organizing; students had a common interest and the Friends of Invergarry provided opportunities for students to serve the larger interests of the school. At this point, without a clear external focus around which everyone can unite, students and staff are struggling to redefine the Friends of Invergarry. The relationship between organizing and authority and power is not well developed or widely understood.

Vancouver Municipal Workplace Language Program

At VMWLP the situation is similar to Invergarry in that students have to make their own choices about the topics for their writing, and workers of all ability levels, language backgrounds, cultures, and educational attainment are together in each class. However, there are fewer students, and a smaller ratio of students to teachers, so the problems of noise, creating a personal space, and identity that are so prevalent at Invergarry do not appear at VMWLP. There are fewer choices, since it is a de-centralized collection of classes and services rather than a centralized

multi-service program. The division of class time into periods for writing, followed by reading and sharing in a group, is controlled by teachers primarily, and the structure of the instructional process is relatively uniform.

However, even with fewer choices, VMWLP also illustrates the fundamental tensions inherent in learner centred work. For example, students and teachers struggle with the **tension between allocating time equitably among students and engaging in authentic conversation** and cross-cultural sharing. The staff feel responsible for setting limits on the conversation during reading and sharing to make sure that every student has time for his or her piece. At the same time, the staff is committed to encouraging conversation so that students practice their language skills and explore the ideas in their writing. Teachers also have to deal with a **tension between their responsibility to be responsive to students and their goal of helping students become independent**. Students are encouraged to work with as many teachers as possible at VMWLP; the program's philosophy is that students gain by having as much input as possible into their work. At the same time, students are told that they should do as much as possible on their own.

The Vancouver Municipal Workplace Language Program and the Invergarry Adult Learning Centre Literacy program differ from each other significantly in their structure and approach as well as their external constraints. They share a commitment to learner centred instruction, but they implement it in different ways. Both programs provide insights into the tensions created by learner centred education, however. They illustrate how teachers and learners have to work together to deal with issues of power and authority over and over again, re-inventing their responses in each new situation.

Instruction: Competing Sources of Authority

The process of facilitating instruction is complex within a learner centered philosophy. One of the major underlying issues has to do with the competing authority of the teacher and the learner. Students have the authority of their own prior learning experiences. Many are literate in their native languages and have experienced success with a more structured, teacher-driven approach to instruction. Other learners have not experienced that success themselves, but their expectations that learning must have a teacher to drive the process are so deeply rooted that they feel uncomfortable, unsettled, when those expectations are violated.

The teachers are committed to a philosophical position that they believe is supported by their experience. It places students' prior experience with teacher centred and skills-based instruction in a larger framework. Although students may have experienced other approaches as effective in the past, teachers believe that students will find the approach at Invergarry and VMWLP more effective, or effective in a broader range of ways, if they give it a chance. They believe that students will enhance their skills and knowledge in relation to literacy and language, and that learners also will enhance their ability to take control of and to assess their own learning in ways that will be important as they continue learning across their lifetimes.

Invergarry Adult Learning Centre

Teachers and students come together in instruction with different types of authority and expertise. Students know their lives, their interests, their cultures, their preferred ways of learning -- many areas of skill and knowledge that are important in the process of improving their literacy abilities. Teachers come with skill and knowledge in facilitating the learning process; in learner centred work this means that they must be good listeners and must be able to use information shared by students to provide guidance and substance for instruction. The teacher and learner each control different aspects of the process, which depends fundamentally on dialogue. As the students develop a sense of their own authority, **a tension often develops between students' expectations, connected to their prior schooling, and the ways that the teachers at Invergarry want to approach instruction now.**

This tension around authority about the learning process tends to manifest itself around the issue of grammar workbooks. Many students ask for grammar instruction in traditional forms such as lists of rules. However, learner centred literacy work generally involves teachers and learners creating curriculum together; rules for spelling and grammar are taught as they become meaningful in the context of something a student is reading or writing. Invergarry's teachers, therefore, prefer to help learners with sentence structure and grammatical components in the context of students' writing, when the information will make sense in the light of what the learner is trying to do. This tension between the competing authority of the teacher and the learner has to be resolved uniquely in each relationship between each teacher and learner.

One teacher learned English as a second language. His authority is based on his experience, which differs from the other teachers' experience and is heavily oriented toward more traditional schooling practices, including the use of grammar worksheets. There appears to be a group of students who are responsive and appreciative. Since he offers this instruction in response to students' requests rather than as an automatic prescription for their learning needs, his work with grammar is tolerated within Invergarry, if not actively promoted. Indeed, the diversity among the teachers at Invergarry often makes it possible for students to find someone who will respond to their requests.

Assessment of progress is an arena in which students' and teachers' authority often compete in traditional programs. At Invergarry, portfolio assessment was developed to facilitate a dialogue between teachers and students about goals, learning and progress.

Vancouver Municipal Workplace Language Program

Students at VMWLP like the fact that they can study at their own pace, and they appreciate the respect they feel about their experience, their thoughts and their writing. At each site a group class develops a sense of community over time. This connection to a group is mentioned by learners and teachers as a particularly important aspect of participation in VMWLP. The group provides a setting that supports learning and provides a context within which the tensions inherent in learner centred work emerge and are resolved, continually.

Since a group of teachers works together with all of the students in one class at each VMWLP site, a student's request for a change in the way that instruction is structured in a class amounts to a change in the program's structure and instructional approach. When one student wants things done differently, that means that all students would have to participate in the change. At times, this results in magnifying the tension between students' and teachers' authority.

For example, VMWLP offers heterogeneous classes including learners with a wide range of English abilities and native languages. Some students want more differentiation between students whose abilities differ -- they want to separate students into different ability levels. At Invergarry, one teacher decided to divide her small class into two groups: those who had more English language ability, and those who had less. The change in this class was scarcely noticed in the larger Invergarry program. At VMWLP, however, this would amount to changing the program's structure.

Students who requested changes in the program's way of organizing instruction usually were persuaded to continue to participate in the present structure, or they were invited to find an alternative program, such as free grammar, GED, and conversation classes at Vancouver School Board Programs at other sites in the city. The staffs response to these students can be viewed partly as a healthy appreciation of the limits of the program. Rather than trying to be everything that everybody wants, the administrators have identified a niche for the program -- it is writing-based, students work in one group, and it does not teach grammar and spelling out of context of a student's writing. On the other hand, the staffs response can be viewed as an example of **the tension between being responsive to learners and wanting learners to agree with staff member's decisions about program organization**. This is analogous to the tensions experienced at Invergarry around goal setting in portfolio assessment or limiting the use of grammar worksheets.

Teachers at VMWLP try to help students feel a sense of authority about their own work. This process is called "negotiating meaning," with the teacher making suggestions and explanations and the writer making the decision about what to change or leave as is. Many learners deeply appreciate this approach to "corrections."

The teacher's role is difficult. Teachers try to give learners consistent messages about the legitimacy of their own knowledge; sometimes teachers realize that this process can undermine their goals by focusing on the teacher as a source of information and judgment. The small number of teachers at VMWLP allows for more informal communication among the group. Rather than large staff meetings, such as take place at Invergarry, teachers at VMWLP talk informally as they car pool to class or visit on the telephone. These constant informal conversations provide opportunities for teachers to share experiences and to struggle with decisions about how to respond to individual students most effectively.

The director struggles with the tensions of implementing learner centred literacy education. He feels a **tension between his hopes that the teachers in the program will share responsibility for the administrative work of the program, and his sense of responsibility for defining the boundaries of the program**. His leadership style appears to equate teachers' sharing authority

for instructional decisions with, in effect, opening the program to changes that would not necessarily be in students' best interests.

At Invergarry, teachers have a more central role in creating instructional processes than at VMWLP. The increased flexibility at Invergarry comes with increased work to create boundaries for students and teachers. Less flexibility at VMWLP comes with an increased sense of security and predictability. These are all trade-offs. In both cases, however, teachers, students and administrators are negotiating the relationship between their complementary domains of knowledge continually. This appears to be connected to students developing increased insights into their own learning and literacy, and enhancing their ability to advocate for themselves.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The Invergarry Adult Learning Centre Literacy program and Vancouver Municipal Workplace Language Program are exciting programs in which adults from a wide variety of ethnic and cultural backgrounds come together to work on common issues of language and literacy. Each program appears to be effective for those adults who are willing and able to become engaged in the learner centred approach as it is implemented in the program.

Programmatic conclusions and recommendations

As a result of participation in these programs, many adults develop improved literacy and language skills and practices; develop new attitudes about their abilities and aspirations; develop a larger perspective on education and learning; enhance their ability to negotiate new environments in ways that meet their needs; and enhance their ability to take responsibility for initiating and assessing their own learning. These impacts can be seen in students' performance on their jobs as well as in their family and community life. Some students develop a more tolerant view of other cultural groups through participation in these programs. Some learners experience a shift in the extent to which they continue practices from their native cultures; this shift can cause some distress, even when viewed as positive. Overall, the impacts of engaging in learner centred education are intertwined with the impacts of participating in literacy and language instruction.

This report has extensively explored the tensions inherent in learner centred education. Teachers and learners constantly have to negotiate power and authority as they construct the instructional process. The fundamental contradiction of learner centred education -- the decision to share power has been made unilaterally -- provides a boundary within which a lot of learning takes place. The ability to establish trust, personal as well as interpersonal honesty, willingness to compromise and question, and commitment to personal growth and learning are essential attributes for people who engage in learner centred work.

Specific recommendations

Culture and Learner Centred Literacy Education

We recommend more systematic discussion about the relationship between culture, learning, instruction, and programmatic responses.

Culture cannot be separated from a robust model of learner centred literacy education. Some of the tensions that arise when implementing learner centred literacy have their roots in culture and gender, as well as relating to personal history and background. Issues such as culturally-related attitudes toward authority, orientation to individual achievement, and assumptions about the relationship between literacy and power influence an adult's way of participating in learner centred education and process writing instruction. Invergarry and VMWLP are models of culturally responsive instruction, in many ways. However, a great deal of responsibility for recognizing the role of culture in each situation and responding appropriately falls to individual teachers. We recommend more systematic discussion about the links between students' backgrounds and their learning approaches to enhance understanding of patterns across people with similar characteristics.

We recommend engaging students more often in critical analysis of the tensions they experience around learning, change, and culture.

Learner centered education is a cultural intervention, rewarding Western values of autonomy and independence. There are times that learner centred education, as it is implemented in these programs, requires that students choose between their native culture and the culture of the program. For example, students are told that they must become assertive but, at times, this kind of assertiveness feels rude and inappropriate, or exhilarating but threatening. This can be particularly problematic for women, who may feel that their native cultural roles are at odds with their increasing sense of independence.

We recommend more discussion about the literature and research related to second language learning.

Although there are great differences having to do with educational background and native language literacy among the students in both programs, only oral proficiency and writing in English was discussed with any regularity. The literature and theory in second language learning might help staff place their own practice in a larger perspective so that debates about grammar, for example, become more grounded in research and theory.

Instruction

We recommend that all students at Invergarry be provided with an opportunity to engage in peer response to writing.

The process approach to writing at Invergarry and VMWLP is successful for many students. It includes opportunities for students to respond to each other's writing in small group classes at

Invergarry and during reading time at VMWLP. However, learners in the big classroom at Invergarry do not have an opportunity to provide peer responses to other learners' writing, since their interaction is primarily with teachers rather than with other students. The process writing model as described in the literature emphasizes the importance of providing feedback, as well as receiving it. Invergarry could encourage small peer response writing groups to provide this kind of interaction.

We recommend that both programs provide instruction in a wide range of literacy functions, and provide access to reading materials covering a wide range of topics.

Most students at Invergarry and VMWLP seem to be learning and to be enjoying their classes. They can see changes in their abilities both inside and outside of the classroom, and in their attitudes. Invergarry and VMWLP both emphasize authentic language use in the classroom, which facilitates learners using their learning to change their lives. Instruction at both programs is a model of cross-cultural communication, with learners and teachers freely sharing information about their own cultures and inquiring into others'. However, instruction tends to include only a narrow range of functions of language. We most often observed students writing personal narratives; when the students were working on other kinds of literacy and language development, it seemed to be the result of their initiation rather than teachers' guidance. Students need to be encouraged to engage in different forms of writing, for a variety of audiences and purposes. This will help students move from classroom tasks to social and cultural practices outside the classroom. Teachers can bring in reading materials that elicit or model a range, of types of writing.

Dealing with Power and Authority

We recommend that staff in all three programs -- Invergarry day, Invergarry evening, and VMWLP -- participate in regularly scheduled staff meetings that provide a forum for discussion about the relationship between theory and practice.

Staff meetings at Invergarry were important forums in which staff discussed the relationship between theory, philosophy and practice. These meetings provided opportunities for staff members to begin to confront differences as well as to support each other's shared commitment. Portfolios provided a way for individual staff members to feel responsible for struggling to understand specific learners. Therefore, the process of reviewing practice became more systematic. This kind of structured, regularly scheduled opportunity for staff to talk to each other about their work and to help each other think about their work with students seems to be essential. It is important that the program administrator support the staffs struggles, rather than trying to solve problems for the staff members, or telling them what to do. This can be an uncomfortable role for administrators; they should judge the appropriateness of their participation in the staff's meetings on the basis of their ability to allow the staff to founder, at times.

Funding, Limits and Accountability

We recommend examining Invergarry Adult Learning Centre as an example of a multi-service centre for adults and examining VMWLP to see the positive potential of developing small-scale literacy efforts.

The sponsoring and funding relationships that support each program create pressures to respond to the needs of as large a group as possible; funders generally assume that bigger is better. Programs that serve increasingly larger numbers of students are seen to have minimal additional costs, since the facility, the start-up costs and the basic administrative structure already are funded. However, there are costs in terms of the ability of the programs to meet students' needs, particularly when the programs are developing their own curriculum and teaching in a learner centred way. The strong sense of community that appears to develop in many of the small groups in VMWLP illustrates the potential of small, rather than large-scale, programs.

Policy makers should examine the ways in which funding mechanisms can support programs that are developing, becoming more mature and moving in the direction of specific ideals. As programs mature, the needs of their clients often become better understood. As a result, there may be a need for additional resources to support enhanced services for the community of learners. This does not necessarily go hand in hand with increased numbers of learners. Policy makers should explore providing incentives for developing a number of small programs in a geographic area of great need, rather than for building large programs in which goals of efficiency may displace learner centred instruction.

The Invergarry Adult Learning Centre Literacy program exists in the same building with services for adults with less English language ability (Schoolbridge), adults with more developed literacy abilities (Adult Basic Education), and young children (the child care center). There are counselors and other helpers available as well. The range of services available at Invergarry allows the school to be flexible and responsive in a much more sophisticated way than is the general practice. This kind of multi-service center for adults should be examined for the ways in which it can be a model for other adult education programs serving populations with a similar range of needs and interests.

We recommend developing systematic authentic assessment and accountability procedures in both programs.

Participation is a measure of accountability in both programs; Invergarry's waiting lists and VMWLP's referrals from 'supervisors both appear to attest to some measure of satisfaction on the part of each program's community. However, it is important that the Invergarry staff continue to create structures to limit the number of students in the program. Also, the staff should continue to develop the portfolio assessment process as a systematic accountability mechanism, expanding portfolios to the evening program. In addition, some kind of systematic assessment process needs to be put in place at VMWLP to complement the informal process in which VMWLP students review their notebooks with teachers periodically.

Using This Report

We recommend that Invergarry and VMWLP use the relevant parts of this report to begin a series of discussions and self-assessment meetings.

These meetings would include students, volunteers, teachers and administrator. Each group would examine its own understanding of the program. Each program should develop a process for examining the outcomes of the discussions described above and the recommendations in this report. Then a process should be designed to bring together these perspectives, examining implications for action. Each program should develop and implement an action plan to respond to the final set of recommendations, including a staff development plan.

Recommendations for the Field

This report yielded insights for the larger field of adult literacy instruction, as well as for the specific programs that participated. Our findings and recommendations are consistent with the model indicators and sample measures included in Stein's (1993) framework for assessing community-based literacy program quality.

One of the most important lessons we learned in this project is that **participation in ongoing reflection and self-examination helps programs to develop**. This is most fully documented in this project's companion report that focuses on our methods. In addition, we saw that learner centred literacy engages everyone in learning all the time -- teachers, volunteers and administrators have to engage with students, struggling with the internal tensions and resolving problems uniquely in each situation. Therefore, it is important to **create processes and structures that monitor the extent to which programs are learning (e.g., improving quality)**.

Invergarry and VMWLP illustrate the **importance of assessing learning in terms of practices** -- how adults use their learning in their lives and on their jobs. We encourage adult literacy programs to develop ongoing assessment processes that capture changes in literacy skills and practices, personal and social development, and areas relating to learners' specific situations, such as new technology at work or children entering school.

In general, the philosophy of learner centred education should inform every level of the program, so that there is consistency between instruction and assessment, for example, and between how students are treated as learners and how staff are treated as learners. In Invergarry and VMWLP we see how crucial it is to support ongoing staff development, such as the periodic staff meetings at Invergarry day program in which staff struggle with the relationship between theory and practice. In learner centred literacy programs, **staff development should be an ongoing process in which teachers' experience is respected and their questions create the agenda**.

Additional recommendations for the field are:

Culture and learner centred literacy education:

1. Adapt learner centred education so that programs explicitly respond to learners' cultural, gender, and linguistic backgrounds.
2. Program staff should:
 - learn a framework for thinking about culture and gender;
 - learn about the specific cultural backgrounds of their students and the gender roles associated with their students' native cultures;
 - develop insights into their own cultural background and gender roles and its implications for their work as instructors; and
 - develop the ability to incorporate their insights into their teaching in an ongoing way.

Instruction:

3. Provide opportunities for students to have experience with a range of reading and writing functions, moving beyond personal narrative to other writing practices in their lives systematically.
4. Provide opportunities for and preparation for students to engage in peer response to writing in group settings.
5. Increase attention to practices and critical reflection.
6. Develop a managed intake and orientation process for new students, particularly at large programs.
7. Provide regularly scheduled staff meetings so that teachers who work together have regular opportunities to struggle with the relationship between theory and practice.

Funding, limits and accountability

8. Limit program size so that teachers and students can develop a sense of community.
9. Develop systematic assessment and accountability processes.

Policy makers:

10. Develop support for programs that: are becoming more mature and requesting additional funds to enhance services rather than to expand;
11. Develop incentives for multiple small programs in a geographic area of great need, rather than primarily building large programs.
12. Develop multi-service centers for adults.

The Invergarry Adult Learning Centre Literacy program and the Vancouver Municipal Workplace Language Program are helping us to expand our understanding of learner centred adult literacy education. The staff and students participate with a degree of commitment and dedication to growth that supports exciting, continual learning. Both programs are moving into uncharted territory as they combine learner centred literacy, self-directed learning, English language instruction, and the process approach to writing. Their struggles help us all to continue moving forward.

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