Perceptions of Literacy and Adult Literacy Programs

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There are numerous definitions of literacy in the literature but relatively few data on the views of adult learners in literacy programs regarding literacy and even fewer on the views of adult literacy instructors. This study examined the views of 94 learners and 31 teachers regarding literacy as well as the actual classroom experiences of a subgroup of learners. Results showed that learners tended to view literacy from a fundamental perspective but entered programs for job-related reasons. Their teachers viewed literacy from a functional perspective but presented programs that were fundamental in nature. Emancipatory views were reflected to a very limited extent in either views of literacy or actual classroom experiences.

Bien qu'il y ait de nombreuses définitions de l'alphabétisation citées dans plusieurs documentations, il existe peu de données des opinions qu'ont les apprenant(e)s adultes participant aux programmes d'alphabétisation en ce qui concerne l'alphabétisation comme telle. Il existe encore moïns de données sur les opinions qu'ont ces gens de leurs instructeurs et instructrices. Cette étude examine les opinions de 94 apprenant(e)s et 31 instructeurs et instructrices en ce qui concerne l'alphabétisation ainsi que les expériences en classe d'un sous-groupe d'apprenant(e)s. Les résultats indiquent que les apprenant(e)s considérent l'alphabétisation d'une perspective fondamentale mais s'inscrivaient dans ces programmes pour des raisons reliées an marché du travail. De leurs côtés, les instructeurs et instructrices percevaient l'alphabétisation d'une perspective plutôt fonctionnelle mais présentaient des programmes de façon fondamentale en sorte. Des opinions émancipées ont été exprimées d'une façon trés limitée lorsqu'il s'agissait soit des expériences en salle de classe, soit des points de vue concernant l'alphabétisation.

Introduction

Although some information is available on the concepts of reading held by adults in literacy programs (Gambrell & Heathington, 1981; Norman & Malicky, 1986), little research has been done on how instructors in adult literacy programs view literacy or on the congruence of views of literacy learners and teachers. In light of dropout rates from adult literacy programs that have been estimated to be as high as 70% (Quigley, 1992), it is important to understand not only the degree of consistency between learners and instructors in how they view literacy, but also the degree of consistency of their views with literacy practices in classrooms. Street (1992) stresses the importance of understanding the nature of the relationship between ideas and practices. He believes that literacy is a social, political phenomenon that always involves power relations.

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There is considerable support in the literature for a socio-political view of literacy (Fingeret, 1992; Harman, 1987; Scribner, 1984). Kazemek (1988), for example, describes literacy as a personal and social process of coming to know that is political, cultural, and context-dependent. He decries current adult literacy programs that employ teacher-controlled, didactic methods and argues instead that "literacy is an ethical endeavor that has as its goal the liberation of people for intelligent, meaningful, and humane action upon the world" (p. 467). He would support a position where one first determines the goals of literacy education and then designs a program consistent with these goals.

There is often considerable difference in the backgrounds of adults in literacy programs and of their teachers. In general, learners tend to come from more disadvantaged backgrounds than their teachers (Hunter & Harman, 1979). In a study of the literacy practices in three communities in Piedmont, Carolina, Heath (1983) found that the programs and practices used in schools were often at variance with the cultural backgrounds and values in people's lives. When teachers modified programs to make them more consistent with the language and literacy backgrounds of the children in their classes, achievement levels of children from disadvantaged backgrounds increased.

A major purpose of the study reported in this article was to examine the perceptions of both learners and teachers regarding the nature and goals of literacy as well as their views regarding the literacy programs in which they were involved as teachers and learners. The focus of this part of the study was on the degree of congruence between the views of learners and teachers. Lack of agreement in perceptions of literacy and literacy programs could be one factor in high dropout rates from adult literacy programs. A second purpose of the study was to observe the nature of the experiences of a subgroup of learners in literacy classes to determine the extent to which programs reflected the goals and views of learners and teachers. A discrepancy between stated goals and the means to realize them could negatively affect the success of literacy programs. Analysis of data was conducted from the perspective of the following three major concepts of literacy that are widely reflected in the literature and have dominated the work of UNESCO from 1945 to the present (Lind & Johnston, 1986).

Concepts of Literacy

In 1946 the concept of fundamental education was adopted by UNESCO with the core content of adult education programs involving skills of thinking, speaking, listening, calculating, reading, and writing. Illiteracy was viewed as a disease to be eradicated and the major tool was primary school education. Adult literacy education was viewed as an extension of schooling and often the same materials and techniques were used. Few writers define literacy this narrowly today, although fundamental literacy is sometimes included as one aspect. For example, Valentine (1986) uses the term *general* literacy to refer the reading and writing aspects of literacy and contrasts this with *functional* literacy. As Kazemek (1988) points out, this view of literacy is still reflected in the instructional practices of many literacy programs. For the purposes of this study, fundamental literacy refers to the skills of reading and writing.

The concept of functional literacy began to influence international thinking in 1956 with Gray's survey of reading and writing conducted for UNESCO. Whereas Gray stressed the relative nature of literacy and the need to relate literacy training to the context in which individuals live, UNESCO linked the concept of functional literacy with social and economic development. The major focus was on literacy for work and increased productivity. Literacy was not viewed as an end in itself, but rather as a way of preparing people for social, civic, and economic roles. Literacy was viewed from a human capital paradigm of economics in which education is viewed both as a form of consumption and a form of investment. The goal of education from this perspective was to enhance human capital, which would in turn increase productivity and yield a positive rate of return. Although this narrow view of functional literacy is still reflected in some programs, many writers view functional literacy from a much broader perspective. For example, Valentine (1986) defines it as "an individual's reading and writing ability in relation to the reading and writing tasks imposed by, or existing in, the environment in which that individual resides and seeks to function" (p. 109). Levine (1982) focuses more on information when he defines functional literacy as "the possession of, or access to, the competencies and information required to accomplish those transactions entailing reading and writing in which an individual wishes-or is compelled-to engage" (pp. 263-264). In this study functional literacy is viewed from the broader perspective of Valentine and Levine, although it is important to note that one of contexts in which people deal with written language involves work.

Although functional literacy continues to dominate much of the literature in North America, UNESCO began to move away from a functional definition in 1975. The Declaration of Persepolis adopted at the International Symposium for Literacy in 1975 retained the relative and contextual aspects of literacy but stressed the political, human and cultural aspects as well. Literacy was defined as

not just the process of learning the skills of reading, writing and arithmetic...Literacy creates the conditions for the acquisition of a critical consciousness of the contradictions of society in which man [sic] lives and of its aims; it also stimulates initiative and his participation in the creation of projects capable of acting upon the world, of transforming it. (Hamadache & Martin, 1986, pp. 128-129)

This is the definition used in this study for the terms liberation or emancipatory literacy. From this perspective, literacy is not viewed as neutral, "for the act of revealing social reality in order to transform it, or of concealing it in order to preserve it, is political (Hamadache & Martin, 1986, p. 128). This liberation or emancipatory view of literacy reflects the work of Freire (1970) and others (Hunter, 1982; Kretovics, 1985; Stanage, 1986) who have focused on empowerment and the ability to bring about change in inequities and injustices in society.

Generally, the goal of literacy programs based on functional and fundamental views of literacy has been to adapt individuals to fit into the existing socio-political order and hence to preserve this order. The goal of liberation or emancipatory literacy, on the other hand, is for individuals to act on society and bring about change.

Procedures

The Sample and Context of the Study
The sample of learners consisted of 94 adults enrolled in literacy programs in one urban center. The gender, age, status, and mean reading level of subjects are presented in Table 1 along with the type of literacy programs in which subjects were enrolled. The range of reading grade scores on the Tests of Adult Basic Education (TABE, 1987) was from level 2.1 to 9.2. The higher proportion of females to males was reflective of the population in adult basic education programs in the area as was the relatively high proportion of immigrants.

A subgroup of 18 learners was randomly selected for more in-depth study, and the teachers of these learners were also involved in the research. Half the subjects in this subsample were immigrants and the other half Canadian born. Twelve were female and six were male. Eight of these subjects remained in adult basic education, bridge (a transition between ABE and high school classes for ESI, students) or high school classes across the duration of the study, whereas the others either went to different types of programs or left for personal reasons (e.g., health, family, etc.). Of the five who went to other programs, four went into trades or pre-trades programs whereas the other went to a high school program in another setting because of dissatisfaction with his previous setting.

Most instructors of adult basic education, bridge, and high school programs who taught the 18 subjects in the subsample were interviewed to obtain the views of literacy and to describe typical literacy classes. Views on literacy were obtained from 26 instructors, 19 of whom were teachers in adult basic education or bridge classes and seven of whom were in high school programs. Five additional instructors provided descriptions of typical literacy classes.

Table 1
The Sample of Literacy Learners

Variable	Number or Mean
Gender	
Females	61
Males	33
Mean Age	29.5
Status	
Canadian-born	40
Immigrants	54
Attendance in the Literacy Program	
Full-time	69
Part-time	25
Nature of the Literacy Program	
Formal	84
Non-formal	25
Mean Reading Level on TABE	5.0

Data Collection and Analysis

Data were collected from the sample of 94 adults attending literacy programs and from 31 teachers of these programs. Both formal testing and interviews were used to collect information from learners. The Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE) was used as a screening tool to select learners below a high school reading level because the major focus of the study was on adult basic education, All learners were interviewed at the beginning of the study using a structured interview schedule to obtain demographic data as well as information about their concepts of literacy and reasons for entering the literacy program. This interview schedule was based on a questionnaire used by Davis and O'Brien (1985) with adults in literacy programs in Nova Scotia. The purpose of this interview was to describe the adult participants in literacy programs as well as to identify the meanings they associated with literacy. The major changes to the interview schedule involved omitting some questions because Davis and O'Brien had noted that it took too long to administer. The initial interviews were audio-taped and responses were recorded on the interview sheets.

Across the three-year time period of the study learners were also interviewed at six-month intervals while they attended literacy programs and at the time they exited literacy programs (if they did). One focus of these interviews was on what they viewed as helpful in the literacy program and what else they would like to have seen in the programs. Two open-ended questions were used to elicit these comments: What do you think are the strengths of what you are doing in your classes? and What else would you like to do that you are not now doing in your classes? Although change across time was not of major concern in relation to these questions, the three-year time period of the study was essential to understand the relationship of participation in literacy programs with employment (Malicky & Norman, 1994b) and to provide data on more than one class for most learners in the study. Research assistants conducted interviews under the supervision of one of the principal researchers and all interviews were audio-taped and transcribed for analysis.

Learners in the subgroup of 18 were observed approximately every three months in their classes to obtain data on the nature of their actual classroom experiences. These observations were conducted for as long as the participants remained in literacy or high school upgrading classes across the three-year time frame of the study. Field-notes were kept of these observations, outlining what materials were used as well as providing a running commentary on what students and teachers did and said during the lessons.

The teachers of the subgroup of 18 were interviewed to determine their concepts of literacy as well as their perceptions of the literacy program they were providing. Questions that focused on ways in which literacy and literacy programs were perceived were selected from a questionnaire for literacy instructors developed by Davis and O'Brien (1985). Examples are: Why do you think being literate is important? What do you think constitutes being a literate person? What do you think should be the purpose of literacy programs like the one in which you are involved? Would you describe a typical class or session for me? All interviews were audio-taped and transcribed.

Data collected from the total sample of 94 learners on the TABE and initial interview were quantified and tabulated where possible. Means were calculated to provide a description of the adults in the study. Responses to other questions such as literacy concepts and perceived strengths of programs were categorized and the number of responses falling into each category determined. Data gathered on follow-up interviews with learners, on interviews with instructors, and through classroom observations were read to identify emerging categories regarding perceptions of literacy programs by program participants, views of literacy held by instructors, content of programs and the nature of interactions in classrooms.

Learners Perceptions of Literacy and Literacy Programs

The majority of learners were full-time students at the start of the study, attending classes during the daytime five days per week. Part-time students generally attended classes once or twice each week. Most of the adults in the study were from formal programs, with 51 attending literacy classes in a vocational center and the other 33 attending classes in a continuing education program sponsored by a school system. The remaining 10 adults were in non-formal literacy programs, five in a volunteer one-to-one program and the other five in community-based programs.

Funding for the programs involved in this study was provided by two government departments-Manpower and Education-with the result that these programs generally reflected one of the following two orientations: (a) a manpower orientation concerned primarily with enabling individuals to participate in the labor force, and (b) a social demand orientation concerned with enabling individuals to participate more fully in all aspects of society. In this study the literacy program situated in the vocational center had an explicit manpower orientation whereas the other programs had more of a social demand orientation.

Definitions of Literacy and Goals for Entering Literacy Programs

Program participants were asked directly to provide their definition of literacy during the initial interview (Are you familiar with the word literacy? What do you think it means?). Many were unfamiliar with the term, particularly those with English as a second language. Of the 36 who did respond, 25 or 69% included reference to reading, writing and/or literature in their definitions. Five referred to knowledge, five to education, schooling or learning, and one to English as a second language. Generally, definitions provided by participants tended to reflect a fundamental notion of literacy.

Further information on participants' views of literacy was obtained by asking them, Why did you enter this program? Many participants gave several reasons, but the most common were job-related: 83% believed that increased literacy could help them improve their job opportunities. In addition to job-related goals, several people cited personal /psychological reasons such as feeling better about themselves and developing self-confidence. These reasons were given more frequently by Canadian-born respondents (43%) than by immigrants (17%). Social reasons, such as meeting people or becoming more independent, were given by approximately one quarter of the men and immigrant women, but 73% of Canadian-born women provided reasons in this category. This may reflect differences in men's and women's ways of knowing with women perceiving themselves more in terms of connections and relationships (Kazemek, 1988). Both general and specific educational goals were also important to the participants in this study. Immigrants (43%) gave more specific goals, such as learning how to read and improving English skills, than did Canadian-born respondents (16%).

Perceived Strengths of Literacy Programs and Suggested Changes

Participants were asked at regular intervals to comment on their perceptions of the programs they were attending. Some participants left the program before they could be given a follow-up interview, and hence the data presented in Table 2 were collected from 83 of the sample of 94 learners. Because some participants moved from one program to another during the study, comments on both basic literacy and high school upgrading programs are categorized in Table 2. The scores in the table indicate the number of comments received regarding areas that participants felt were strengths or in need of change at some point during their participation in programs.

Areas of Language Arts

The information presented in Table 2 indicates that participants frequently referred to traditional areas of language arts education as both strengths of programs and areas in which more instruction was needed, although this was less true for Canadian-born males than for the other program participants. The areas that participants perceived as most helpful were reading and writing, with 39% citing writing as a strength of their programs and 28% citing reading. The other two areas mentioned frequently were grammar (24%) and vocabulary (20%). It is not surprising that these two areas were viewed as valuable by immigrants because most were learning English as a second language, but it is interesting that several Canadian-born women (23%) included these areas as well. One woman talked about improving her language competence because she had a young child, and it may be that some of the other women also felt the need to present better language models for their children. In any case, this finding is consistent with the relatively high number of social goals given by Canadian-born women for entering literacy programs. None of the Canadian-born men cited vocabulary or grammar as strengths of or needs in their programs.

Table 2
Perceptions of Literacy and Upgrading Programs: By Learners

Focus of Comment	Number of Comments Received	
	Strength	Area of Suggested Change
Language arts areas	121	57
Specific instructional materials	5	0
Content	6	9
Specific activities	7	6
Interpersonal aspects	33	15
Organization of classes	48	26
Level/Amount/Pacing	3	26

When asked what changes they wanted in their programs, women tended to provide more responses than did men, but even the women gave relatively few responses to this question. In relation to areas of language arts, two areas mentioned by several of the immigrant females involved more focus on speaking (22%) and listening (16%), again consistent with expectations for ESL learners. These areas were mentioned by only two of the Canadian-born participants. More reading, writing, spelling, and pronunciation were also mentioned by a small number of both immigrants and Canadian-born participants.

The relatively heavy focus on traditional areas of language arts education is consistent with definitions of literacy provided by program participants and confirms that a fundamental or traditional view of literacy was widely held. Hence it appears that participants brought this view with them to their literacy programs, although persistence of the view could also reflect the nature of the programs in which they were enrolled.

Content, Materials, and Instructional Activities

In general, skill areas such as reading and writing were mentioned much more frequently than content or topics. Only six participants identified general or specific content as a strength of their programs (e.g., the environment, Meech Lake, different life styles) and six noted general or specific content that they would like to have had included (e.g., books on animals, news, history of different nations). Three other participants cited problems with their programs related to content: two talked about content being useless or irrelevant and one identified a specific workshop on how to dress as a waste of time. Overall, though, content was not a strong focus of the program participants in this study, and there was little difference between immigrants and Canadian-born participants or between males and females in the extent to which they identified content or topics as strengths or needed changes in their programs.

Similarly, specific instructional materials or activities were rarely mentioned as either strengths or weaknesses of programs. A few respondents referred to specific books being used in their classes as good and to activities such as story projects and research papers as useful. They offered no suggestions regarding what materials they would like to use and tended to identify activities they didn't like rather than make more constructive suggestions. This is perhaps not surprising in that they would not have been aware of the range of options available.

Interpersonal Dimensions

Instead, learners frequently focused on interpersonal dimensions when talking about strengths and areas of needed change. Both immigrants (41%) and Canadian-born participants (53%) indicated that their teacher was a real strength of their program. Many simply indicated that their teachers were good, but others talked about what made their teachers good, for example,

> The teacher, I thought, was an excellent teacher. She knew what she was talking about and she wouldn't go any further unless everyone in the class understood it. (female, Canadian-born)

> I like the teachers ... they are real helpful and friendly and willing to help every time I ask them. (female, immigrant)

> All the teachers are really good. They really pushed me further than I ever thought I would go.... When I was at school before, they treated me like a child and I didn't get any benefit from it. Now they treat me like an adult and you know, you can talk to teachers like, when I was at school you didn't know the teacher's first name. (male, immigrant)

The somewhat higher percentage of Canadian-born than immigrant participants who cited their teacher as a strength of their program might reflect the heavier focus of Canadian-born respondents on personal/psychological goals for entering literacy programs. Interpersonal relationships would appear to be more critical to meeting these goals than would specific content or instructional activities.

It is important to note that not all comments about teachers were positive. Seven students felt that they needed more time or assistance from their teachers, and three others felt they were being treated like children. According to one woman,

> She teaches as if we're in an elementary class type of thing.... Like she, you know, it's like "Okay kids we're going to do this, this and this today." Like, I find that writing spelling words out is a real pain. I mean that's what grade ones and twoers do type of thing. (female, Canadian-born)

Two of the immigrants felt they were being treated unfairly by their teachers, for example,

> Sometime I think it maybe-prejudiced. I think the teachers ... I copy from the encyclopedia word by word, and they give me the paragraph back full of red marks. (female, immigrant)

Relatively few comments related to interpersonal relationships with other students. Some students such as one Canadian-born male talked about how he enjoyed "going to school and talking with the students," but generally the participants in this study viewed their teachers as being key to their literacy learning.

Organization of Classes and Pacing of Instruction

Program participants also commented on the way programs were structured, particularly those students in the computer-based literacy program. Initially, many were enthusiastic about working on computers (11 commented on this as a strength of their programs), but once the programs were underway, five people expressed concern that they were not really learning to use computers, for example,

> I really thought the computer program was gonna be like where you learn the computer, like doing it so you go out and get a job. (female, immigrant)

A need for class instruction along with use of computers was identified by three individuals and six indicated that they would like more class time. Typical of these comments were the following:
> It's fun working on the computers but if you wanted to sit down there and learn, I like the classroom teaching you know. In the classroom, I mean, there are more things, like a teacher teaching you and additional things that one might add and you get more knowledge from that. (female, immigrant)

Not only those participants in the computer-based literacy program expressed a need for more class time. Five participants expressed a desire to access pull-out classes for extra assistance.

Several comments were related to level, pacing, and amount of material covered. Two participants were pleased that they were challenged and one that the material was easy. However, several were concerned that the program moved too slowly (6), that the material was too simple (8), or that there was too much review (7). Twelve of these comments were received from immigrants, several of whom had attained more advanced levels of schooling in their countries of origin, but some Canadian-born participants also felt programs did not move quickly enough for them, for example,

We've worked for weeks on these prepositional phrases and subordinate clauses and all these new words. And she's sort of drilled that into us and now it's becoming quite boring. If she doesn't move to some new material soon, I don't know how much more the class will put up with it. (female, Canadian-born)

Far fewer participants felt that programs moved too quickly (2), presented too much (2) or didn't provide enough review (1).

The Subsample

The subsample of 18 subjects was involved in more in-depth study, including interviews with their teachers and observations in their classrooms. The major purpose of this part of the study was to obtain an indication of the views of literacy held by literacy instructors and the nature of literacy programs provided. It was also conducted to determine the degree of consistency between teachers' and learners' beliefs and between what teachers said about literacy and what they actually did in their classrooms.

Eleven of the students in the subsample were attending literacy classes in the vocational center at the beginning of the study. Most of these students were immigrants and most had taken ESL courses at the center prior to entering adult basic education classes. Of those who were in basic literacy classes at the beginning of the study, two began in a level 3-4 classroom , one in level 4-5, three in level 6-7, and two in level 7-8. Two other students were in bridge classes for the first observation. Nearly all these students were observed in more than one level, and five eventually moved on to high school classes. There were strict attendance requirements in this program and movement from one level to the next was based on test performance.

Six of the students attended literacy classes in the school system-sponsored adult basic education program. Students were involved in both computer-based and classroom instruction. Two of the students moved into the high school program sponsored by the same school system and one went on to a pretrades program at the vocational center. The final student began her program in a community-based literacy program and then entered the high school program at the vocational center.

Instructors' Views of Literacy and Literate People

As indicated above, 26 instructors of the 18 adult learners in the subsample were interviewed to find out how they viewed literacy. They were asked to tell why they thought literacy was important, what they thought constituted being a literate person, and what they thought the purpose should be of literacy programs like the one in which they were involved. Most instructors provided multidimensional descriptions of literacy and of literate people.

The most common descriptions given by instructors involved functional aspects of literacy; a total of 44 responses fell into this category (several informants gave more than one functional aspect of literacy). Typical responses in this category follow:

To make people more employable.

Handle forms and most things you run into in most situations.

Can read and write well enough to function in society.

Function in daily activities.

Being able to get along or succeed in day-to-day living.

 Fundamental descriptions of literacy were also prevalent in the data; 27 of the responses fell into this category. Most involved a reference to a specific area or aspect of language arts, but several also involved references to schooling or academic achievement.

Basic understanding of spelling, punctuation and basic paragraphs.

Basic abilities for reading and understanding the written word.

Literature, reading and writing.

Preparation for [other programs named].

Reading is not just decoding but enriching what a person already knows.

Writing as a means of communicating.

A similar number of responses focused on the socio-political (11) as the personal, psychological (11) aspects of literacy. Examples of socio-political responses included: "if you're not literate, you're third class," the illiterate let somebody else take control of their lives," "to make people who are not easily governed." Psychological aspects of literacy included: "able to enjoy themselves," "gives a sense of self-esteem," and "self-confidence." Five respondents recognized that literacy is relative, depending on both the person and context. One, for example, said "it depends on what the person wants to do.' Finally, eight responses reflected a more global/ general view of literacy, such as "want a future," "aspire to a better life," "important in every facet of life," and "related to being human." When views of literacy were examined in relation to whether teachers taught in adult basic education, bridge, or high school contexts, there was little difference in how literacy was viewed.

What is most striking is that all instructors interviewed for the study included some aspect of functional literacy in their descriptions of literacy or literate persons. Most also included a fundamental notion of literacy in their 11 descriptions whereas less than one quarter referred to emancipatory or psychological outcomes of literacy. One would anticipate on the basis of these results that most literacy programs would reflect a somewhat equal emphasis on functional and fundamental aspects of literacy, whereas there would be far less of a focus on sociopolitical aspects or personal development.

Two types of information were collected to determine the degree of correspondence between views of literacy espoused by instructors and the programs they provided for students. First, they were asked to describe typical class lessons, and second, approximately every three months a lesson was observed and fieldnotes taken.

Descriptions of Typical Lessons

Instructors were asked to describe a typical class and the following probes were used if necessary: What are the books and materials you use? How much time do you spend on each area? Descriptions of typical lessons were obtained from 31 instructors (nine instructors provided more than one lesson description because they taught two or more different courses or levels). Nineteen instructors taught adult basic education classes (two of these also taught high school classes), four taught bridge classes (one of these also taught high school classes), and eight taught high school classes. Adult basic education and bridge classes in the vocational center were frequently taught by teams of two instructors.

Most instructors included more than one area in their descriptions of typical classes, and these were categorized as shown in Table 3. In a level 7-8 class at the vocational center, for example, the teacher indicated that the students worked on reading in the morning and writing in the afternoon. Reading instruction was based on a workbook containing factual articles; students completed questions for homework, and these were corrected and discussed in class. Literature was also included in the program, with students reading stories and answering questions in class. Writing instruction was focused around two workbooks, one with an emphasis on grammar and the other on vocabulary.

In the adult basic education program sponsored by the school board, students spent a considerable portion of their time in computer-based literacy programs. In the Pathfinders program, students completed pretests and on the basis of their results the computer provided them with a list of materials to use. After completing the recommended exercises the students took a posttest on the computer. Teachers were available to answer questions both on the use of the computers and on what students were doing. Classes varied considerably across instructors; reading and writing were common components, with spelling, grammar, oral presentations, listening, and study skills included in various classes.

In the community-based literacy program the teacher included one half-hour every day on reading comprehension and also what she referred to as exercises on an area of need identified from the students' writing, for example, quotation marks. In addition, students worked for one and a half hours Mondays on writing, Wednesdays on reading comprehension, and Fridays on spelling. The teacher selected the materials for the students to read, and current topics served as the basis for brainstorming and writing.

Table 3
Aspects Included in Descriptions of Typical Classes

Aspects of language/literacy	Percentage (number) of Instructors					
	ABE (N=24)		Bridge (N=7)		High School (N=21)	
Grammar	33%	(8)	29%	(2)	29%	(6)
Vocabulary	19%	(4)				
Oral presentations	13%	(3)	14%	(1)	5%	(1)
Discussions	19%	(4)				
Reading						
Strategies	21%	(5)			10%	(2)
Literature	19%	(4)	14%	(1)	57%	(12)
Individual	21%	(5)	29%	(2)		
Question/Answer on reading	33%	(8)	43%	(3)		
Writing						
Skills	13%	(3)	43%	(3)		
Paragraphs/essays	58%	(14)	29%	(2)	33%	(7)
Journals	13%	(3)				
Study Skills	8%	(2)	14%	(1)		
Other	13%	(3)				

From the data in Table 3 and these few examples, it is apparent that in spite of the heavy emphasis on functional literacy evident in the definitions provided by instructors, descriptions of typical adult basic education classes focused almost exclusively on fundamental aspects. This was true to a large extent for high school classes as well, although there were some differences. The majority of lessons at the high school level included work on literature and writing, whereas those in adult basic education classes involved a wider range of aspects of language arts. Typical of programs provided at the high school level is the following description provided by a teacher in the vocational center setting. The program she offered included five major components: short stories, novels, plays, research projects, and eight book reports. The program was planned to meet the requirements of the provincial curriculum.

Although it is possible that instructors were aware of the discrepancy between their definitions of literacy and the programs they provided, only a small number of them commented on this inconsistency during interviews. One, for example, indicated that the goal of the program should be to increase employability and self-esteem but "instead we are preparing students for an academic program." Another expressed concern that some students

leave here feeling like a failure because they haven't made progress academically. They still aren't any better off in terms of a job.... We may be doing a disservice by making people feel worse than they did when they came in.

She noted that "we are changing" but that students were not always in favor of this change.

> Sometimes when we give students the opportunity to talk about what will help them in their everyday lives, that's not what they want from us. They don't see education as providing that.

Both of these instructors wanted a heavier focus on functional aspects of literacy. A third instructor felt that the institution was focusing on both functional and fundamental aspects and she wanted to see a heavier emphasis on socio-political goals.

Classroom Observations

Data obtained through actual classroom observations were also analyzed to gain further insight into the degree of congruence between descriptions of literacy provided by instructors and what they actually did in their classrooms. These data were analyzed both in relation to the content of the lessons as well as the nature of interactions between teachers and students. The number of lessons observed in adult basic education settings was 42, the number in bridge settings seven and the number of high school classes 21.

Content

Table 4 provides an indication of what the content focus was in the lessons observed. Again, most of what was observed in classrooms could easily be classified according to traditional areas of language arts education. Students were frequently involved in reading and writing activities, although the nature of these activities varied depending on whether they were attending adult basic education, bridge, or high school classes. Students generally read a wider range of materials in adult basic education classrooms than in high school English classes where the focus was primarily on literature. Writing activities were similar across the two contexts, with the exception of journal writing, which was not observed in high school classrooms. Very few bridge classes were observed, so it is difficult to draw any generalizations about what was happening in those classes. It does appear, however, that there was a heavy focus on grammar in these classes probably because of the heavy enrollment of ESL students. In some of the bridge classes observed students spent the entire time working through a grammar book, completing exercises and correcting them together in class.

Teachers generally selected what students would read and assigned topics for writing (although for writing teachers sometimes gave several possible topics for students to choose from and left the possibility open for students to choose one of their own instead). Journal writing and independent reading opportunities did provide for some degree of student control over content, but these were far more common activities in adult basic education than in high school classrooms.

What Table 4 masks is that functional or emancipatory goals may have been served in some of the reading and writing activities. Short stories occasionally lead to heated discussions about topics such as child abuse or drunk drivers. Suggested writing topics were also sometimes controversial in nature and designed to heighten consciousness about issues, for example, "Women should/should not have equal job opportunities." Generally, however, teachers reported little input from students into curriculum decisions and most discussions were related to skill development rather than to issues in the life worlds of the students in the classes.

Table 4
Aspects of Lessons Observed in Various Contexts

Aspects of language/literacy	Percentage (number) of Lessons					
	ABE (N=42)		Bridge (N=7)		High School (N=21)	
Grammar	29%	(12)	100%	(7)	19%	(4)
Vocabulary	12%	(5)	29%	(2)		
Listening	7%	(3)				
Oral presentations					5%	(1)
Pronunciation	2%	(1)	29%	(2)		
Reading						
SRA Kits/Independent Reading	5%	(2)	14%	(1)	5%	(1)
Literature	19%	(8)	14%	(1)	50%	(10)
Newspaper	19%	(8)				
Specific Skills	17%	(7)			14%	(3)
Writing						
Journals	12%	(5)				
Paragraph/essay	12%	(5)	14%	(1)	29%	(6)
Specific Genre	5%	(2)			5%	(1)
Specific skills	12%	(5)			33%	(7)
Life/Study skills	5%	(2)				
Subject areas	10%	(4)	29%	(2)		

In general, there was considerable correspondence between what teachers said they did in typical classes and what actually went on in classrooms; activities in classrooms were primarily focused on fundamental aspects of literacy. Bridge teachers demonstrated a heavier emphasis on grammar than they reported, but there were few other striking differences between what teachers reported and what they did.

Interactions

Classroom observations were also analyzed in relation to the nature of the interactions that occurred between students and teachers, and the results of this analysis are presented in Table 5. The types of interactions placed in the "other" category included such things as the teacher giving students words and asking them to find corresponding pictures, teachers writing questions on the blackboard and having students answer them orally, and the teacher reading words and having students repeat them. What Table 5 fails to capture is the sequence of interactions in classrooms. In order to provide some indication of this, observations of selected classes for two of the students are briefly described.

Sandra was observed first in a community-based literacy program and then moved to a high school program in the vocational center. At the beginning of the first class observed in the community-based literacy program (March), students were working at circular tables on reading comprehension exercises while the teacher worked with one individual on a possessive pronoun exercise. The teacher then handed out an exercise on quotations. She put an example on the board and directed the students' attention to a page in the handout, asking them to tell what was wrong with the sentences. The students chimed in answers as the teacher read each sentence. On the next page she read the directions and asked the students to do three items individually. She then called on individual students to provide answers. The teacher moved to reading comprehension and explained that she wanted the students to generate a main idea statement for articles on garbage and then go through the 5W questions. She solicited the 5Ws from the class and wrote them on the board. She then gave a different newspaper article to each of three groups, checking with each group as they worked and commenting on the appropriateness of the statements they had written. Each group then shared the main idea they had written with the rest of the class, going through the 5Ws after they had done so.

Table 5
Interactions Apparent in Classroom Observations

Nature of Interaction	Percentage (number) of lessons					
	ABE (N=42)		Bridge (N=7)		High School (N=21)	
Teacher lectures	19%	(8)	43%	(3)	33%	(7)
Teacher questions, students answer (oral)	33%	(14)			24%	(5)
Teacher reads, questions/students answer	29%	(12)			14%	(3)
Teacher/students do example together	19%	(8)	14%	(1)	29%	(6)
Teacher goes through test/assignment orally	14%	(6)			33%	(7)
Students do exercise independently, check orally in class	26%	(11)	43%	(3)	29%	(6)
Oral discussion	24%	(10)	29%	(2)	10%	(2)
Students read orally	5%	(2)	14%	(1)		
Students do exercise in groups	12%	(5)	29%	(2)	29%	(6)
Students work individually on assigned task	50%	(21)	14%	(1)	24%	(5)
Students do test	7%	(3)	29%	(2)	5%	(1)
Students work individually on task of own choice	2%	(1)			14%	(3)
Other	14%	(6)	14%	(1)		

The next fall Sandra was in a grade 10 English class in the vocational center. The tables were organized in rows facing the front of the room and a text entitled *College Writing Skills* was used during the lesson observed. The teacher asked students to turn to a particular exercise in the textbook and to do it. They were to rewrite a passage that had nine errors (run-ons, dangling modifiers, etc.) in it. The teacher circulated helping individual students as the others worked quietly on their own. When the students finished, they passed their papers to another student, and the teacher went through the sentences one by one, asking students if there were any mistakes. After checking to determine how many students got all the sentences right, the teacher assigned the next exercise on subject-verb agreement in the text. The students completed it individually, passed the papers to another student and again marked it together. The teacher then said, "Let's give you a chance to talk for awhile." He asked the students to write two topics on two pieces of paper. Students pulled topics from a box and spoke in front of the class for 30 seconds. The teacher encouraged the speakers by saying, "Well done," "Good job," and the students rated each other on a 10-point scale.

The second student, Mary, began upgrading in the program sponsored by the school system and then enrolled in English 30 in the vocational center. During one class in the upgrading program (March) the teacher began by working through an exercise on prefixes and their meanings from a workbook entitled *Communication Skills*. The teacher then assigned an exercise on suffixes and the students completed it, helping each other figure out the directions and then working quietly. Mary frequently consulted the dictionary as she completed this assignment. The teacher went through the exercise with the students who chimed in with answers. He then gave them the following writing assignment on the board:

> Take one of the words you have worked with in lessons 5-8 and expand it to give it more meaning, that is understanding of it to your reader.
> OR
> Take one of your own.

The teacher explained the assignment and that the students would be editing their own writing. The students wrote until the end of class time.

From data in Table 4 and from these examples, it is evident that most classes revolved around activities selected by the teachers that students did and then frequently checked orally with the teacher. Most interactions among people were teacher-directed although students did do some teacher-assigned activities in groups and in four of the classes observed had an opportunity to work on a task of their own choice. Overall, however, teachers tended to define what counted as knowledge and had most of the power in classrooms. There were some exceptions as indicated in the following description of Mary in a high school English class at the vocational center one year after the class described above.

The class began by the teacher helping students fill in a form on short stories they had read. The form contained the headings title, author, genre, and plot. One student mentioned that Solchuk means "son of sun" and the teacher said, "See I told you guys. You teach me something new everyday." Another student asked whether Mr. Solchuk was the protagonist or antagonist. Rather than providing an answer, the teacher said, "That's a good question. What do you guys think?" After considerable discussion the class came up with a definition. Similarly, other questions were dealt with by the class rather than by the teacher. When discussing one of the stories, Mary commented, "You want to believe parents do things like this." She talked about conflict in her family with her mother and father and indicated that she hadn't mentioned this in class because she didn't know that the young people would understand. A male student responded, I think we can empathize with you," and discussion ensued about lack of family support. Finally, the teacher brought the discussion back to the story by asking the class to think for tomorrow about the fact that the father of the character in the story was coming around. As the students packed up to leave, another student came over to talk to Mary and said he thought they had had similar experiences. Mary later told the researcher that she never used to talk in class, but this teacher had done something different with this class-they worked in groups and talked about things.

What this teacher had done was give up some of the ownership of knowledge to the students in her classroom. Her definition of literacy was quite similar to that of many other teachers interviewed-she gave fundamental (reading, writing, listening, speaking, viewing), functional (dealing with everyday life, being able to use resources, where to get help), and personal, psychological (increased self-confidence) goals for literacy. However, in her description of a typical class, she referred to the transactive theory of Rosenblatt (1978) and indicated that there was a heavy focus on response to literature. Students were encouraged to talk and write about how they felt about the literature they read, bringing in their personal experiences. This was not the only class in which a teacher relinquished some of the control of content and classroom interactions to students, but it was rare rather than common among the upgrading classes observed during this study.

Conclusions and Discussion

Overall, the results of this study revealed considerable discrepancy within and between student and teacher groups in how literacy was viewed and practiced. When the learners entered adult literacy programs, they tended to hold a fundamental view of literacy, probably as a result of their past school experiences. However, they persisted in this view as they attended literacy classes in spite of the fact that when asked why they had entered literacy programs they frequently cited job-related (functional) goals. This would appear to reflect a mismatch between the perceptions of literacy held by adults in literacy programs and their goals for entering these programs. However, it is unlikely that the participants viewed this as a mismatch. Instead, they appeared to believe that a traditional education was the avenue to improved job opportunities in spite of the fact that there is little evidence in the literature to indicate that increased literacy will have a positive impact on employment (Graff, 1987; Levine, 1986). Indeed, most of the learners in this study returned to the same low paying, temporary jobs that they had held before entering literacy programs (Malicky & Norman, 1994b).

In contrast to program participants, literacy instructors tended to view literacy from both functional and fundamental perspectives, yet presented programs that were primarily fundamental in nature. Hence the programs they were providing were more consistent with the views of learners regarding the nature of literacy than with their own views. This seems to reflect a gap between theoretical orientation and practice in the classroom. Some instructors recognized the discrepancy between what they believed should be done and what they were doing, but generally felt constrained by their institutions and, according to one instructor, the students as well. Despite somewhat different mandates of the vocational, school system-sponsored and community-based programs, literacy content and instruction was markedly similar. The degree of consistency in the type of literacy instruction across the different contexts appeared to reflect the pervasiveness and impact of the fundamental view of literacy instruction and learning in the province. To some extent this was determined in high school upgrading classes by the mandated provincial curriculum, but there is no mandated curriculum for adult basic education classes. In light of high dropout rates in the study (Malicky & Norman, 1994a), the strong emphasis on fundamental literacy needs to be critically examined in relation to goals and purposes of programs.

Emancipatory views of literacy were reflected to a very limited extent in the views of literacy instructors and students or in the content and interactions in classrooms. Classrooms tended to be teacher-dominated, with teachers determining the content of instruction and evaluating student performance. Students generally expressed positive comments regarding their teachers and although they valued opportunities to interact with other students they worked individually rather than cooperatively. Overall, there were few opportunities for students to share power with their teachers, and this did not appear to be an area of concern for most of them. The purpose of the literacy programs in this study could be viewed as helping students to adapt to or fit into the existing socio-political order, and hence reproducing this order (Apple, 1982; Giroux, 1983), rather than equipping them to act as change agents on society. It is important to note that there were classes in which students engaged in the kind of consciousness raising dialogue that Freire (1970) believes is an essential element of change. Hence it was possible to reach emancipatory goals even in high school upgrading classes with a mandated curriculum.

There were relatively few differences between females and males or between immigrants and Canadian-born program participants in their views of literacy or their comments regarding literacy programs. Immigrants tended to focus somewhat more heavily on the traditional areas and skills of language arts whereas Canadian-born subjects were more concerned with interpersonal dimensions of literacy instruction, but a relatively large proportion of comments from all groups fell into these two broad categories. There were the expected differences of immigrants valuing work on grammar, vocabulary, speaking, and listening, but even here Canadian-born females also identified vocabulary and grammar as significant areas of instruction. There were few differences based on gender or immigrant status on how content, materials. specific activities, classroom organization, and pacing of instruction were viewed.

A significant finding of the study involved the importance attributed by adult literacy students to their teachers as compared with materials or methods, Teachers spend a considerable amount of time searching for the "best" series or instructional technique, and publishers try to fill this need. The adults in this study viewed their teachers as a significant strength of their literacy programs and valued the assistance and explanations they received during classroom instruction. In contrast. they rarely referred to specific materials or techniques when describing strengths of their programs. Hence the results of this study do not support a heavy emphasis on methodology or technology. This was particularly evident in students' responses to the computer-based literacy program. Although some were enthusiastic about the program throughout the study, many expressed a desire for more interaction with teachers after the initial phase of their involvement in the program. It appears, then, that more emphasis needs to be placed on teacher-learner interactions in planning and implementing literacy programs rather than on searching for the "best" methods or materials. In particular, the results do not support replacing teachers with computer-based instruction.

Although the finding that students viewed their teachers as crucial and generally "good" will be of comfort to literacy instructors, it raises a question regarding the independence of adult literacy learners. One of the basic principles of adult education is to lead adult learners in the direction of becoming independent and self-directed, and yet the learners in this study appeared to be quite dependent on their teachers, viewing them as necessary to learning. In a study of adult illiterates reentering the learning context, McDermott (1982) found that self-direction and independence increased slowly as adults experienced success and developed confidence in themselves as learners. Thistlethwaite (1983) also identified lack of confidence in ability to learn as an obstacle to self-direction and independence. Many of the students in the present study were lacking in confidence at entry to literacy programs (Malicky & Norman, 1994a). This does not mean that we should treat adults like children; rather it means that adults will require assistance to overcome their fears and anxieties and to develop confidence in their ability to learn. Adult literacy students require supportive, successful learning experiences to become independent, self-directed learners.

It is important to keep in mind when interpreting the results of this study that they are more a reflection of societal views of literacy and literacy teaching than of individual teachers. The teachers in this study appeared to be no more empowered than their students; they were constrained both by societal views of literacy as reflected in their students and by the institutions in which they worked, The institutions in turn were constrained by the views of policy makers and funders of adult literacy programs. There is a need for major partners in the adult literacy enterprise-learners, teachers, administrators, policy makers, funders - to critically examine their views of literacy and literacy learning. Only in this way will programs move beyond the current almost exclusive focus on fundamental literacy to achieve some of the emancipatory potential of literacy learning. Only in this way will literacy programs help people to make rather than take their place in society.

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