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THEMSELVES AND THEIR LIVES**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Little research has focused on the lives of adult literacy learners or on their perceptions of changes in their lives as they participate in literacy programs. In this study, 94 adults enrolled in literacy programs in a large Canadian urban center were interviewed at entry to literacy programs, and 69 of these adults were involved in follow-up, interviews across a 3-year time period. While some program participants talked about the financial problems they were experiencing at home, most focused on relationships with other people, primarily family members, and on time pressures and stress. They perceived positive cognitive, psychological and social changes within themselves, particularly in the initial stages of program participation. However, with increased demands from school and minimal support from family or friends, some felt less positive about themselves by the end of the study. In addition to recognizing the complexity of the lives of adult literacy learners, there is a need for more support services for many adults in programs and for more long-term research.<sup>1</sup>

Much of what has been written about the lives of adults labeled as illiterate paints a picture of darkness and despair (e.g., Calamai, 1988; Kozol, 1980; 1985). We are inundated with statistics and images of illiteracy which reflect the perspective of the academic, the researcher, the literate rather than the perspectives of those of whom the statistics and images are written. As Horsman (1990, p. 136) points out, "few educators seek to describe the situation of those who are labeled illiterate from the 'illiterate's' perspective." Similarly, Hunter and Harman (1979) concluded in their overview of research on adult illiteracy that the perceptions, views and attitudes of clients are notably absent from the bulk of the literature. There are some exceptions. Eberle and Robinson (1980) talked with adults about what it was like to be illiterate and why people decided to increase their literacy skills. Quigley (1992) asked adults to recall their experiences in school and related these experiences to their participation in literacy programs. Beder (1990) and Beder and Valentine (1990) investigated the participation decisions of adult basic education students. However, only a handful of researchers have talked with adults about what their lives are like or what the impact of literacy education is on their lives.

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Fingeret (1983) spent 12 months with illiterate adults in their urban communities to "understand how they viewed their social relationships and the role of literacy in their social world" (p. 134). The results of her research did a great deal to dispel the myth of illiterate adults as dependent and deficient. She described most of the adults in her study as living within social networks characterized by interdependence, with each member contributing a range of skills and knowledge to the social network.

Horsman (1990) and Rockhill (1987) focused their research on the lives of illiterate women. Horsman talked with women in rural Nova Scotia and, in addition to presenting a description of their lives, she examined dominant discourses about literacy and ways women resisted these dominant discourses. One of the most notable aspects of the lives of the women in her (1990) study was the way their lives were organized (or disorganized) "in relation to the needs of others" (p. 25). These women lived their lives around the demands of their partners and children, and the organization of time, space and resources was outside of their control. They were frequently seen as responsible for all of the housework, making it difficult for them to have time to participate in literacy programs. They often moved locations in relation to their husband's work and rarely had access to a car, leaving them physically and socially isolated. For those on welfare, the welfare system organized their lives leaving them feeling controlled by the bureaucracy. Horsman (1990) also noted dependence in the lives of these women and how this dependence was related to violence,

the violence of women's isolation in the household and sometimes the actual physical violence of men's domination of women; the violence of drudgery of inadequately paid, hard, monotonous jobs; the violence of living on an inadequate welfare income and enduring the humiliation of receiving assistance. (p. 86)

For the women in Horsman's study, literacy represented a dream of going somewhere, of getting a job, of becoming independent, of change as reflected in the dominant discourses of literacy programs.

Similarly, for the women in Rockhill's (1987) study, literacy involved a desire to become "somebody." The women in her study were recent Hispanic immigrants (most residing illegally in the United States) in the west side of Los Angeles. Many of the women worked a "double day" both in and out of the home, assuming the bulk of the responsibility for household work. This left them little opportunity to improve their English or literacy skills even though literacy was basically seen as "women's work," including the purchase of goods, transactions around social services, health care, and the education of their children. These women spent much of their time at home because their English was limited, their husbands objected to them going out, and there were few places for women to congregate (in comparison to the men who met in clubs, restaurants, bars etc.). Even when women worked outside of the home, their work options were very limited domestic or factory work and neither context offered much opportunity for women to improve their English. Like Horsman, Rockhill described the violence with which many of the women lived. Many men prevented their wives from attending classes or learning English and controlled most other aspects of their lives, sometimes through physical violence.

There has also been some research from the perspective of adult learners on the impact of literacy programs on their lives. Jones and Charnley (1978) interviewed 39 adults who had participated in the literacy campaign in England and identified four areas in which they felt they had made progress. First, were improved literacy skills which for some adults opened up a new world, such as reading their children's books or taking the bus to get where they wanted to go. Second, was the achievement of having registered for the campaign at all. Third, and closely related to this, were the perceived psychological and social benefits of participation. Jones and Charnley reported that phrases like 'I feel better about myself' (p. 94) occurred more than any other in their data. Finally, there were references to improved family relationships particularly with children. Jones and Charnley noted that while the adults perceived many benefits, they also recognized that their progress was slow and many were not ready to exercise their new skills in public.

Darkenwald and Valentine (1985) interviewed 294 adult students 7 months after their initial enrollment in literacy classes in New Jersey to obtain data on both "the intended and unintended outcomes of participation in adult basic skills education" (p. 18). They focused their interviews on three areas-academic skills, employment, and personal development and family functioning. Over 80% of the adults responded yes when asked if the classes helped them to become a better reader and 62.6% indicated they were better writers. Modest employment-related gains were also reported with adults indicating that they had received promotions or raises, that they had found a better job, or that they felt their job performance or job security had improved. When asked if they felt better about themselves, 92.1% replied yes, and two-fifths provided reasons related to increased self-confidence or self-esteem and the psychological rewards of personal accomplishment. When asked about the most important benefit they had gained from program participation, the most frequent responses were academic improvement and enhanced self-confidence and self-esteem. Darkenwald and Valentine (1985) concluded that the outcomes of program participation were significant and varied, and that programs met the needs of a wide range of learners. Although collecting data 7 months after students entered literacy programs had the advantage of reducing the impact of attrition, Darkenwald and Valentine's conclusions are limited to perceptions of adults after a fairly short period of time in literacy classes.

One purpose of the 3-year study reported in this paper was to understand the lives of participants in adult literacy programs in a large urban center in Canada from the perspectives of the program participants themselves. A second purpose involved asking them about perceived changes in them and in their lives as they participated in literacy programs. The more we know about the adults in our literacy programs, the more our programs can reflect their needs and the subjective realities of their lives.

### The Study

The population for the study consisted of adults entering literacy classes in one large Canadian urban center. Initially, 94 adults entering five literacy programs volunteered for the study. These 94 adults were interviewed to gather demographic and other data about their lives when they entered these programs, again every six months while they remained in programs, and at the time they left the programs (if they did).

## The Sample

In the initial sample of 94, there were 61 females and 33 males; the average age of subjects was 29.5 years. Representative of the cultural make-up of literacy classes in the area, 40 subjects were Canadian-born (three were aboriginal) while 54 were born in other countries (primarily the Middle East and Asia). Forty-one spoke English as their first language, four spoke French and 49 had learned to speak English as a second language (ESL). Adults whose second language was English had completed ESL courses prior to admission into literacy programs.

The majority of subjects were full-time students at the commencement of the Study (n= 69), attending classes 5 days per week. The remainder attended literacy programs on a part-time basis, attending classes or one-to-one tutoring once or twice each week. Fifty-one of the adults in the study enrolled in an adult basic education program in a vocational center and 33 entered literacy classes in a continuing education program in a school system. Five entered a one-to-one volunteer tutoring program and five others entered community-based literacy programs. The programs generally reflected one or both of the following two orientations: (a) a work orientation concerned primarily with enabling individuals to participate in the labor force, and (b) a social orientation concerned with enabling individuals to participate more fully in all aspects of society (Further Education Services, 1985).

Basic demographic data as well as information about family, income, and employment were gathered from all subjects at the beginning of the study. However, we were able to conduct follow-up interviews with only 69 Subjects (73%); the other 25 left literacy programs and could not be located. Information on participation and dropout patterns of this sample have been presented elsewhere (Malicky & Norman, 1994b).

## Procedures

Data were collected from the initial sample of 94 through structured interviews based on a questionnaire developed by Davis and O'Brien (1985) for use with adults in literacy programs in Nova Scotia. The questions involved basic demographic data (age, gender, country of birth, first language, level Of education) as well as information about their family, income and employment status. Some questions were also selected from the Southam Survey (Creative Research Group, 1987) to gather information about their social integration and reliance on others for literacy tasks. These interviews were conducted by assistants under the direction of the researchers; responses were audio-taped and written onto the interview schedule.

Follow-up interviews were conducted by a research assistant either at the center where adults were attending literacy classes or by telephone. Two open-ended questions were asked to find out what changes had occurred in their lives at home and in the community and how they felt about themselves as a result of participation in literacy programs. They were asked, "What new or different has happened since you began the program at home and in the community?" Prompts were given if the individuals had difficulty responding. In relation to changes at home, prompts included questions about changes in activities with their children or spouses and about things they read and wrote which they hadn't done before. Prompts about changes in relation to the community focused on going to new places, joining new groups, and associating with different people. Participants were also asked if they felt any different about themselves than before they began taking the literacy class and if so, in what way. At the time of the interviews, the research assistant noted the adult's responses on an interview sheet; interviews were also audio-taped and transcribed.

Data analysis was completed by one of the researchers. Data collected from the initial interview were quantified and tabulated to provide a description of the adults in the study. Data gathered on followup interviews were analyzed to identify emerging themes. The first step in this analysis involved identifying information in the transcripts related to changes reported by participants in their home lives, in their community lives, and in themselves. Responses in each of these broad categories (home lives, community lives, themselves) were then analyzed by grouping similar responses together. Groups were then labeled and these groups, in turn, were placed into more general categories. Once these categories were established, each individual's responses were analyzed and categorized. Numbers of responses in each category were calculated for each of four subsamples based on gender and immigrant status (Canadian-born males, Canadian-born females, immigrant males, immigrant females). Few differences between these subsamples were apparent and most of the results presented below reflect the combined sample.

### Home Lives

This section presents basic information about income and marital status as well as results obtained in follow-up interviews regarding changes at home during participation in literacy programs. Themes identified in follow-up data were relationships with family members, violence, time pressure and stress, and financial pressures.

#### At Entry to Programs

A characteristic which pervaded the lives of most of the adults in this study was poverty. Seventy percent of those who answered our question about total family income indicated that their income was below \$15,000 per year. Sixty of them received welfare, training allowances or Worker's Compensation; this was frequently the only income for their entire family.

Thirty-seven of the adults in the sample of 94 were married (including common law relationships) when they entered literacy programs and another three got married (or moved in with someone) while they were in programs. A lower percentage of Canadian-born women were married (19%) than were men (39%) or immigrant women (54%), and Canadianborn women were overrepresented in the single parent group. There were 16 single parents and 14 of these were Canadian-born women. Hence, as a group fewer Canadian-born women lived in intact family units, and more shouldered sole responsibility for child rearing.

Twenty-seven of the adults in the sample were single and, as far as we were able to determine, had never been married. A further 25 men had been divorced or separated, and only one of these men had custody of the children. Overall, only 31% of the men in this study had daily responsibility for child care whereas 57% of women were caring for children while they attended literacy programs.

### Relationships

When asked to talk about what was happening in their home lives in follow-up interviews, several responses were related to relationships with children and spouses. Some individuals talked about how supportive their families were or how they were able to help their children with homework because their own language and literacy skills had improved. Two people reported that since they had entered literacy programs, they watched less TV and spent more time talking with their families. However, the majority of comments involved problems in relationships with family members. Several individuals talked about problems with their children. Two indicated that their children were having difficulties at school, five that their children had recurring illnesses, two that their children were rebellious, and two that children in their immediate or extended families had been sexually assaulted.

Most of the individuals who reported having problems with their children were Canadian-born women. As noted above, these women were frequently single parents and hence, did not have another adult to help them when they experienced difficulties with their children. One woman, for example, was raising her son alone and found that as he got older, he demanded more and more time. During the time she was attending literacy classes, her son was sexually abused in one day home and developed a range of health problems. Initially, her mother provided some support but as time went on, her mother was unable to provide the amount of support that she felt she needed.

I haven't talked to my mom for about a month now and I just can't do it all by myself like she thinks I can... I just wish she would be here like when I need, like I have this assignment that's due on the 28th for Read to Learn and it's just like I wish I had somebody that would be able to take him for at least 4 hours.

She had continual problems with the father of her son not providing financial support and causing difficulties when he visited. The last straw was when she was raped over the summer, and she subsequently dropped out of school.

And it was just too hard emotionally and physically. I just couldn't force myself to do it anymore . . . I was always tired. I wasn't there and I was worried about him. I just couldn't handle it anymore and I didn't know what to do. Like I was ready to give [her son] up for adoption.

This participant was one of three women in the study who considered giving their children up for adoption and a fourth had her children taken away by social services when she was unable to cope any longer with the pressures of raising them alone. Another woman had one child living with her and her other two children living with their

father in another province. She indicated that these two children wondered why she wasn't with them, and eventually she dropped out of the literacy program to go to the other province to try to regain custody of her children. Two other individuals were also engaged in custody battles for their children during the Course of the study.

In addition to the disruption to family lives caused by problems with children, there was considerable flux in relationships with spouses or partners in the lives of several of the individuals in the study. Nine individuals, mostly women, reported that relationships were disintegrating, and some separated from their partners during the study. At the same time, more women than men were moving into new relationships. These relationships sometimes provided a stabilizing influence in women's lives but were frequently accompanied by pregnancy and hence, lead to other kinds of demands on women's time. Relationships did not always lead to greater stability. One man who moved in with his girlfriend reported that the relationship became strained within 6 months. He went to a psychologist and was told to leave his girlfriend before he "blew up", but he didn't leave her partly because of financial problems.

### Violence

At times, either explicitly or just beneath the surface of talk on relationships was another theme that of violence. Sometimes it was the adults in the literacy programs who perpetrated the violence, (e.g., one man was charged with assault following a fight in a bar, and one woman was charged and convicted of manslaughter). In general, however, the adults in the study were more frequently victims than perpetrators of violence, and it was generally women who were the victims. Some of this violence was verbal. For example, one woman indicated that if she had still been married, she would not have been allowed to attend school or do homework. When she attended a family reunion, her father criticized her for going to school, and she reported that her brothers and sisters were not supportive either. She broke up with her boyfriend near the end of the study because he was "trying to change her."

Some of the women, however, did not feel that they were able to leave abusive relationships. one immigrant woman got pregnant a few months after she entered the literacy program and quit school because she was not feeling well and had missed several classes. After she had the baby, she was virtually confined to the house. A few months later she indicated that her husband had hit her and that she had called the police on two occasions. The last time the police told her that if she called again, the baby would be taken away from her. By the end of the study, she was pregnant again and she was both sick and depressed. She said that neither she nor her husband wanted the baby, and that her husband didn't care for her and she didn't care for her husband. She was planning to go to her country of origin to be with her family until her baby was born, but she felt she had no choice but to return to Canada eventually because she didn't know what else she could do with two children.



Not all violence against women involved family members. One woman reported that she was attempting to find a new place to live because her landlord made her feel "uncomfortable" and another woman indicated that she was moving because she did not feel "safe" in the neighborhood in which she was living. Violence was also not restricted to women. One man described living with violence on an almost daily basis while he was going to school.

It's pretty hard when you've got other things on you mind. You have to, when you got to deal with a drunk in your family like with my dad, eh, it's hard... He's over here banging at the door or something. I broke up with my girlfriend. Last week she broke the window here and everything. Well my mom's not talking to me now. I don't like her boyfriend... because he's abusive to her. And we got into a fight one night. He was drinking and now my mom doesn't want me back over there. (male, Canadian-born)

While violence was a theme in only some of the interviews Collected in this study, it is important to keep in mind that we, like Rockhill (1987), did not ask any questions about violence but rather focused on aspects of people's lives related to their attendance in literacy classes. Hence, the information collected related to this theme likely provides an underestimate of the extent of violence in the lives of the individuals in this study.

### Time Pressures and Stress

While both women and men reported increased stress and pressure from dealing with the combined demands of home and school, this was reported more frequently by women than men. This is again partly related to the fact that more women were single parents. Typical of the responses provided by women in the study were the following:

I go to school, then I go home, feed the kids and do my housework and then by that time I'm dead. (female, Canadian-born)

I'm finding with raising the children on my own and going to school it is, you know, not only is it a pain but it's just too much of a load. (female, immigrant)

Two women who reported that they were not able to do as much cooking or house cleaning as they had prior to admission to literacy programs received very different reactions from their families; in one instance the family was very supportive, in the other the husband was highly critical.

There were few instances of other services available to women who found the increased pressures of home and school too much to deal with. One single parent, who reported very early in the literacy program feeling "burned out", had so much difficulty that social services eventually provided her with a parent aide. However, even this was not enough. She eventually had an "emotional breakdown" and her children were placed in foster care.

## Financial Pressures

In light of the fact that most of the adults in this study were living below the poverty line, there were relatively few (14) comments regarding financial pressures. Most of these comments were given by men who seemed to reflect the traditional belief that it was their responsibility to provide financial support for their families. This was one of the few areas in which men reported greater stress than did women.

## Community Lives

In an attempt to gather information about community involvement, individuals were asked in the initial interview what organizations they belonged to. Forty-four indicated that they were not members of any organizations, 36 indicated that they belonged to one organization (generally a church or cultural group), 12 belonged to two organizations, and one man belonged to five.

In follow-up interviews, several participants indicated that they would like to become involved in more community organizations but did not have the time or money to do so. A small number of participants joined one organization either while or after they had been in literacy programs, (e.g., Spa Lady), but often joined on only a short term basis.

Twelve of the participants identified going to school as a way of extending their community contacts. All except one of these participants were immigrants and they generally valued the opportunity provided by classes to meet people and make friends, particularly people outside of their own cultural group. Some of their comments indicated that it was not easy to interact with Canadians outside of the school context. One man said it was easier to be with Canadians at school because "Canadians try to keep very far from each other," and one woman said that, "Some Canadians if you talk to them and they don't understand, they just don't like to talk to you."

In the initial interview, most (82) of the participants indicated that they frequently traveled alone outside of their neighborhood for goods and services. Indeed, only one woman indicated in a follow-up interview that she had begun to travel by bus whereas she had never done so before. However, this does not mean that all individuals in the study belonged to strong social networks. One of the immigrant women indicated that she hadn't been out of the house for weeks after her baby was born. Another single immigrant woman who dropped out of the literacy program early in the study eventually ended up living in a single room at the YWCA, eating cereal and noodles alone in her room because she did not receive enough on social assistance to eat in the cafeteria. By the end of the study, she had nobody to talk to and described herself as really desperate, "I don't have no feeling now. I just can't think anymore."

## Changes in the Participants

Participants were asked to indicate if there were any changes in how they felt about themselves as they were involved in literacy programs and after they discontinued attendance. Responses were categorized into three general categories---cognitive / academic, psychological / affective and social.

### Cognitive/Academic Changes

In relation to academic effects, both men (9) and women (27) indicated that they were able to communicate better as a result of attending literacy programs. As would be expected, they talked about being able to read and write better, and about improved English. Perhaps because many of the participants spoke English as their second language, several also identified understanding and speaking as positive changes from their involvement in literacy programs. One immigrant woman, for example, talked about how she used to be shy but "now talks to all kinds of people." However, becoming more outspoken was identified by both women and men and by both immigrants and Canadian-born participants. This is particularly interesting since the primary focus of the literacy programs in this study was on written rather than spoken language.

Another academic outcome of participation in literacy programs perceived by several of the adults (13) in this study was knowing more. They talked about learning more about culture, society, rights, and responsibilities. In addition, one woman indicated that her involvement in the program had changed the way she looked at things, and two men said that it had changed the way they thought, the way they viewed life.

Five of the men mentioned "smartness" in relation to program participation. One man indicated that once he received his high school diploma, he was going to take it to show to his father and say: "Look at this. You can't call me dummy anymore. I'm smart."

### Psychological/Affective Changes

The most frequent affective or psychological change (29) mentioned by participants in this study was increased confidence.

I have more confidence in everything that I'm doing now whereas I would sit back before. Now I'm volunteering to do things... I think the first time I volunteered to do something was read in class. It's just, I looked and my hand was up and I said I guess I volunteered for this... I said, my body is, it's out of control, (male, Canadian-born)

Other frequent responses in the affective, psychological category included statements regarding increased self-esteem (5), being more comfortable in a range of situations (8), feeling proud of what they were doing (4), and just feeling good because they were doing something (7) besides "laying around" or "sitting around complaining."

Well it's proved to me that I can do it... When I thought of going back to school, I figured I would never do it but I really surprised myself. (female, Canadian-born)

Not all changes were positive, however, and while some changes such as depression (mentioned by 8) related largely to personal and family problems, others (13) talked about becoming frustrated and discouraged as they experienced difficulties in literacy programs. Several people talked about being dissatisfied with themselves as learners. One immigrant woman stated it this way, "The more I get higher, the more I worry. I not confident." One man who felt he was being treated as a child indicated that he didn't "feel good as a human," and another man said that the program lowered his self-esteem.

### Social Changes

In relation to social changes, several program participants talked about increased independence, for example,

I never used to go and pay any bill, like somebody else always paid my bills and this last while here I've been paying all the bills. (male, Canadian-born)

Before I came to school I had to depend on somebody if I wanted to say, if I wanted to go to the doctor or something, you know... Like I can do things by myself. (female, immigrant)

The most frequently mentioned social outcome, however, involved sticking up for themselves and not letting other people walk A over them. This was reported primarily by women, for example,

I stand up for myself. I say what I want to say... (female, Canadian-born)

I do find if I have a problem with a product or something I will write this letter and say this is my problem. I want my money, this type of thing. (female, Canadian-born)

Three men also gave responses in this category. One man, for example, talked about feeling more secure and being able to reject the opinions of others when he didn't agree.

### Cycle of Change

While most of the changes presented above are positive, feelings expressed by some participants about changes in themselves went through a cycle. It was not uncommon to find that participants began the program with a positive outlook, feeling good about themselves during the initial months of program involvement. Then as the pressures of home and school mounted and some began to experience difficulty with the program, they became increasingly discouraged. One woman expressed her disappointment this way, "I don't know why I so stupid. I not progress. My English is still the same before." One man said that he thought he had been "doing something" with his life and then it "just sort of fell apart." Some of the downward cycle was related to perceptions related to job opportunities. As program participants saw their classmates completing programs and failing to improve their job prospects (Malicky & Norman, 1994a), they, too, began to feel concerned that they "may end up in the same job" as before.

## Summary and Discussion

Most of the adults in this study lived in poverty. This result is consistent with that obtained by Davis and O'Brien (1985) who interviewed adults in literacy programs in Nova Scotia and found that 75% of family incomes were below \$15,000 per year. The National Anti-poverty Organization (1992) interviewed persons with low literacy skills from every province and territory in Canada and found that over 80% of their family incomes were \$12,000 or less. Hence, the incomes of the adults involved in this study were typical of incomes of adults across the country with low levels of literacy skills. In spite of their relatively low family incomes, however, less than 20% mentioned financial problems when talking about what was happening in their lives, and most of those who did so were men. This does not mean that adults in literacy programs do not need more adequate financial support; rather it appears that other aspects of their lives were of more immediate concern.

What many women and some men talked about were relationships with their children and partners, and the difficulties they were having juggling the combined work load of home and school. This was particularly true for single parents, most of whom were Canadian-born women. These results were similar to those in Horsman's (1990) research, where women were seen as responsible for all work in the household. The disorganization she identified in women's lives from the demands of family members was clearly evident in the lives of many of the women in this study. Also, as in Horsman's study, some of the women in this study were discouraged from participating in literacy programs.

Another theme which surfaced in this study as it had in Horsman and Rockhill's studies was violence, particularly violence against women, although some of the men lived with violence in their lives as well. Immigrant women, in particular, frequently had nowhere to turn for help, partly because they had not yet been in the country long enough to establish extensive social networks.

Generally, however, the people in this study did not appear to be as physically isolated as were the rural women in Horsman's (1990) study. This does not mean that all had the kind of strong social networks identified by Fingeret (1983). While nearly half of the participants in this study belonged to at least one community or cultural group, some did not belong to any group and many valued the opportunity provided by literacy classes to extend their community contacts. Immigrant learners, in particular, saw classes as an opportunity to meet people and make friends beyond their cultural group. The women in Horsman's (1990) study also saw literacy classes as an opportunity for social contact.

The participants in this study reported positive cognitive, psychological/affective and social changes within themselves, especially near the beginning of their involvement in literacy programs. They felt they were able to communicate better and this included communication through oral as well as written language. Campbell (1995), in a study of adults involved in participatory literacy programs, obtained similar results. She referred to this as "moving from silence into speech." Some of the men related their participation in literacy programs with smartness. This is consistent with Smith's hypothesis (1987) that the meaning of literacy is different for males and females because of different personal and public roles they play. He indicates that, "a primary motivation for males has to do with the maintenance of public face and in adults, redemption from failure. For females, the appeal is the acquisition of skills enabling them to fill secondary support roles" (p. 63).

Many program participants also reported increased confidence, self-esteem and independence. These results are consistent with those of Darkenwald and Valentine (1985) that in the short-term, positive outcomes of literacy are perceived by adults in literacy programs. In the current study, these positive outcomes persisted for some program participants but for others, both social and psychological/affective changes appeared to go through a downward spiral over the course of the study.

### Implications

The major implication of the results of this study is the need for literacy programs and workers to recognize the complexity of the lives of adult literacy learners in order to make it possible for adults to continue in literacy programs. Women, in particular, find it very difficult to add large quantities of homework from school to the already heavy demands from partners and children. Horsman (1990) suggests that in addition to acknowledging the complex lives of adult literacy students, programs can go even further and provide opportunities for learners to critically examine the social organization of their lives so they can challenge the forces which lead to dropout. This could help more women take the stand of two of the women in this study who broke off relationships with men who didn't want them to go to school. It could also help alleviate the downward cycle experienced by some adults as they participated in literacy programs.

As well as incorporating critical pedagogy into literacy programs, counselors and other support services are important components of literacy programs. The ideal would be development of comprehensive programs which go beyond the academic needs of learners as recommended by Glustrom (1983) and Hunter and Harman (1979). In the absence of these types of programs, however, information on services available in the community need to be gathered and made available to learners,

Enhancing the social aspects of literacy programs is recommended to meet the needs of adults who are relatively isolated in their homes. Providing opportunities for learners to engage in meaningful dialogue with one another and with teachers also leads to improved oral communication skills. Silent classrooms with students working independently tend to silence learners rather than help them to find a voice.

In relation to further research in this area, open-ended questions appear to be an appropriate technique for examining the situation of illiterate adults from their perspective. However, interviews need to be conducted across a considerable period of time because of the complexity of individual's lives and changes which occur during and after participation in literacy programs. Few conclusions can be drawn regarding the impact of literacy programs from data collected over relatively short time periods; even the 3-year time frame in this study was insufficient. In order to develop appropriate literacy programs for adults, we need research on the long-term impact of their participation in these programs.

#### END NOTE

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