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**Native Learners Perceptions of Educational Climate in a Native Employment
Preparation Program**

NATIVE LEARNERS PERCEPTIONS OF EDUCATIONAL CLIMATE IN A NATIVE EMPLOYMENT PREPARATION PROGRAM

Paulette C. Tremblay
Maurice C. Taylor

ABSTRACT

Concerned with the problem of undereducated and unemployed Canadian Native adults, the qualitative study sought to describe the dimensions of educational climate which were influential in providing optimal learning conditions for Native adult learners in a Native Employment Preparation Program. This was a pioneering study which provided rich descriptions about educational climate from the perspectives of Native adult learners. Research questions relating to learner milieu, dimensions of the cultural, social, and instructional environments, and learner outcomes were examined. The cultural environment emerged as the most influential factor contributing to a quality learning environment; the values, cooperation and supportiveness components were found influential in providing effective learning conditions.

Introduction

Many Native adults in Canada have not experienced positive educational climates; they have participated in second-rate education and lacked exposure to curricula which acknowledged the contribution of Native cultures and created positive images of Native people. In fact, a high percentage of Native people have dropped out of the education process prior to the completion of grade 12 to join the ranks of the undereducated and unemployed. This has led to the existence of distinct educational and employment discrepancies between the Canadian population and the Native peoples of Canada.

This disadvantage is explicitly noted when comparing relevant statistics associated with the Native and Canadian populations. According to the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs (1990), individuals 15 years of age or older with less than a ninth grade education represented 17% of the Canadian population versus 45% of the status Native population living on reserves and 24% of the status Native population living off reserves. Unemployment rates for the same groups of individuals were 6% for the Canadian population versus 13% for status Native people living on reserves and 14% for status Native people living off reserves. Employment rates for these groups were 34% for the Canadian population versus 21% for status Native people living on and off reserves. In other words, the ability of Native peoples to fully participate in Canada's economy has been severely restricted.

PAULETTE C. TREMBLAY is Director of Education, Assembly of First Nations, Ottawa, Ontario.

MAURICE C. TAYLOR is Associate Professor, Faculty of Education, University of Ottawa, Ottawa, Ontario.

Based on these circumstances, there was a pressing need for researchers to focus on Native literacy, the learning environment, and ways to encourage the persistence of Native adult learners in educational settings. It was also essential to understand the perceptions of the learners because the voice of undereducated Native adults has been cloaked in silence. According to a number of recent studies, there are strong links among literacy skills, employment and income (Crompton, 1996; Government of Canada, 1996; Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development and Statistics Canada, 1995). Literacy training has become a critical stepping stone toward a solution; it provides the means to help undereducated Native adults enhance their personal growth and acquire new knowledge and skills which may enable them to find better employment opportunities.

Literature Review

Educational Climate and Adult Education. Educational climate as a research construct has received very little attention in the literature relating to adult education and literacy. Even in the late 1980's, many researchers believed that theory building in adult learning was in its infancy, taking the form of tentative formulations which lacked empirical testing and the support of a substantial body of research. As a strategy to change this situation, Merriam and Caffarella (1991) suggested that future research in adult learning should take into consideration the perspectives of the learners in the learning process and the sociocultural context within which learning took place. They stated that, "few researchers have seriously addressed the issue of what constitutes a positive environment for learning. Certainly more attention needs to be given to delineating just how people, structure, and culture interact to shape the formal learning context" (p.40).

In an earlier review of the literature, Anderson (1982) described climate as "the total environmental quality within a given school building" (p.369). Findings from the review showed that the construct of climate was influenced by the characteristics of the learners and the learning processes and that students experienced multiple outcomes as a result of the learning process. Student outcomes that were affected by climate included cognitive behavior, affective behaviour, values, personal growth, and learner satisfaction.

According to Ennis et al. (1989), "only two studies were found which investigated social climate in adult education settings" (pp.76-77). Using an ethnographic design to examine the dimensions of educational climate with adult participants within a university setting, the researchers focused on the perceptions of the participants involved in the classes. Interestingly, the social system category emerged as influential in contributing to a positive learning experience. It was found that shared decision making and communication were the most important factors. These authors suggested that the construct of educational climate could be used in a variety of adult education settings. Furthermore, they indicated that adult education programs which assessed the variables of instruction and climate would likely provide a holistic experience which addressed the lifelong learning goals of students.

Literacy Although there is a paucity of literacy research on educational climate, many investigators have promoted the need to examine the quality, effectiveness, and success of literacy programs and services. For example, Chang Barker (1992) stated that there was a lack of research in the field of adult literacy and encouraged researchers to investigate the nature and effectiveness of various literacy programs and training methods. She called for empirical evidence to substantiate claims of program success and help professionalize the field with credibility. In a similar vein, Draper and Taylor (1992) stated that it was important to study specific literacy programs to determine why they were successful and unsuccessful and the extent to which the results were influenced by instructional methodologies and learning environments. Furthermore, Campbell (1996) and Tisdell (1995) have strongly advocated the need to understand literacy success through inclusive learning environments and participatory practices.

Native Literacy. Again, very little research is available in the area of Native literacy. Most of the studies were descriptive in nature and based on the perceptions of literacy practitioners and administrators rather than the learners. The following characteristics of successful Native literacy programs were found in the literature (B.C. Ministry of Education 1984; George, 1992, 1993a, 1993b; Goldgrab, 1991; Rodriguez & Sawyer, 1990; Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technologies, 1990; Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs, 1990; Wabano, 1991). Successful programs were community based and community controlled. They were linked to the economic, social, political, and spiritual development of the community. They provided sufficient counselling services and employed instructors who were culturally sensitive and committed to the community. They also incorporated a strong cross-cultural component and accepted the language of the learners.

In addition, these authors indicated that meaningful learning environments were learner-centered, holistic, and used a whole language approach. Effective learning conditions in a Native literacy context were created by focusing on the needs, experiences and background of the learners. An experiential learning approach was practiced and the inclusion of life skills as a key curriculum component was found effective. Important parts of the program included Native teachings and the use of elders as resources in the learning process. A variety of teaching methodologies such as group interaction, small group work, cooperative learning and the "watch and then do" technique were commonly used in the classroom. Instructional approaches which promoted critical thinking, learning to learn, decision making, and interpersonal communication were thought to be important.

While practitioners and administrators perceived that the program characteristics mentioned above would provide optimal conditions for Native learners, research relating to Native literacy programs had not been conducted to verify these perceptions. In addition, empirical evidence regarding the perceptions of Native adult learners enrolled in literacy programs could not be found. It was quite evident that there was a knowledge gap in the literature relating to the perceptions of Native learners and the learning climate in a Native literacy context.

Conceptual Framework of Educational Climate

In the study, educational climate was defined as "the social and contextual qualities of an organization as perceived by the participants" (Ennis et al., 1989, p. 76). To focus and guide the data collection and analysis processes, a conceptual framework of educational climate was developed from a comprehensive range of dimensions and components found in the literature (Anderson, 1982; Darkenwald, 1989; Ennis et al., 1989; Knowles 1980,1984; Knox, 1980,1986; Tagiuri, 1968). Operationally defined, educational climate included the five dimensions listed on the [next page](#).

1. Learner Milieu. This dimension referred to the characteristics of the learners.
2. Instructional Environment. This dimension referred to the learning process.
3. Social Environment. This dimension referred to the interaction patterns and social relations among program participants.
4. Cultural Environment. This dimension referred to the values and beliefs of the program participants.
5. Learner Outcomes. This dimension referred to the ways learners had changed as a result of the learning experience.
6. The components of each dimension are listed in Table 1.

Table 1:
Dimensions and Components of Educational Climate

Dimensions of Educational Climate Components

Learner Milieu

- demographic data
- prior knowledge and experience
- reasons for attending the program
- learning expectations and goals
- learning interests and attitudes

Instructional Environment

- course objectives
- content areas of the curriculum
- methods (lecture, inquiry, individual work, explain, demonstrate, video, group work)
- application (doing, practicing, applying knowledge/skill)
- involvement (active participation in activities, listening, sharing ideas, paying attention, discussing, asking questions, reading aloud)
- feedback (reinforcement, praise)
- evaluation of learner process

Social Environment

- communication patterns (instructor-class, instructor-learner, learner-class, learner-instructor, learner-learner)
- types of communication (ask question, provide response, make a comment)
- social relations (friendly, smiling, approachable, available, get along, receptive to concerns)

Cultural Environment

- values (openness, non threatening, take risks, make mistakes, importance of learning, warm and comfortable atmosphere, holistic, informal, challenging, fun, enjoyable, humor)
- cooperative emphasis (help each other)
- collaboration (learner centered, share responsibility, share decision making, work together)
- respect (trust, treat with dignity)
- supportiveness (caring, encouraging, listening, appreciating feelings, accepting)

Learner Outcomes

- achievement (successful performance)
- general skill development (communication, thinking, problem solving, assertiveness, making decisions, resolving conflict)
- personal management skills (being on time, attendance, reliability, adaptability)
- team skills (work well with others)
- personal growth (self-esteem, self-confidence, positive attitude, lifelong learning, set goals, new perspective)
- future goals (next steps)

Purpose of Study and Research Questions

The results of the literature review highlighted the need to investigate the perceptions of Native adult learners regarding educational climate. Therefore, the purpose of the qualitative study was to describe and analyze the salient factors in a Native literacy program which created an optimal educational climate for Native adult learners.

The following research questions were addressed. What were the characteristics of the Native adult learners participating in the program? What instructional, social, and cultural factors in the teaching-learning context provided an optimum educational climate for Native adult learners? How would learner outcomes be described upon completion of the program?

Methodology

A qualitative design was selected to investigate educational climate for a number of reasons. The design accommodated the exploratory nature of the research problem. It supported the conduct of the study in the natural environment of the participants and helped the researcher understand the total environmental quality of the program. The design enabled the researcher to examine the routine and habitual patterns which portrayed the everyday experiences, thoughts, meanings, feelings and actions of the participants as they functioned naturally in the teaching/learning context. It also supported the collection of rich, verbal descriptions provided by the program participants.

The research site selected for the study offered a community based program which focused on classroom oriented employment training. The Employment Preparation Program was administered and delivered by Native staff of the Grand River Polytechnic Institute (GRPI) located on the Six Nations Reserve in southern Ontario, Canada.

The Employment Preparation Program was developed to address the training needs of Native people on social assistance, unemployment insurance, or those without an income. It was designed to help this population develop skills for finding, acquiring, and keeping a job and to encourage individuals to pursue lifelong learning. To be eligible for the program, candidates had to be 18 years of age or older, out of high school for one year or more, and functioning at a grade 8 level or higher.

The curriculum included five components: Life Skills, Computer Skills, Academic/Occupational Skills, Native Perspectives, and Work Placements. Learners received credits towards their grade 12 diploma for all five courses. All but one of the five subjects were unique because they were designed especially for the program by Native instructors. The academic subject matter was the only part of the program that was taken from the provincial curriculum. It provided learners with the opportunity to complete high school subjects which they were required to take to finish their grade 12 diploma. The learners took the academic requirements as correspondence credit courses while attending the program. Program learners selected the appropriate academic courses and worked on them individually during the assigned classes; a Native instructor was available to assist and support the learners.

The program had recently been changed from a period of 15 weeks without levels to a period of 21 weeks with three levels. This change had been made to accommodate the real life needs of the learners. The three levels of the program were stand alone learning modules which enabled learners to enter and exit the program between levels and gain credits for the levels that they had successfully completed. Level 1 of the program was geared to entry level learners who had little or no previous exposure to the content of the curriculum; it included 6 weeks of classroom based instruction from 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. Level 2, which covered a period of 7½ weeks, provided the next step in the learning process; learners spent 4 days involved in classroom based instruction and 1 day participating in work placement assignments of their choice. This part of the curriculum helped participants gain practical job experience in an establishment in the local and surrounding communities. Level 3 was the final phase of the program; it covered a period of 7½ weeks and included 4 days of classroom based instruction and a 1-day work placement assignment.

Two distinct groups of learners participated in the study and started the program at the same time: 8 learners with little previous program experience started level one, and 11 learners who had previously participated in the original 15 week program began level 3. The researcher was granted permission to serve as observer-participant for the purpose of data collection and started the program with the learners. The purpose of the research was fully explained to the learners during program introductions and all learners, instructors and program staff signed a letter of consent agreeing to participate in the study. All Life Skills and Native Perspectives classes were observed for both groups of learners. Twenty-three classes were observed for level 1 learners for a total of 58 observation hours and 20 classes were observed for level 3 learners for a total of 50 observation hours.

Multiple data collection strategies were employed in the study. Participant observation was used to observe learners formally in the classroom and informally outside of the classroom.

Observations were recorded in a daily observation journal and reflections of the researcher were recorded in a separate journal. A total of four focus group interviews were conducted with the learners near the end of each level of the program; each session lasted for approximately 2 to 3 hours and two sessions were held with each group. In-depth semi-structured interviews were held individually with 7 staff members throughout the 9 week period of data collection. Interviews ranged from one to 2 hours in duration and all interviews were recorded on audiotape. A document review of curriculum materials and progress reports was conducted as a means to verify information collected.

A data reduction analysis approach was used as a means to process the research findings. Field notes and interview transcriptions (from focus groups and individuals) were coded in units of information with similar meaning and clustered into the components and dimensions of educational climate depicted in Table 1. Conclusions were then drawn from the data by noting patterns and themes, making comparisons and contrasts, and clustering and counting data of a similar nature. Findings related to the learner milieu and learner outcomes were organized into narrative text which provided a profile of the Native learners.

As previously mentioned, the components used to determine the characteristics common to the learners included demographic data, prior knowledge and experience, reasons for attending the program, learning expectations and goals, and learning interests and attitudes.

Characteristics common to Native learners in both levels one and three of the program showed that all learners were status Indians from the Mohawk or Cayuga Bands of the Iroquois, and all were unemployed. The majority of learners in both levels were female single parents who had completed grade 9 or higher. Learners varied in age ranging from 18 years to 40 years. Most of the learners were situated in the younger age groups: six were between the ages of 18 and 20, and five were between the ages of 21 and 29. Most of the adult learners had left school for personal reasons; they had taken a diverse array of training in various occupational areas; and they had previous work experience in one to three different jobs. The average attendance for learners in both levels was 80% or higher.

The majority of learners indicated that they had attended the Employment Preparation Program to enhance their personal lives and improve their knowledge, skills, and qualifications. They indicated that they had not experienced success in provincial programs which provided standardized curriculum. Some of the comments provided by the learners are as follows. "I have dropped out of several job readiness training programs provided by non-Native organizations. There were other Native students but there weren't Native instructors. I didn't feel like I was learning anything". "The program I attended before was taught in a totally different way. The teacher did all the talking and as students, we just sat there and listened. I found it boring and left". Another learner said the following.

It's a lot different than I thought it was going to be. I went to another program for upgrading in Math and English. It was the same old boring stuff. Learners there worked alone on individual assignments with no sharing, no learner interaction, and no interest on the part of the coach. There was a feeling of isolation and aloneness. I didn't learn anything. That program was a waste of my time.... It's friendlier here. We talk and share ideas all of the time. Everyone here is caring, interested, and supportive. I have learned so much. There is a lot of humor and learning is fun.

The key learning goal for all learners was to acquire more education. This took the form of finishing the program, completing credit courses to obtain a grade 12 diploma, and/or engaging in more specialized training. Academic classes taken by most of the learners included provincial correspondence courses in English and Math. This was the one class where there was not a lot of classroom instruction. Learners worked on their courses independently with an instructor present to provide assistance. While fully aware that they needed to complete these courses to complete their grade 12 diplomas, learners were not able to do so successfully. Learners made the following comments. "I'm not working on my academic skills. I don't like the way it's being taught right now". "Academics is the hardest part of the whole program, I don't like working on the correspondence courses, but, I enjoyed working on my portfolio and resume". "I find some of the material hard to understand". "I've signed up for Math and English. I've started reading the English, but, I'm scared to try the Math. I don't know why".

Learners indicated that the program had met their expectations. Representative comments made by the learners are listed below. "It has helped me a lot. I found out what I wanted to do in school and how to better cope with my children". "When I first started, I only wanted to work on the academic part of the program. I was scared of computers. I didn't want to do Life Skills. However, as it went on, I realized how much I was going to need the information that I was learning about". "This program is very informative. A classroom setting has always been the best way for me to learn".

All learners stated unanimously that they enjoyed the program. Level one learners identified two factors which contributed to their enjoyment of the program: their personal development and the social environment. The following comments were made: "It changed my perspective on a lot of things"; "I realize that I'm smart"; It "eases my fear"; "I'm learning a lot about people in the workplace". "You feel that you are making progress in the things that you are doing". The two main factors which contributed to the enjoyment of level three learners included the social environment and the program curriculum. Typical comments made by level three learners were as follows. "Everybody is so friendly and open; it's a fun place to be". "Class discussions help you get to know everyone's background". "The friendly instructors, classmates, and the instructors' attitudes towards you and their job make a difference in learning". "By participating in the job placements, you are able to see what you want to do or you find out what you don't want to do in a job"... "I found the Native Perspectives classes to be the most meaningful. I liked the respect that was given to different viewpoints, They covered the majority of residents in this community. To see all the different community perspectives was very valuable".

Learners emphasized the importance of participation, cooperation, and application as instructional strategies that helped them learn more readily. In the words of level one learners: learning is "about participation"; "I get a lot out of the classes because we are always sharing ideas"; "It's about doing it". "Here, we get to do it and experience it. This way it sticks with you". Two major factors which emerged as helpful in the learning processes for level three learners centered on the quality instructors and the comfortable learning environment at GRPI. They indicated that the instructors: "made you feel like a real being, not like somebody who doesn't know anything or isn't educated"; They "let you work at your own pace. They don't put any pressure on you", The instructors "are all open, friendly and approachable. They really set the mood for the whole place"; and "They are awesome". With respect to the learning environment, one learner said, "You feel comfortable and people are willing to listen to you". Another learner remarked, "The comfortable environment. It's easier to talk. You don't feel funny asking questions. That's what I found hard about going to school before". In the words of yet another learner, "the instructors talk to you, not down to you... they tried to create a comfortable atmosphere. That is the major hurdle for learning".

When describing typical characteristics of the Native learners, staff members referred to the many life issues facing this population, the diverse backgrounds of the individuals, and the increased awareness of the learners of the requirement for higher levels of education to obtain employment. Furthermore, a staff member expressed the need to acknowledge the courage of entry level learners in taking the initial steps to start the program.

Some of the people that come to the program are fairly shaky. This is the first time in a long time that they have been in a learning environment. People have a hard time breaking out of the passive role that they've been in for so long... [They] go through a self-discovery process while they are here... People are asked to do a lot of self-analysis and goal setting. For people who are coming from largely dysfunctional families and problem beset families, that's asking a lot of them. One of the most important things that I've learned is to have compassion for the courage of the people who come here.

Cultural Environment

Of the three environmental dimensions of educational climate, the cultural environment emerged as the key dimension which contributed to an optimal learning environment for Native literacy learners. Participants consistently identified the values, cooperation, and supportiveness components as influential factors which contributed to the quality of the learning environment. Values which were found conducive for creating a favorable atmosphere for learning included a psychologically comfortable feeling and a physically comfortable facility along with a nonthreatening environment in which participants were able to take risks and make mistakes. Participants needed an environment which placed value on being happy, having fun, and the appropriate use of humor. Other factors focused on an open and warm environment where it was easy to talk, learn, and ask for things, an environment where learners felt respected as individuals, and an environment in which a philosophy of empowerment and responsibility for participants was advocated and practiced.

Using different methodologies (participant observation, researcher journal, focus group interviews, individual interviews and document review) data were gathered and compared across a variety of sources (the learners, staff members, the researcher and documents). Thus, verification strategies were built into the research design to increase the strength and rigor of the findings and augment the credibility of the results. In relation to the reliability of the study, interview guides with the same questions asked in the same order were used across different sources to ensure consistency; findings were found to be consistent across methods and groups; and the features of the research design were congruent with the research questions. The generalizability of the findings to other settings or to the larger population was not intended; instead, speculations regarding the applicability of findings to other situations, under similar conditions were provided.

Emerging Perspectives

Perspectives which consistently emerged across the different sources of information are presented in this section for the five research dimensions. These included learner milieu, cultural environment, social environment, instructional environment and learner outcomes.

Learner Milieu

An examination of the learner milieu provided a profile of the Native adult learners participating in the Employment Preparation Program.

Results of the study showed that learners actively participated in making decisions around planning and evaluating their learning experiences. To gain entry to the program, learners had to identify their learning needs and select the academic courses that they needed to earn their grade 12 diploma. Throughout the program, learners were required to reflect, evaluate, and discuss what was working and what was not working. They were encouraged to be assertive, communicative, and actively participate in the learning process. They developed plans which highlighted their short-term and long-term goals and they produced portfolios which provided a profile of their learning and work experiences.

Cooperation and supportiveness emerged as minor components of the cultural environment which influenced learners. Elements of cooperation that were found important included participants who: willingly helped each other, asked for help when needed, knew where to go for help, found individual assistance available and accessible when required, and interacted in positive ways to solve problems, discuss issues, and complete tasks. The elements of supportiveness that were identified as influential in the learning context involved the caring, encouraging, and accepting nature of program participants.

Social and Instructional Environments

Both the social environment and instructional environment emerged as factors of secondary importance across all perspectives. Important elements of the social relations component of the social environment included program participants who were characterized as friendly, smiling, receptive to problems and concerns, approachable, interactive, willing to talk to each other and able to get along with everybody. The three components of the instructional environment which made important contributions to a quality learning environment incorporated the curriculum, learner involvement, and application. Course content that was found influential included Native Perspectives, Life Skills, and Work Placements. Influential elements of involvement which had an impact on the learning environment centered on: the active participation of learners in the learning process, the ability of learners to share their ideas and participate in discussions, and the ability of learners to engage in active inquiry. Elements of application that were found important included "doing everything," practicing, and using knowledge in practical or new situations.

Learner Outcomes

The learning outcomes dimension of educational climate provided evidence of how the learners had changed as a result of the learning experience. The personal growth component emerged as the most influential factor which contributed to learner changes and successful learning experiences for all learners. While participating in the program, learners experienced growth associated with enhanced self-esteem and self-confidence. They had learned how to set goals and had enhanced their ability to communicate and to be assertive. Learners found that their perspectives had changed: they had become more positive in outlook and realized the importance of learning. Moreover, they wanted to continue to learn. The program had provided them with the opportunity to open a door and start the learning journey. Along the way, they discovered new perspectives which enabled them to see new possibilities.

With respect to the program information that would help them find employment, level one learners identified the importance of general skills such as assertiveness and communication, while level three learners suggested that the knowledge and skills acquired from the Life Skills classes, Computer classes and the development of the portfolio would help them find work. All learners indicated that they needed more education and most expressed the desire to continue formal learning.

Two areas of concern emerged from the findings. The majority of Native learners taking correspondence courses in the academic classes did not submit or complete the course assignments; thus, they were unsuccessful in meeting the requirements of this part of the program. One might speculate that the learners at this stage of the learning and development process were not ready to work in isolation; they may need to be in a classroom environment where they can interact, share viewpoints, and participate in group learning activities. One may conclude that another problem area for the learners in the academic classes centered on the standardized provincial curriculum used in the correspondence courses. Clearly, the use of correspondence materials, independent study, and non-Native courses, does not work with this population. New ways must be found to address the completion of academic course work for literacy learners because these learners must complete grade 12 to enhance their chances of finding future employment. This is an area which requires further investigation.

Another concern related to the difference in the performances that were found between the younger learners (18-25 years old) and older learners (26 years or older) in both levels of the program. It was the younger learners who had problems associated with attendance and punctuality both within the program setting and the community work placements. It may be that the younger learners were limited by their lack of experience; they were not yet ready to change their existing behavior patterns. Perhaps they didn't have the outside support to provide encouragement to engage and persist in the learning process. Perhaps they simply enjoyed attending the program because it was supportive, friendly, and helped them experience new ways of relating. This was an important finding because over half of the learners in both levels of the program were young adult learners. This is especially important in the Native context because this population (aged between 18-24) is projected to grow by 43% by 2011 (Loh, 1990).

Implications For Practitioners

The findings of the study have a number of implications for practitioners. The learning environment of the Employment Preparation Program was described as holistic, learner-centered, collaborative, and supportive of learner and staff empowerment. Decisions regarding learner goals, academic courses, work placements, and career choices were made by the learners with the assistance of program staff. The atmosphere was characterized as highly interactive, warm, open, comfortable, and encouraging. Individuals were recognized and valued as total human beings on a spiritual, intellectual, physical, and emotional level. It was a place for learner renewal and growth. It provided a positive learning environment for all Native learners. Practitioners who work with Native adult learners might find it useful to apply some of the elements and techniques that were employed in this teaching-learning context.

Findings might be used by practitioners to create effective learning conditions with any group of learners in various teaching-learning contexts. This would involve the implementation of a number of learning conditions. For example, establishing a cultural environment characterized as warm, comfortable, nonthreatening, fun, enjoyable, open, respectful, and empowering was essential for creating an effective climate for learners to team. Providing a cooperative environment in which learners helped each other and instructors were available to provide individual assistance was an important condition for learning. Developing a supportive environment where staff were accepting, caring, and encouraging was another condition which enhanced learning. Promoting effective social relations which involved being friendly, smiling, being available and approachable, and being receptive to problems and concerns were important ways to spark the learning process. As well, providing meaningful curriculum, actively involving learners in the process, and providing ample opportunities for learners to practice and apply the content in new situations were key conditions which contributed to an effective learning environment.

Findings from the study showed that learner outcomes were not limited to academic achievement or general skill development. The major component of the learner outcomes that emerged as most influential for all learners was that of personal growth. Practitioners, stakeholders, and funding agencies involved with literacy programs need to clearly define the criteria for learner and program success in broad terms which encompass a multitude of learner outcomes and impacts.

Results from the investigation also indicated that the majority of learners taking provincial correspondence courses in the academic class had not completed assignments. Novel ways must be found to address this issue as it becomes essential for learners to complete grade 12 as a foundation for finding employment. This may involve the adaptation of the provincial courses to make them more meaningful to Native learners and the delivery of academic courses in collaborative group settings with Native instructors. In addition, the results suggested that the younger adults experienced more problems associated with attendance and punctuality. Different types of support mechanisms need to be established within the training environment to overcome these work related behaviors. Both of these issues point in the direction that require further investigation.

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