“something to think about

please think about this”

Report on a National Study of Access to Adult Basic Education Programs and Services in Canada

prepared and written by
Susan Hoddinott

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(Ottawa-Carleton District School Board)

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Something to Think About - Please Think About This: Report on a National Study of Access to Adult Basic Education Programs and Services in Canada **is the final report on a study undertaken in January 1996 by the Ottawa Board of Education (now the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board) under the direction of Joyce White, Manager of ABE/ESL programs. The study was funded by the National Program of the National Literacy Secretariat, Human Resources Development Canada.**

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The title of this report is taken from a composition by a student at one of the four local research sites which participated in the national study. The full title of the composition is *"Why I think it's important for programs like this to exist: Something to think about - Please think about this".* The composition is presented in full in an 'Afterword' to this report.

National Study Research Team

(Teacher Researchers and Social Policy Researchers)

Shari Buchan
Lianne Calvert
Diana Gibson
Louise Mathieu
Carol McMurchy
Peter Mowat
Dr. William O'Grady
Monique Ouellette
Madeleine Pelletier
Patricia Reichert
Dr. Deborah Stiles
Diana Twiss
Dr. Susan Hoddinott (Principal Researcher)

Researchers for Phase 1 of the study were Betty Butterworth, Susan Hoddinott and Madeleine Pelletier. The report on Phase 1 of the study, *To Meet a Significant Need: A Discussion Document on Adult Literacy in Canada* (1996) was written by Susan Hoddinott with the assistance of Joyce White.

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Introduction

Background

Although Canada has made considerable progress in educational attainment rates over the past half century, the results of the Canadian component of the 1994 International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) reveal that low literacy skills continue to present significant problems for many adults. Nearly one quarter of the Canadian sample adult population surveyed for the IALS demonstrated literacy skill at or below the lowest level of proficiency on all three scales of literacy measured by the survey. This represents much the same proportion of the population which demonstrated low literacy skills in Statistics Canada's 1989 Survey of Literacy Skills Used in Daily Activities, when the differences in scoring between the two surveys are taken into account.

Two things are clear from an examination of the 1989 and 1994 surveys. The first is that the number of Canadian adults with some degree of literacy difficulty is significant enough to warrant continued public concern and a considered public policy response. The second is that, in spite of the variety of literacy policies and initiatives undertaken over the past decade, little significant progress has been made in terms of changing the overall adult literacy picture for the country.

The IALS results also show that access to adult education and training is negatively correlated with low educational attainment/low literacy skills. In Canada, as in all the countries surveyed, the majority of adult education and training "goes to those who are already highly skilled" (Statistics Canada, Human Resources Development Canada, and National Literacy Secretariat, 1996:50). In this, the IALS data confirm the findings of previous Statistics Canada studies including, most recently, the 1992 *Adult Education and Training Survey*. As the Canadian report on the IALS data notes, "… there is concern that adult education and training work to increase inequality because it mostly serves to increase the skills of the already skilled" (ibid).

The results of the International Adult Literacy Survey and the discussion and interpretation of these results in both the international report, *Literacy, Economy and Society: Results of the first International Adult Literacy Survey* and the Canadian report, *Reading the Future: A Portrait of Literacy in Canada* strongly suggested the need for a follow-up study of what each nation was doing to address the critical issue of adult illiteracy. This need has since been confirmed by *The Hamburg Declaration*

on Adult Learning **which came out of Unesco's Fifth International Conference on Adult Education (July 1997). The Declaration calls for participating nations to promote "policy-driven and action-oriented research on adult learning" by "promoting national and cross-national studies on learners, teachers, programmes, methods and institutions of adult education, and supporting the evaluation of adult education provision and participation, especially in relation to the needs of all groups of society" (Unesco, 1997:28). The national study on which this report is based begins this process for Canada.**

About This Document

Something to Think About - Please Think About This: Report on a National Study of Access to Adult Basic Education Programs and Services in Canada **is the final report on a research project which began in January 1996 under the auspices of the Ottawa Board of Education, with funding from the National Literacy Secretariat. The preliminary phase of the project ended in December 1996 with the completion of a report entitled *To Meet a Significant Need: A Discussion Document on Adult Literacy in Canada* (Hoddinott, 1996). The findings of the preliminary research and the plan for the second, and final, phase of the research were presented in that report.**

The principal findings of the preliminary research phase were summarized in *To Meet a Significant Need* as follows:

1. *Current levels of provision of literacy programs generally do not match the need for such programs. A comparison of numbers currently enrolled in programs with the IALS assessment of potential need attests to a significant shortfall in provision. The existence of large waiting lists for literacy programs in many areas confirms this problem.*

2. *Access to literacy programming varies from province to province and the extent to which literacy education is available to some degree reflects the relative economic positions of the provinces. The latent inequity in this situation is heightened by the fact that the poorer provinces also tend to exhibit higher levels of low adult literacy skills and undereducation.*

3. *Access to literacy programming varies withinprovinces and territories. In general, adults in urban areas are more likely to have access to programs, although this is not uniformly the case.*

4. *Many of the provincial literacy policies and initiatives established over the past decade are undergoing review and retrenchment in the current period. It would appear that, as a result, access to literacy programming in many jurisdictions is becoming more limited.*

5. *In general,the least educated and those with the lowest levels of literacy skill have the fewest opportunities. Where educational upgrading programs are provided, the majority of funding tends to be directed towards those at the higher grade levels.*

6. *Adults in literacy programs in most regions of the country face considerable difficulties with respect to recognition and accreditation of learning.*

Following the preliminary research phase, which had clearly indicated the need for a re-assessment of current approaches to Literacy and Adult Basic Education, the second phase of the research focused on conducting a thorough examination of Literacy policy and practice in Canada. The key questions guiding the research, as stated in the Phase 1 report, were *whether Canadian adults in need of literacy level upgrading have reasonable access to programs and whether they can be assured that the programs they have access to can enable them to achieve their educational goals and, thus, better prepare them to pursue their employment aspirations*.

The findings of the second phase of the project, as presented in this report, support the general conclusions arrived at in the preliminary research phase. Utilizing a research process which combined detailed study of a number of regionally distributed Literacy and Adult Basic Education programs with a general survey of the Literacy policy and programming environment in each province and territory, the project has documented the inadequacies of basic education provision for adults in the current period and confirmed the need for a general review of existing policies and practices. Only through recognizing the weaknesses of current Literacy strategies, can we begin to address the urgent need for increased access to an improved Adult Basic Education service in this country.

Outline of the Report

This report describes the research which was undertaken in the second phase of the research project and presents the findings. Chapter 1 presents an analysis of the issue of adult illiteracy in Canada, drawing especially on the contribution of Statistics Canada's two national literacy surveys, the 1989 Survey of Literacy Skills Used in Daily Activities (Statistics Canada, 1991) and the Canadian component of the 1994 International Adult Literacy Survey (Statistics Canada, Human Resources Development Canada, and National Literacy Secretariat, 1996). It also critically examines popular conceptions of literacy and illiteracy, as promoted through recent literacy campaigning, and suggests that a re-evaluation of both popular and political understanding of the issue will be necessary if more appropriate policy and programming responses

to the needs of undereducated Canadian adults are to be taken. This chapter is reprinted from the above referenced report on the first phase of the research project, *To Meet a Significant Need.*

Chapter 2 describes the research which formed the basis of this report. The research design, incorporating both locally based, *reflexive* research and general *investigative* research is described. This is followed by an account of the ways in which the research design was implemented during the course of the study and an analysis of the relative success of each component of the research in contributing to the overall objectives of the study.

Chapters 3, 4, 5 and 6 describe the *local research* component of the study. Chapter 3, "A Window on the Practice of Adult Basic Education", describes the four local research sites. Each of the four sites is described in terms of its place within the provincial/territorial Adult Basic Education system and the ways in which it organizes for the provision of Literacy and Adult Basic Education. The student groups at each of the four sites are described in general terms. Chapter 4, "Aspiring for More", describes the students at each of the four local research sites in terms of their goals and aspirations and the changes which these were subject to over the period of the research. Chapter 5, "Learning the Hard Way", continues the documentation on students at the local research sites; it describes the ways in which the student participants in the local research were supported to attend their programs and the difficulties they faced when needed supports were not provided or when available supports were inadequate to meet their needs. Chapter 6, "Adult Basic Education as Work", describes the conditions of employment and the working experiences of the teachers at the four sites.

Chapter 7 presents an analysis of the state of Literacy and Adult Basic Education provision in Canada in terms of the principal trends and issues identified by the general research component of the study. The issues identified by students and teachers at the local research sites provided the starting point for the analysis of the general research data. Chapter 8 concludes the report with the presentation of a number of recommendations made by the teachers at the local research sites for changes to current approaches to the delivery of Literacy and Adult Basic Education services.

The title of this report, *Something to Think About - Please Think About This,* is taken from the composition of a student at one of the local research sites. Written at a time when her program was under threat of closure, as a part of her contribution to the research, the full title of the composition is 'Why I think it's important for programs like this to exist: Something to think about - Please think about this'. The composition presents an insightful analysis of the reasons for adult undereducation and the need for an ongoing

societal commitment to providing basic education services to adults. It is presented in full in an *Afterword* to this report.

It is significant to note that, in large measure, the issues identified by *The Hamburg Declaration on Adult Education* (Unesco, 1997) are the issues which emerged from this national study of Literacy and Adult Basic Education in Canada; the 'Agenda for the Future' **identified by the Hamburg Declaration could as well have flowed from the Canadian research project. This agenda includes:**

Ensuring accessibility and quality [including] by:

- *support(ing) and extend(ing) programs for rural and isolated areas*
- *developing a comprehensive policy, taking into account the critical role of the learning environment*

Opening schools [and] colleges to adult learners [including] by:

- *requiring institutions of formal education … to be prepared to open their doors to adult learners, both women and men, adapting their programmes and learning conditions to meet their needs*

Improving the conditions for the professional development of adult educators and facilitators [including] by:

- *elaborating policies and taking measures for better recruitment, initial training and in- service training, working conditions and remuneration of the personnel engaged in … adult education programmes and activities in order to ensure their quality and sustainability, including the contents and methodology of training*

Promoting the empowerment of women and gender equity through adult learning [including] by:

- *recognizing and correcting the continued marginalization and denial of access and of equal opportunities for quality education that girls and women are facing at all levels*
- *ensuring that all women and men are provided with the necessary education to meet their basic needs and to exercise their human rights*
- *eliminating gender disparities in access to all areas and levels of education*
- *removing barriers to access to formal and non-formal education in the case of … young mothers*
- *promoting a gender-sensitive participatory pedagogy which acknowledges the daily life experience of women …*

Creating an educational environment supporting all forms of learning for older people [including] by:

- *ensuring access for older people to all the services and provisions that sustain adult learning and training and thereby facilitate their active participation in society*

Ensuring the right of … refugees … to participate in adult education [including] by:

- *providing migrants and refugees with comprehensive education and training opportunities that promote their political, economic and social participation,and enhance their competence and cultural base*

Creating continuing opportunities for persons with disabilities and promoting their integration [including] by:

- *making all forms of learning and training accessible to disabled people and ensuring that the learning and training provided respond to their educational needs and goals*
- *fostering institutional policies that ensure equal access, services and vocational and employment opportunities for the disabled, under which appropriate learning technology matches their special learning needs*

Linking literacy to the social, cultural and economic development aspirations of learners [including] by:

- *emphasizing the importance of literacy for human rights, participatory citizenship, social, political and economic equity, and cultural identity*
- *replacing the narrow vision of literacy by learning that meets social, economic and political needs and gives expression to new forms of citizenship*

The Hamburg Declaration defines the goal of ensuring the universal right to literacy and basic education **and commits all participating nations (of which Canada was one) to *allocating an equitable share of the education budget to adult education and to promoting the ratification and application of the International Labour Organization Convention 140 (1974) concerning paid educational leave*. It also asserts that:**

> *All members of the community should be invited and, where necessary, assisted in participating in adult learning.*
>
> **and**
>
> *Adult education [is] a human development and productive investment [which] should be protected from the constraints of structural adjustment.*

This is, indeed, an agenda which the students and teachers who participated in the local research component of this national study—as well as the majority of respondents in the general survey—could wholeheartedly embrace. As the following pages describe, however, the reality in Canada at the present time is quite different; meeting our commitment to the *Hamburg Declaration on Adult Education* will require that current trends be reversed and that a concerted and coordinated effort be undertaken to improve all aspects of access to Adult Basic Education programs and services.

Chapter 1

Adult Illiteracy in Canada

Towards an Understanding of the Issue

1

Chapter Summary

This chapter establishes the theoretical framework for the presentation and analysis of the findings from the National Study of Access to Adult Basic Education Programs and Services in Canada. It discusses the official (and popularly accepted) definitions and measures of literacy which currently prevail in this country and assesses the relationship between these definitions and measures, and educational attainment data. It also examines critically the ways in which our understanding of adult illiteracy (as an individual and social issue) has been shaped by literacy campaigning activities over the past decade and, in particular, by media involvement in the campaign. The central argument of the chapter is that the solutions which we adopt to address a problem are a reflection of what we understand to be the nature of the problem; only by critically examining current perceptions of the nature of adult illiteracy can we assess existing public strategies to address the issue and begin to envision alternatives.

Introduction

It is now a decade since literacy was declared a national priority in the Parliament of Canada (Speech from the Throne, October 1, 1986). There can be little doubt that, in the intervening period, the average Canadian has become more aware of the issue of adult illiteracy than perhaps at any other time in this country's history. Responding to a national opinion survey conducted in 1990, International Literacy Year, 84 percent of those polled identified illiteracy as a "very" serious or "somewhat" serious problem (ABC Canada, undated:3-4). Three major, highly publicized nationwide surveys of adult literacy performance have been conducted since the 1986 declaration, theoretically adding a depth of understanding to popular perceptions of illiteracy (Southam, Inc., 1987; Statistics Canada, 1991; Statistics Canada, Human Resources Development Canada, and National Literacy Secretariat, 1996).

This chapter examines current perceptions of illiteracy and, in particular, the ways in which our understanding of illiteracy has been shaped over the past decade—as evidenced in the manner in which it is presented in the public arena (media, educators, policy makers) and in the policy and programming trends which have been developed in response to new awareness about the issue. The solutions which we adopt to deal with a problem are a direct expression of how we define that problem. For this reason, as a first step in assessing

literacy strategies or proposing alternate ones, it is essential that we begin to reflect on whether the ways in which we have defined (and redefined) illiteracy over the past decade have helped or hindered us in finding solutions which substantially and meaningfully address the issue.

Literacy and Educational Attainment

At the time of the 1986 declaration of literacy's importance and priority status in the Canadian Parliament, the only measure of adult illiteracy available was the proxy measure of educational attainment. The most recent Census data on educational attainment available at that time, from the 1981 Census, showed just under 21 percent of out-of-school Canadians over the age of 15 with less than grade 9 (Statistics Canada, Cat. No. 93-328).

It was recognized that educational attainment did not absolutely correlate with the development of literacy skills. A certain proportion of those with only elementary level education might be expected to have acquired and retained basic literacy skills, for example; of those, some would likely have developed relatively advanced reading and writing abilities without the benefit of further education. Conversely, among those with higher levels of educational attainment, a certain proportion might have relatively low levels of literacy skill development.

By and large, however, the correlation between educational attainment and literacy skill development was recognized to be distinctly positive. This was evidenced in the adoption of the proxy measure by organizations such as the Canadian Association for Adult Education, which considered at least an eighth grade educational attainment necessary for functional literacy and UNESCO, which recommended educational attainment data to member states as reliable indicators of literacy levels and also endorsed the eighth grade:functional literacy equation (Thomas, 1983).

What was recognized as at least equally critical in the discussion of adult illiteracy up to the early 1980s was the importance of educational attainment—irrespective of literacy skill development—as a condition of access to an increasing proportion of both skills training programs and skilled jobs. From at least the mid-1960s, the less educated sections of the Canadian adult population had found itself barred from most avenues to a reasonable standard of living, as what has been described as 'credential inflation' began to penetrate all sectors of training and an increasing proportion of employment (Berg, 1977; Finn, 1987). Canadians with less than secondary school education and, increasingly, those with some secondary level education but less than high school graduation—many of whom would have had access to trades training and

relatively skilled work in previous decades—found themselves excluded from both, as entry level requirements began a process of escalation which has continued unabated.

A recognition of educational attainment as the basis for entry to training and skilled work was clearly evident in the Canadian Parliament's 1967 Adult Occupational Training Act, legislation which saw the federal government expand its training role to include educational upgrading programs to prepare undereducated adults to participate in vocational and technical training. For several years following the passage of the Act, the federally sponsored educational upgrading program, Basic Training for Skill Development (BTSD), as well as other programs directed at the undereducated, expanded in all areas of the country. In 1972-73, for example, more than 55,000 adults were enroled in federally sponsored programmes for the undereducated (Thomas, 1983). A 1974-75 government review showed that between one-quarter and one-third of all Canada Manpower Training Programme annual funding was being spent on BTSD alone (ibid).

Although federal spending on BTSD and related programs began a steady decline from the mid-1970s, the issue of under-education did not go away. For example, the National Advisory Panel on Skill Development Leave, which reported to the Minister of Employment and Immigration in 1984, recommended an increased emphasis on basic and generic skills "since the National Training Act has caused too great a focus on job-specific skills, preventing many Canadians from obtaining vitally needed general upgrading" (1984:7). The report contained specific recommendations for a Ten Year Program to Combat Illiteracy in Canada—among them, new funding from general revenues to support Employment and Immigration Canada upgrading programs such as BTSD and a national Paid Education Leave programme which would provide time off for workers taking "literacy leave" (ibid:14-15).

From Southam to IALS: Redefining Literacy

In 1987, Southam, Inc. sponsored the first Canadian survey of adult literacy, using a literacy 'test' administered to a sample of adults from across the country in face-to-face interviews. The Southam survey—adapted from a 1985 U.S. survey of young adults, the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP)—tested respondents' ability to perform reading tasks considered by the test designers to be essential to functioning in everyday life. The survey results were touted as the first "real statistics" on the state of literacy in Canada (Southam, Inc., undated:4).

Yet, though the popular report on the Southam survey, *Broken Words*, made much of the fact that the survey respondents' literacy

ability and educational attainment frequently did not correlate, the results overall confirmed a direct statistical association between low educational attainment and what the report had defined as 'functional illiteracy'. Nearly three-quarters of those with grade four attainment or less were assessed as functionally illiterate; also classified as functionally illiterate were just over half of respondents whose attainment fell between grades 5 and 8 and a quarter of those who had some secondary education but had not finished high school. In fact, the aggregate national figure of 24 percent functional illiteracy corresponded quite closely to the proxy measure of 21 percent functional illiteracy extrapolated from the 1981 Census school attainment data.

Since the Southam survey, Statistics Canada has conducted two general literacy surveys of the adult population—the first in 1989 and the second, as part of a series of international literacy surveys, in 1994. Like the Southam survey, Statistics Canada's 1989 Survey of Literacy Skills Used in Daily Activities (LSUDA) was modeled on the 1985 U.S. survey of young adults, NAEP. But, unlike the Southam survey which had established cutoff scores at which an individual could be considered either *literate* or (functionally) *illiterate*, the LSUDA more closely followed its U.S. prototype, designating points along what was termed a 'literacy continuum'. Respondents were deemed to be at literacy level 1, 2, 3, or 4 based on their test scores, with 1 being the lowest level of literacy skill and 4 the highest. The popular interpretation of the LSUDA results did not differ markedly from interpretations of the Southam survey, however. LSUDA level 1 came to be identified with Southam's 'basic illiteracy' category and level 2 with its 'functional illiteracy' category. Sixteen percent of the respondents tested at levels 1 and 2 combined, 8 percent less than Southam's national average. However, in some interpretations, LSUDA level 3 scorers were also included in the estimates of functional illiteracy, adding an additional 22 percent for a total national average of 38 percent.

The most recent Statistics Canada literacy survey, the 1994 International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS), represents a further refinement of the original test design, its immediate U.S. model being the 1992 National Adult Literacy Survey. It utilizes greater scoring complexity and incorporates a wider range of demographic profiling than the LSUDA survey did. It also incorporates a significant writing component for the first time. And, although the IALS uses the same 'literacy continuum' framework for scoring as the LSUDA used, it has adopted a new score grouping system. LSUDA's levels 1 and 2 are combined in IALS level 1, for example; LSUDA level 3 is represented in the IALS as level 2; and LSUDA level 4 is represented as IALS levels 3, 4 and 5. Twenty-two percent of respondents nationally scored at the new IALS level 1 (LSUDA's levels 1 and 2).

Both the LSUDA and the IALS reports have reiterated the "strong and positive relationship" between level of reading proficiency and level of schooling (Statistics Canada, 1991:9). The report on the LSUDA, for example, noted that only 12 percent of adult Canadians with less than secondary level education "have reading skills necessary to meet daily demands" and only 48 percent of those with some secondary education do (ibid). "Secondary school completion", the report observes, "plays a key role in literacy skill development. Only 8% of Canadians who reported their highest level of schooling as high school completion have limited reading abilities (levels 1 and 2) …" (ibid:22). The IALS report echoes the conclusion that "literacy is closely associated with educational attainment" (Statistics Canada, Human Resources Development Canada, and the National Literacy Secretariat, 1996:23). Approximately 90 percent of those with less than Grade 8 scored at IALS level 1 and approximately one-quarter of those with some secondary schooling scored at this level. The remaining three-quarters of that cohort, with a very few exceptions, scored at level 2 (ibid:24-25).

The international comparisons of the IALS data support the educational attainment/literacy proficiency correlation still further. In terms of prose literacy, for example, the correlation between educational attainment and literacy ability for respondents with less than secondary level schooling is virtually identical for Canada, Germany and the United States. In all three countries, 68-69 percent of those with less than secondary level schooling scored at level 1 (ibid:27). Sweden, the most 'literate' on all three literacy measures of the seven nations surveyed, also exhibits the highest levels of educational attainment.

Educational Attainment:Assessing Canada's Gains

On the basis of school attainment alone, Canada has made significant progress over the past four decades. Improvements in access to schooling, particularly over the second half of the century, have resulted in an increasing proportion of each generation attaining secondary level education and high school graduation. Census data on school attainment reflect this increasing participation; but it should also be noted that Census data reflect the passing with each decade of a proportion of the generations which grew up before universally accessible schooling and the rate of change can, thus, be expected to slow with each Census. Over the period from 1951 to 1991, for example, the proportion of Canadian out-of-school adults over the age of 15 with less than grade 9 education fell from 51.9 percent to 14.3 percent (Statistics Canada, Catalogue 93-328:11). The rate of progress is remarkable and should not be underestimated; it is an achievement of which, as a nation, we can feel justly proud.

However, it must be borne in mind that the actual achievement of a grade 9 education is of considerably less value to the individual in 1991 than it was in 1951, or even 1971. There are two principal reasons for this. The first is the general rise in educational levels itself and the related phenomenon of 'credential inflation', discussed above. When more than half of the adult population had less than grade 9, the achievement of this level obviously 'bought' the individual more in terms of employment opportunities, wage bargaining power, and social status. When more than 85 percent of the population have achieved secondary education or higher, it is clear that the achievement of grade 9 is worth very much less.

It would appear that 'credential inflation' is unlikely to slow down in this country, certainly not while unemployment remains high and those with higher levels of education continue to add to their 'educational capital'. Indeed, the evidence suggests that the trend has intensified since the mid-1980s as, on the one hand, the Canadian labour market has become tighter and, on the other hand, restricted public spending on education and training has resulted in shrinking capacity in the non-compulsory education and training sector.

The second factor which tempers the progress we have made in education since 1951 relates to the concurrent growth in the 1951-91 period of what might be termed 'literate practices'. As a greater proportion of the population has attained higher levels of education and, with it, higher literacy skills, the collective use of such skills has increased. More and more of the processes of government bureaucracies, as well as business and social organizations, have come to rely on print for their communications. Not only must people read more in order to understand these communications; they must also frequently engage in writing/printing if they are to participate in many of the processes of everyday life as citizens, consumers, parents and workers. It is perhaps in this respect that the recent literacy surveys have made their most important contribution.

In providing some measure of the literacy skills actually required for full participation in Canadian society, surveys such as Southam's and Statistics Canada's LSUDA and IALS have contributed significantly to a rethinking of the education:functional literacy equation. If their assessment of the literacy requirements of modern-day Canada is in any measure correct, then it is clear that the attainment of anything less than secondary school completion, or its equivalent, correlates very highly with a diminished ability to cope with the literacy demands of life and work in our society. For, as has been noted, the International Adult Literacy Survey (1994) found that one quarter of those with some secondary level education (but less than completion) scored at the survey's lowest level of proficiency. The remaining three-quarters scored at the second lowest

level of proficiency. According to the 1991 Census data, there are just over eight million Canadian adults—30 percent of the adult population—who have not completed secondary schooling or gained an equivalent qualification. Recent innovations in the documentation of literacy levels suggest that this 30 percent is the statistic we could legitimately compare with the 50 percent figure from 1951.

The Eclipsing of Undereducation as a Public Issue

For much of the last decade Canadians have been exposed to an unprecedented level of campaigning around the issue of illiteracy. ABC Canada's national survey of public attitudes towards the issue demonstrated clear evidence of the success of that campaigning (ABC Canada, 1990). That more than four-fifths of those polled in 1990 thought illiteracy to be a serious issue, in spite of the continuing improvements in educational attainment over several decades, can undoubtedly be attributed to literacy campaigning activities, and particularly to the involvement of all branches of the popular media in the campaign.

However, although ABC's 1990 survey revealed that an overwhelming majority of Canadians identified illiteracy as a problem, it also revealed a low level of understanding of the issue. Most of those polled identified illiteracy as a "personal or individual problem" rather than a "societal or economic issue". And, while a combined total of 52 percent identified the chief problems arising from illiteracy as those relating to personal self-esteem and citizenship issues, only 28 percent identified training, employment and income issues as the most important impacts of illiteracy. About half of respondents identified illiterate individuals themselves as being chiefly "at fault" for their condition and a further 25 percent identified their parents as the group most at fault; a combined 69 percent identified the persons themselves and their parents as being most responsible for dealing with the problem.

Public opinion is, to a large extent, a product of the information which is made available and the manner in which that information is presented. A review of media accounts of the issue of illiteracy in the two to three year period immediately preceding ABC's survey goes some way towards explaining the opinions expressed in that survey. For media presentations of illiteracy in that period focussed almost exclusively on the individual 'illiterate'—isolated, fearful and ashamed.

The stereotypical 'illiterate' in many such presentations was not a person looking for an opportunity to upgrade his or her education—not even one who would avail of such an opportunity if it were presented; in many instances, the whole 16 or 24 or 37 percent (depending on which source was cited) were portrayed as needing, first and foremost, moral and emotional support to

boost their fragile self-esteem. Not only were educational programs not necessarily the answer; most illiterates, it was either implied or explicitly stated, were too ashamed of their 'handicap' to openly admit to it and join a program. For many of those not hindered by such shame, bad memories of their initial schooling were assumed to have made them forever averse to formal education.

It is not disputed that there is an element of truth in such presentations; in an overwhelmingly literate society, illiteracy is stigmatized—as, indeed, is undereducation, regardless of literacy ability. The problem, however, is that these presentations are *stereotypes*—that is, from a limited number of cases and examples, generalizations are made about an entire demographic category. And generalizations which suggest that undereducated or low literate adults are too ashamed to do anything about it, for example, are simply not borne out by the evidence of literacy campaigns themselves.

It has been demonstrated many times over the past two decades that, when the public is given to believe that educational assistance will be made available—whether through literacy and upgrading programs or individual tutoring—the response is overwhelming. The most famous examples include the experience of the British literacy campaign (1975-1977) where more than 45,000 adults sought help through a national telephone referral service. In the first two years of the campaign, well over 100,000 adults had sought help nationally and locally (Jones and Charnley, undated). Prior to the campaign, only around 5,000 adults had been receiving any kind of basic education provision (Haviland, 1973). A more recent highly publicized example is that of Project Literacy U.S. (PLUS), a literacy campaign effort launched by the American broadcasters PBS and ABC in 1986. During the first two weeks alone of the PLUS campaign, the national telephone literacy referral service took 35,000 calls. Response to the campaign overwhelmed local providers and, in both New York and Chicago, for example, programs had to close their doors to new students and tutors less than a month into the two-year campaign (Business Council for Effective Literacy, October 1986).

Many regions of Canada have experienced similar responses to public awareness campaigning around literacy. In the light of such experiences, it is remarkable that, in recent literacy campaigns, the issue of access to programs for undereducated adults has been relatively marginal. All three Canadian literacy surveys have shown that low adult literacy skills (in French or English) are primarily associated with first language status or low educational attainment, particularly as a function of access to education. Southam's 1987 survey revealed, for example, that the considerable regional differentials in literacy skill reflected regional differences in the development of universal access to education; that illiteracy

was highest in rural areas where access to schooling (or to well supported schooling) was most limited; and that urban areas with high levels of immigration exhibited higher levels of low literacy skill than would otherwise be expected (Southam, Inc., 1987). These conclusions have been confirmed in the results of both Statistics Canada's literacy surveys. In fact, if immigrants and those who had not completed secondary education, or its equivalent, were removed from the samples, adult "illiteracy" in Canada, as measured by the surveys, would virtually disappear. This is confirmed again by the results of the most recent of these surveys, IALS (1994), which found that fewer than 10 percent of high school graduates scored at Level I, while over 90 percent of those with less than grade 8 scored at that level. In fact, most secondary school graduates were found to be at IALS Level 3 which would have put them at the highest LSUDA literacy level, Level 4.

In spite of the clear demonstration of the education:literacy link, much of the media response to those surveys has focused on the 8 or 10 percent of high school graduates with low literacy skills (or, according to Southam, 17 percent), or Southam's 8 percent of university graduates with literacy problems. The public debate has, in fact, frequently disregarded the greater portion of adults with low literacy skills. The general condition of literacy in Canada has become the issue; the issue of educational disparity and lack of access to adult education (the central issues in the 1970s) have all but disappeared. The problem is presented as a social problem, arising out of poor reading habits and irresponsible recreational practices—personal, family and community. Respondents in ABC Canada's 1990 survey on attitudes towards illiteracy, for example, identified television as a chief cause of literacy problems.

The solution to the problem of illiteracy, in line with this analysis of the problem, has focused largely on the personal, family and community cultivation of better reading habits and practices. In this respect, recent literacy campaigns have resembled campaigns to encourage healthy eating or physical fitness such as, for example, the *Participaction* campaign. Southam's *Broken Words* concluded with "Fifteen tips to increase literacy" or, in the words of the report, to "widen the magic circle of readers" (1987:81). Only two of the fifteen tips referred to adult literacy programs. None spoke to the need to ensure that adults have access to programs, although the report itself acknowledged that lack of funding for programs was a major problem. And, while it is not intended to diminish the value of a campaign which encourages parents to read to children, children to visit the library, or schools to become more attentive to the development of literacy skills, such solutions make little sense for the hundreds of thousands of adults whose low literacy skills make a self-help approach to improving literacy entirely unrealistic.

Addressing Adult Illiteracy: Future Directions

The results of the three Canadian literacy surveys suggest that, since literacy skill development is evidently the product of time spent (successfully) in educational programs, it is unlikely that any 'short cuts' for adults whose literacy skills are low will have significant or lasting results. While television or video, computers, volunteer tutoring, and informal literacy programs and activities may all have a role to play in a well developed adult literacy service, the core of that service must be a sound, well supported program—available to all adults who may need or desire it, and of sufficient breadth and duration to establish a solid foundation of critical literacy skills.

It also needs to be recognized that, for the majority of the eight million Canadian adults who have not achieved secondary school completion or an equivalent qualification, no amount of literacy skill development will materially improve their employment outlook unless it is accompanied by an improvement in educational qualifications. Indeed, though many of those excluded on the basis of low educational attainment may actually possess sufficient literacy skills to participate in training programs and perform well at a variety of jobs, in most cases there is no avenue for them to demonstrate their abilities. Unless—and until—steps are taken to regulate the use of inflated credentials by employers and training institutions, the only possibility for those with less than secondary school completion, or its equivalent, to get access to the majority of jobs and virtually all training is through the acquisition of the required qualifications. Any program which purports to meet their needs must, therefore, be able to either offer such qualifications or provide the foundational skills which will facilitate access to programs which can offer them.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored the issue of adult illiteracy in Canada in the current period. The discussion has centred on the relationship between the way in which illiteracy has been defined, as a *problem*, and the *solutions* which have been advocated or instituted to deal with the problem.

It is argued here that, in the recent period of literacy campaigning in Canada, there has emerged a basic contradiction in the way in which adult illiteracy is perceived and acted upon. On the one hand, there has been the notion of illiteracy as a personal and social problem, amenable to solution primarily through a range of essentially individual and informal activities. A related notion has interpreted illiteracy as a set of discrete skill deficits which can be corrected through the application of a 'quick fix' skills program or minimal exposure to literacy tuition. This interpretation has given rise to a proliferation of policy and program short cuts which, it is

argued, create unrealistic expectations and frustrate adult students' real educational and employment goals.

On the other hand, there has been the evidence presented by the general literacy surveys of the adult population—including two sponsored in part by the National Literacy Secretariat. These surveys have demonstrated the direct links between adult illiteracy or low literacy and low educational attainment. They have also demonstrated that both low literacy skills and low educational attainment are directly and negatively related to an individual's employment prospects and income potential.

The evidence of the national surveys points clearly to the need for strategic public responses to the problem, responses which offer adults real opportunities to improve their literacy skills in ways which materially improve their employment qualifications.

If we are to address adult illiteracy, understood as the problem revealed by both the 1989 *Survey of Literacy Skills Used in Daily Activities* and the 1994 *International Adult Literacy Survey*, then it will be necessary first of all to document the extent to which current literacy strategies either promote educational 'short cuts' or informal solutions, on the one hand; or, on the other hand, the extent to which they advance realistic solutions to the problem of low literacy skills and offer genuine opportunities for adults to achieve their literacy and educational goals and, thus, to pursue their employment goals. The study on which this report is based represents a first attempt to begin that documentation in a comprehensive fashion.

2 Researching Adult Basic Education

A Voice for Students and Teachers, A Social Policy 'Reality Check'

Chapter Summary

This chapter describes the research which has formed the basis for this final report. *The National Study of Access to Adult Basic Education Programs and Services in Canada* utilized a research process designed both to capture the actuality of students' and teachers' experiences in Literacy and Adult Basic Education programs in the current period and to document the ways in which these experiences are shaped by the social policy framework within which Adult Basic Education is organized in this country. The research process combined input from teachers and students in selected Literacy and Adult Basic Education programs across the country with systematic documentation of the state of Adult Basic Education provision from the social policy perspective. The objective was to produce a dynamic and, as far as possible, comprehensive picture of the extent and nature of opportunities for adult educational upgrading in this country.

Introduction

Any enquiry into the state of provision of a public service must first grapple with methodological questions. What are the best way(s) of documenting the extent and nature of the service provided? How can we know when the information we collect is accurate? How can we establish whether stated public policies are actually put into practice at the level of service delivery? How can we understand what the impacts of these policies are on the users of the service and the general population in need or, conversely, how can we assess the impact of an absence of policy in respect of the service?

This enquiry into the state of provision of Adult Basic Education programs and services in Canada started from the assumption that the 'story' of Literacy and Adult Basic Education in this country will vary depending on who is telling it. From our perspective as 'veterans' in the field of Literacy and Adult Basic Education, we (the research designers) knew that there is frequently a large gap between the official rhetoric about adult Literacy and the actuality of both policy and practice. We also knew that the most frequently told story is the 'official story'; and that those whose experiences and lives are most affected are rarely involved in any meaningful way in telling that story.

The first objective which shaped the research design, then, was that of giving a central role to those who too often are

incidental to research in this field—Adult Basic Education students and their teachers. A second objective was to collect the social policy data which would help us assess the extent to which the 'story' as told by the students and teachers in our (necessarily selective) sample was representative of the general experience of the majority in Literacy and Adult Basic Education programs across this country. This chapter describes the research process which was designed to meet these objectives, the ways in which the research design was implemented during the course of the study, and the relative success of each component of the research plan in contributing to the overall objectives of the study.

Principles of the Research Design

The design of the research was based on a number of premises or principles, the first of which is that general social policy can be best understood in practice—that is, when it is viewed through the lens of the day-to-day conditions and experiences which derive from that policy. Thus, the findings of social policy research are all the more valuable when they are complemented by specific, local research which is able to shed light on the operation of broad social policy at 'ground level'. In keeping with this principle, the research was pursued through a *local research component* which focused on documenting the actual experiences of students and teachers in literacy programs located at a number of selected sites across the country and a *general research component*, which focused on investigating the broad policy and programming environment in respect of Literacy and Adult Basic Education in Canada in the current period.

A second principle which guided the development of the research design was the recognition that people's ideas and opinions are shaped by their experiences over time and, thus, a 'snap shot' of students' and teachers' opinions such as a single-interview survey might yield would be of limited value. Rather, what was needed was a means of allowing students and teachers to respond to survey questions over a period of time, during which it was recognized that there would be changes and developments. The local research asked both students and teachers to respond to a series of questions, organized thematically by week, over a thirteen week period. The positioning of questions in the survey was based on the assumption that, as the thirteen week period progressed, students would become more confident as a result of their participation in the research process and, thus, more able and willing to express their opinions and describe their experiences. It was also hypothesized that certain issues and concerns would become more significant for students as they spent more time in the upgrading program.

A third principle on which the research design was based was a recognition of the value of a *reflexive* research process—that is, research which provides participants with an opportunity to express their opinions and record their experiences but which also guides them in this process in a way which fosters critical reflection. In a reflexive research design, the process of participating in the research may, in itself, result in an enhanced capacity to examine conditions and a greater inclination to question. In respect of this principle, the local research component utilized a structured and progressive series of questions designed to stimulate critical examination of the programs in which students participated and the conditions under which they participated; it also utilized a process of investigation and discussion which encouraged participants to reflect on both their individual and shared experiences.

The Local Research Component

The local research was conducted at four regionally distributed sites, selected for their potential (collectively) to represent the diversity of practice in publicly provided Adult Basic Education programs in Canada. Although it was recognized that the full variety of public provision could not be represented in four examples, the selected sites did represent a number of public delivery models which are fairly representative of the range of existing models. They included an urban-based and a rural-based college in provinces where colleges play the principal role in the delivery of adult upgrading programs; and an institution-based and community-based school board program where school boards are the primary providers of the service. The sites are described in detail in Chapter 3.

At each of the four sites, a group of Adult Basic Education/ Literacy students was specially constituted for the purposes of conducting the research over a thirteen week period beginning in September 1997. At one of the four sites a second (special Adult Basic Education) group was constituted in January 1998 and the research was conducted over a twelve week period. At two of the four sites, the research groups were constituted from the regular student intake; students were either asked at registration whether they would like to participate in the research or visits were made to existing classes informing students of the research project and inviting those who were interested in participating to join the research group. Two of the three research groups at these sites came together once or twice a week expressly to complete the research; for the remainder of the week, they continued with their regular class(es). The third group was together as a class at all times and the research periods were one element in the class's weekly schedule.

At the remaining two sites, a new class was established for the express purpose of conducting the research and these classes constituted the research groups; students who came forward for the classes were informed that if they chose to enrol in the class, they would be required to participate in the research.[1] The initial agreement with the four host agencies for the establishment and/or constitution of research groups included a commitment (by the host agencies) that, at the end of the thirteen week research period, every effort would be made to ensure that those students whose classes were established for the express purpose of conducting the research would be accommodated in other classes or that the research group would be carried forward as a regular class.[2]

Teachers were assigned to the research classes by the host agencies (their employers), as far as possible on the basis of criteria set out in the study's research protocols. It had been requested that teachers be selected, in part, for their interest in the research and that they be given as much choice as possible in respect of taking the assignment. The teachers were assigned to the research project at least a month prior to the start-up of the research classes; during this time, they participated in an orientation session involving all the teacher researchers, the general (social policy) researchers and the research project staff. They were familiar with all aspects of the research before they met with the students and they were actively engaged at all sites in the recruitment and selection of students for the research groups or classes. The teachers' research functions involved facilitating the students' participation in the research, as well as completing a range of research activities of their own.

Though the teachers were employed by the host agencies, their salaries were paid out of research project funds over a six-month period which included the teaching/active research period as well as a four week preparation period prior to the start-up of the research class and a four week wrap-up and reporting period following the research. The project support for teachers' salaries was intended, in part, to ensure the cooperation of host agencies but also, importantly, to ensure that teachers would be given the time to be researchers as well as teachers and that they would be relieved of their normal duties for the month(s) preceding and following the teaching/research period. In addition to salary expenses, all other expenses directly relating to the teachers' participation in the research (travel, telephone, etc.) were borne by

[1] At one of these two sites,the research class was the only option in the region for the students who came forward to register.This had obvious implications for the degree of choice they had with respect to participating in the research;there was no indication,however, that these students found the requirement to participate in the research onerous and some of them embraced the opportunity.

[2] As the following chapters describe, however, the efforts of local host agencies were very much constrained by the general policy and funding environment in which Adult Basic Education programs must operate. At three of the four sites,assurances given in the Spring of 1997 looked as if they would be substantially more difficult to deliver on by October of that year. Nevertheless,all but one of the sites was able to accommodate the majority of students for at least one semester following the end of the research period.

the research project. Host agencies did, however, make considerable 'in-kind' contributions including the provision of facilities and all the support services they normally provided for students as well as computer Internet access for both students and teachers.

The research project also provided assistance to students for the costs of day care and public transportation, in cases where they were not otherwise supported; where they were only partially supported for these costs, the project made up the difference. The assistance to students was provided as a means of ensuring that individuals who were interested in participating in the research class were not prohibited from doing so by inability to pay for day care or transportation; it was also viewed as a means of compensating students in a small way for their considerable contribution to the research. At all sites, some students made use of the project's financial assistance in respect of these two items; at some sites, virtually all students benefitted from this support.

The local research was structured around weekly surveys of both the students and the teachers. Survey questions were incorporated into a 'student journal' and a 'teacher journal'. Each survey 'journal' was organized and bound in a sturdy binder with questions arranged in a week-by-week format. Binders were issued to each participating student and teacher. The teachers received their binders (which included a copy of the student survey journal) at an orientation session involving the other teachers and researchers several weeks prior to the start of the class. Students were presented with their binders by a member of the research project staff who visited each site during the first week of classes to explain the research project and welcome the students as participants. The students' binders were numbered so that they could identify their own; in order to ensure the confidentiality of responses, students were asked not to put their names in their binders. At some sites, students were invited to take their journals home if they needed the extra out-of-class time to complete their responses; at others, it was mutually agreed that all responses would be completed during designated class time and journals would not be taken outside the class. A part of the arrangement with the host agency was that approximately five hours of class time each week would be devoted to research activities. The five groups scheduled their research participation differently but, in each case, the format for student participation was based on an initial group discussion of the week's survey questions followed by individual responses to these questions. The teacher/researcher facilitated the discussion in all the groups; in the case of two of the groups, another person came into the class to assist students with their responses.

Students were given the option of writing their responses directly on the journal pages or typing them and inserting into

plastic envelopes which had been pre-bound into the binders. Those who were not comfortable (or not able) to write their responses, were provided the option of using audio tapes or having a person of their choosing transcribe for them; all students, regardless of ability, were offered the option of taping their responses. The majority of students opted to write directly in their journals; at one site, however, half of the students opted to record their responses on tape. They were provided with tape recorders (which they could use in class or at home) and a blank tape for each week's responses. The special Adult Basic Education class which ran in the Winter 1998 semester (a class of adults with developmental disability) utilized the widest range of reporting options; some chose to record their responses on audio tape, some wrote directly in their journals, some typed their answers and, for some, the teacher transcribed the verbal answer. Some of the group discussions for this group were also recorded by the teacher/researcher.

The students at all sites were given to understand at the outset of the research that their responses could be as confidential as they wished them to be and teachers would not see normally expect to see them; groups were advised that journals should be kept confidential unless there was some reason for involving the teacher or another student. The teacher of developmentally delayed adults did see (or hear) all student responses with their consent and the teacher at one of the other sites also saw some of the students' responses at their request. At three of the five classes, the teachers saw none of the students' journal responses.

In addition to facilitating the students' discussion and organizing sessions in which the students recorded their individual responses in their journal or on tape, the teachers were themselves responsible for completing weekly journal surveys. The 'teacher journals' paralleled those of the students. Teachers were asked to summarize the students' weekly discussions and to comment on the students' response (as a group) to the questions; they were also asked to provide a range of information which would complement that provided by the students. In addition, each teacher was asked to complete a 'daily log' in which the day-to-day issues relating to both the students' and the teachers' experience could be recorded. In the month following the end of the active teaching/research period, teachers prepared a final report in which they presented a comprehensive description of all the elements of the research including the student group, the role of the host agency (their employer) in the provision of Adult Basic Education, the policies and practices of the host agency in respect of publicizing programs, student intake and placement, assessment and evaluation, curriculum and resources, and other related matters. They submitted copies of all relevant documents (including curriculum guides, assessment instruments, and resource lists) with their final reports. Their

reports also provided a summary and analysis of all the issues which had emerged during the period of the research. The teacher 'daily logs' were less formal; they were asked to spend only a few minutes each day reflecting on any issues which had arisen and to submit the original (unedited) log at the end of the research period. The teachers' total contribution to the research data comprised the weekly journals, the daily logs, and the formal report; they also each completed a survey questionnaire on their terms and conditions of employment.

A final element of the local research were visits to each site by the social policy researcher for the region in which the site was located. The first visit took place three weeks after the students and teachers began their journals; the second took place at some time during the final three weeks of the research period. The social policy researcher visits were designed, in part, to give both teachers and students an opportunity to express their views to an outside person and to have those views recorded as a part of a larger report. During the first (day-long visit), the social policy researcher talked to the students as a group and to the teacher separately. The second visit took place over two days and involved in-depth individual interviews with both the students and the teacher. During each visit, the social policy researcher also interviewed selected personnel from the host agency including administrators involved in the Adult Basic Education program and, where applicable, personnel involved in student support services. These interviews formed a part of the general (social policy) research survey.

Student and Teacher Surveys

As noted above, the surveys of both students and teachers were administered through the use of a 'journal' which presented questions over a thirteen week period. Student survey questions related to *educational and employment background and educational and employment goals* (including any changes in goals during the course of the term); *financial information* (sources of income, expenses, problems and issues); *access to the Adult Basic Education program* (including the provision or lack of provision of necessary supports); *assessment of the program* (including curriculum and resources, services and facilities); and *circumstances under which they were attending the program* (social agency and/or family support or lack of support). The questions were organized thematically and certain themes (for example, *finances* and *educational goals*) were raised at several points during the research period in order to capture any changes which might have occurred based on the students' experiences over the intervening weeks. Other themes were positioned in the journal at points where it was judged that students would be best prepared to respond; for example, questions in the first weeks of the research period were more focused on personal information while questions which required the student to have a certain amount of familiarity with the

program or the institution were placed at a later point in the journal. In two of the thirteen weeks (Week 5 and Week 11) each group of students was invited to develop their own (collective) topics or themes and to write in their journal on questions or issues related to these themes. Students were also encouraged throughout the entire journal to add any information or express any ideas they wished, whether or not the topic had been raised in the journal. The student survey questions were field tested at one of the four sites in June and July 1997; based on the results of the field tests, the survey was refined for implementation in September 1998.

The teacher survey journal was primarily intended to complement (and supplement) the information provided by students. Apart from the first week's questions which related to the teacher's own educational and professional background, all the teacher journal questions were designed to provide more comprehensive (or additional) information on selected issues to which students had been asked to provide their individual perspectives. Teachers were asked, for example, to describe the *agency's procedures for student recruitment, intake and assessment*; the *curriculum and resources* used; and *facilities, resources and services* including the extent to which they were (or were not) available to the Adult Basic Education students. They were also asked, at various points during the thirteen-week period, for *their assessment of the adequacy of students' financial and social supports* and the impacts (if any) on the students' experience in the class as well as for their *assessment of students' potential to achieve their goals* in the light of the full range of factors investigated in the surveys. Teachers were also asked to summarize the students' discussions each week, as a means of ensuring that all the topics and issues raised in the discussion were documented.

The General Research Component

The general research component of the study was focused on investigating the broad social policy context in which Literacy and Adult Basic Education provision is organized in the current period. The primary aim of this component was to assess the extent to which current public policies in respect of Literacy and Adult Basic Education enable undereducated adults to improve their literacy skills or increase their educational attainment. The fundamental question initially driving the research was whether there is equitable access to high quality adult upgrading opportunities in each province and territory or whether equitable (and universal) access is likely to be achieved under existing policies and practices.

The general (social policy) research focused on the full range of participants in the policy-making and policy implementation

process as well as a range of other key respondents. Seven social policy researchers, whose mandates covered all regions of the country, interviewed (in person or by telephone) government officials and administrators with responsibility for Adult Basic Education and Literacy, representatives of literacy networks and literacy advocacy organizations, deliverers of Literacy and Adult Basic Education programs, other researchers with an interest or involvement in literacy issues, selected Literacy and Adult Basic Education teachers and representatives of teacher associations or unions. As noted above, the social policy researchers whose responsibilities included the jurisdictions in which the four local research sites were located also spent three days conducting individual and group interviews at these sites. The site interviews were intended to add the perspectives of students and teachers to the social policy research; they also allowed for a more in-depth study of the operation of Literacy and Adult Basic Education policy through interviews with personnel engaged in the administration and delivery of programs at the local level. In addition to in-person and telephone interviews, the social policy researchers also collected all relevant documentation relating to Literacy and Adult Basic Education including, for example, legislation and/or policy statements, reports, curriculum guides, and the like.

The social policy research team was guided by a set of survey questions as they conducted the interviews, site visits and document searches. Though not intended to restrict the researchers in their range of questions, the survey did provide an insurance that comparable information would be gathered for each province and territory; if information on particular questions and issues could not be found, this in itself could reasonably be interpreted as indicative of the state of development of the basic education service. The questions on which the researchers based their (semi-structured) interviews were organized in seven broad categories, as follows: *Policy, Funding, Organizational Structure, Delivery, Regulation and Monitoring, Student Supports*, and *Social Policy Reforms.*

The social policy research team conducted the principal part of their field research in the provinces and territories over a ten week period beginning in early October 1997. Some additional research (including necessary follow-up) was conducted in January 1998 and individual social policy research reports were submitted over February and March 1998.

Linking the Research Components

The research design was, in many respects, an ambitious one. The scope of the research was pan-Canadian—general social policy research would be conducted concurrently in every province and

territory; the four local research sites would span the country. The dimensions of the research were both general and local and the intention was that the one component would complement—and illuminate—the information provided by the other. The local research could provide insights into how general policy operated at the level of local jurisdiction or program; the general research could help us place local conditions in the context of the broader policies which gave rise to them. It was necessary for the two components to work together—each to inform the other during the brief research period—if the full potential of the complementarity of the research were to be realized.

A number of steps were taken in order to ensure that the local and general research worked together as far as possible and that the researchers for each component (social policy researchers and teacher researchers) worked as a team. Prior to beginning the active period of the research—and following the piloting of the local student surveys—a two-day 'project orientation session' was held. The session included the seven social policy researchers, the four teacher researchers[3], and all the research project staff. The aims of the session were to acquaint all participants with the broad objectives of the research; to ensure that researchers in each research component were aware of the particular objectives and methodology of the other; and to refine the research plan for each component. All the researchers (teacher and social policy) were provided with a Project Resource Kit which included the three research instruments—the Student Journal, the Teacher Journal, and the (draft) General Research Plan—and all relevant documents relating to both components of the research. On the first day, both teams of researchers were together and the focus was on understanding the linkages between the two research components; on the second day, the two teams met separately to discuss and, where necessary, refine the survey instrument for their component.

As described above, the research design included the involvement of four of the seven social policy researchers in the local research component through visits to the local research sites in their region. The planning for each site visit involved all seven social policy researchers and, after each visit, informal reports were made to the entire social policy research team. Teachers and social policy researchers were also encouraged to maintain an open line of communication as their involvement in their own aspect of the research proceeded. All telephone and fax expenses relating to communication among team members and between teams were covered by the research project. Each team was coordinated by the one individual—the principal researcher for the project—whose

[3] The fifth teacher (of developmentally disabled adults) joined the teacher researcher second meeting (and reporting session) in January 1998,just prior to the start-up of the research period for that class.

role included ensuring ongoing linkages and open communications between the two components.

Enabling the Researchers to Work as Teams

Apart from ensuring that both components of the research informed each other throughout the period of the research, the other major challenge was to ensure that the teachers and the social policy researchers could work as members of a team (within their component) rather than as individual researchers with discrete projects. This was facilitated through the establishment of a schedule of regular conference calls for each of the teams. Prior to the beginning of the active research period, a schedule of bi-weekly conference calls was set up for each team; all conference call meetings were attended by the research project manager and chaired by the principal researcher. Through the tele-conferencing medium, one or the other of the two teams talked to each other (and to research project staff) every week, both during the active period of the research and over several weeks following the active research as reports were being prepared. The entire research complement (social policy and teacher researchers as well as project staff) also communicated on a daily basis via the Alphacom Internet Conferencing service. This proved to be an invaluable aid to maintaining open and continuous communication both among team members and between the two teams.

A further feature of the research design which facilitated a unified approach to the pursuit of research objectives and assured as much coherence as possible in the presentation of research findings was the provision for a second in-person meeting of both teams. The social policy research team came together for two days of meetings towards the end of their field research (in late November 1997) to share their general findings and discuss issues and questions which had arisen, as well as to plan for the preparation of their individual research reports. The teacher researchers also came together for two days of meetings (in January 1998) following the completion of the active local research period and after they had started the preparation of their final reports. They each reported extensively on how the local research had proceeded at their sites and together refined plans for the preparation of their final reports.

Each of the teams continued to meet by conference call until their reports were largely completed and all made full use of electronic mail and the Alphacom Internet Conferencing service to maintain communication during the critical period of analysis and presentation of their findings.

Engaging Students in the Research

As noted in the introduction to this chapter, the inclusion of a student voice in the telling of the Literacy and Adult Basic Education 'story' was a central element of the research methodology. Three principal avenues were provided to ensure that students' perspectives would be fully represented in the research outcomes. The first (and foremost) of these was the student weekly journals—in which they recorded their responses to survey questions and any other information or ideas which they wished to include. The second avenue for the inclusion of students' experiences and perspectives was the teachers' journals, daily logs and formal reports which were principally focused on describing the conditions under which the students were participating in their programs and the issues and problems which emerged as the research period proceeded. The third avenue was the social policy researchers' reports on their visits to the sites and their interviews (both group and individual) with the students at the beginning and toward the end of the research period.

One challenge relating to engaging students in the research was to ensure that they fully understood both the objectives and the scope of the research. A number of steps were taken to facilitate this, beginning with a visit to each site by a member of the research project staff within two days of the student research group coming together. The project staff visits were intended to welcome students to the research project; to explain the research objectives and methodology; to ensure that they understood their role and responsibilities as research participants; and to put a 'national face' on the research for them. The other research sites were described and each group watched a video which had been recorded during the previous summer in the class which had piloted the student journal questions. The video showed the students at the pilot site participating in research activities (discussion and journal writing) and welcoming the new research participants from the other sites. This proved to be an effective way of introducing students to the idea that they were a part of a much larger research effort and that there were other groups of adults in Literacy and Adult Basic Education programs across the country who would be discussing and writing about the same issues as they were. Teachers committed themselves to reinforcing the 'national' aspect of the study from the outset; this included, for example, incorporating Canadian geography lessons into the students' in-class work to ensure that they were aware of where the other student researchers were. This was also a necessary part of preparing the student participants for another aspect of their role in the research—communicating with students from the other sites via the Alphacom Internet Conferencing service. Though there were many technical problems (and difficulty in some cases in securing access for all students to

on-line computer facilities), every site did manage to link their students into the Internet conference during the research period. Teachers facilitated this aspect of student participation in the research and—the technical difficulties aside—it proved to be both useful to the research effort and very worthwhile as an educational exercise for the students. In one example of its direct relation to the research, students from two of the sites shared their topics and issues for discussion in Week 11, the second of two weeks in the research period in which they were invited to develop their own topics and questions. A number of students became very enthusiastic about using the Internet conferencing and some long-distance friendships were made through it.

Importantly, since the student research groups included both English and French speaking students, it was necessary to find a way to ensure that no group was excluded from the inter-site student communication. The Alphacom Internet Conferencing service provided the answer to this problem; all messages entered by students were translated and posted in both French and English simultaneously. This, in effect, totally removed any language barrier.

Gauging the Relative Value of Each Research Component

At the research design stage, equal weight was given to each component of the research; the success of both would be essential if we were to achieve the outcome we hoped for—a comprehensive and dynamic picture of the state of Adult Basic Education in Canada. In some respects, the more predictable of the two components was the general (social policy) research; the general investigative survey is standard research procedure. It was recognized, however, that the task of collecting information about this area of educational provision in Canada was nothing less than mammoth. For, not only do the provinces and territories take widely divergent approaches to Literacy and Adult Basic Education but, within most jurisdictions, the provision of this service may involve numerous provincial/territorial and federal departments and agencies as well as a range of public and private deliverers. This is further complicated by the fact that policies, funding mechanisms and levels, and ministerial/departmental authority also tend to be in a fairly continuous state of flux.

The general component of the study was approached, first, through the development of a detailed research plan and the selection of a team of experienced researchers who brought to the social policy research a broad range of interest, knowledge and expertise. Their research backgrounds included adult education and community education; social welfare and labour; equity and access issues; youth unemployment, training and state intervention; education, training and employment programs and policies for the disadvantaged; and rural and regional development issues. The team worked

together to revise the survey questions and develop a set of research protocols. One important aspect of the research protocols was that all interviews would be conducted in person or by telephone, following an initial contact which acquainted all potential interviewees with the objectives of the research and the nature of the questions they would be asked, and allowed them time to prepare for the interview. A conscious decision was taken not to send survey questionnaires by mail and not to require respondents to do more than verbally share the information which they had in their possession, or could access with reasonable ease.

The social policy research component worked very well from the point of view of its implementation. The team worked productively as a group, sharing what they learned in each region as they proceeded and modifying the research plan in response to the conditions and the issues they encountered in the field. People in the field were generally very cooperative and all the researchers reported that virtually all interviewees—as well as others of whom information and documents were requested—were extraordinarily accommodating. There was a high level of interest in, and support for, research on the issue.

In spite of the preparation which went into developing the research plan and protocols and the expertise and conscientiousness which went into their application, however, the social policy research yielded only a moderately successful outcome—due to the quality of information available and the enormous gaps in information about Literacy and Adult Basic Education provision in most jurisdictions. What the researchers were charged with doing was, in part, to document the development of a sector of service provision which is essentially *undeveloped* and in flux. Any expectation of definitively describing what is happening in such a sector must lead to certain disappointment. The result has been that the fully comprehensive portrayal of the state of Literacy and Adult Basic Education provision in each province and territory has not been possible. What we have been able to do, however—as presented in Chapter 7—is to document the general picture and to describe the principal social policy trends which clearly emerged from the general surveys. We have also been able to draw conclusions about the state of Literacy and Adult Basic Education provision from the absence of public policy, the diffusion of responsibility, and the relative lack of accountability mechanisms. Importantly, the general research findings have enabled us to establish that the conditions found at the local research sites are not anomalous, but are substantially characteristic of the state of public Literacy and Adult Basic Education provision in Canada in the current period. In this respect, the general research component was not only successful, but also invaluable.

The local research component was, in some respects, the more uncertain (and, hence, riskier) element of the research design. It was essentially *innovative* and its success depended on the cooperation of a wide range of participants whose primary responsibilities (and priorities) were not as researches but as students, teachers, program administrators. From the initial identification of sites and drawing up of agreements with host agencies, to the host agency's selection/assignment of teacher researchers, to the constitution or establishment of student research groups—at every stage, there was potential for misunderstanding or mis-communication which could have compromised the research at that site. Steps were taken from the outset to prevent such an outcome, however. The initial research proposal included detailed criteria for the selection of sites—criteria which assured a certain level of organization and accountability at the research site. Each prospective host agency was visited by one or two members of the research project staff as a part of the selection process. These visits included interviews with the administrators involved in Adult Basic Education at the site as well as discussion or examination of the facilities and services. Though it was not possible to select sites which conformed to every element of the site selection criteria we had established, the four sites selected met most of the conditions.

After the selection of sites, a number of further steps were taken to ensure that the host agencies understood their role in the research process and were guided in that role. A set of Local Research Project *Protocols and Guidelines* was developed for the four sites. This document provided a general overview of the study and a description of the function of the local research component. The roles of the students and teachers as researchers were described in some detail. The role of the host agency in facilitating the local research project was clearly delineated, as was the role of the project sponsor, the Ottawa Board of Education. A set of guidelines for the selection of students and the assignment of teachers was also provided. The principal stipulation of the student selection guidelines was that students *freely elect to participate* in the research activities. To assist the host agency in the selection of students, an informational pamphlet was developed; *Information for Potential Students* presented in clear language the nature and objectives of the study, the role of the students in the research process, the types of information which students would be required to provide if they opted to join the research project, and the way in which the research would be conducted at each site (amount of time per week, options for recording student responses, etc.). The pamphlet was made available well in advance of the student selection process and it was suggested that the information be presented in person to prospective individual students before they were asked to decide whether they would like to be a part of the project. In addition, student participation agreements, which

summarized the students' role and responsibility and which assured confidentiality, were drawn up. These were presented to the students who had opted to participate in the research by a visiting research project staff person within a day of the research group's convening. All participating students were asked to sign the agreement, indicating that they understood and agreed to the requirements of the role of research participant.

Perhaps the single most important element of the local research design was the role of the teacher researchers, since they would be responsible both for doing a substantial portion of the local research themselves and for facilitating the students' participation. A number of steps were taken to ensure that the teachers were both competent to perform this role and fully committed to doing so. The guidelines provided to the host agencies for the assignment of teachers to the research project specified that, within the terms of existing contractual obligations and/or organizational practices, the teachers selected should have extensive knowledge and experience of Literacy and Adult Basic Education including specific knowledge of the place of their own programs in overall provincial/territorial Adult Basic Education provision. That teachers, like students, should freely elect to participate was also a necessity since they too would be expected to provide information and express their opinions forthrightly.

The guidelines to host agencies on the assignment of teachers also specified that the teachers would need to be committed equally to their teaching and research duties and that, for a period of two months, they should have no scheduled teaching duties but, instead, be permitted to work full-time on the research component of their assignment. The research project's support for a full-time salary for each teacher researcher for a period of six months ensured that, in addition to their full-time assignment to the research in the month preceding and the month following the active research period, the scheduling of the teachers would also allow for their participation in necessary research activities during each week of the active research period. It also ensured that they were available for regular (bi-weekly) participation in conference call meetings as well as for two in-person meetings of the research team.

The final element of the local research component which was designed to ensure that the information from the four sites would support the general objectives of the study and that both students and teachers were provided with sufficient guidance and organizational assistance to fulfill their roles without undue effort, was the development of a uniform set of survey questions for each site and their incorporation into student and teacher 'journals'. The binders in which both student and teacher journals were contained provided information about the study in general and, in particular, about their role(s) in the research. They also provided a number of

organizational aids—for recording responses, keeping track of work completed, anticipating upcoming topics and discussions, and the like—which were intended to make the actual material and organizational demands of the research more manageable.

In part, due to the careful preparation for, and organization of, the local research—and in no small measure due to the good fortune of finding local research sites where host agency cooperation was excellent and where both teachers and students were exceptionally able and committed—this component of the study surpassed all expectation. As the following chapters attest, the four sites yielded a richness of data which have rendered a more comprehensible account of the conditions under which Adult Basic Education is provided than perhaps any other type of research could do. Both the teachers and the students took their research responsibilities very seriously and exhibited a truly remarkable degree of commitment to the study.

This is not to say that there were not times in the research period, as they became burdened with the combined pressures of their programs and their personal and family problems and responsibilities, when students became impatient with the added responsibility of their research role. On the whole, however, such times were rare; for the most part the students' interest in, and commitment to, the research was extraordinary. At one site, for example, the teacher reported a much better than normal attendance record during the research period—a fact which she attributed to the students' sense of responsibility for completing the research activities. At another site, the teacher reported the case of a student whose financial situation obliged him to miss most of his class time when his part-time job became virtually full-time; however, he took the initiative to make special arrangements with his employer to schedule his work so that he could be in class when the discussions and journal writing were taking place. At a third site, a student who had been obliged to leave the program in order to take up full-time work took the time, after leaving the class, to write a report on her reasons for leaving the program—and not completing the research. She delivered this to the teacher for inclusion with the other research material from the site.

The teacher at the fourth site described in some detail the responses of her students to the research. She noted that when one student voiced the opinion that "… it didn't matter what they said in the journals, that nothing was going to change things, so why bother?", others in the class challenged her, "claiming that things needed to be documented and that the process of change was a long one but that it had to begin somewhere." "For the most part", she wrote, "the students felt confident that the responses they provided were to be used to benefit Adult Basic Education

programs across Canada. They did not feel that in any way their journals were going to be used against them".

The seriousness with which some of the students took their role is indicated in the remarks of one of the students during Week 13, the final week of journal reporting. They had been asked in this week to review their journal entries for the previous twelve weeks and decide whether they wanted to change or add anything. She wrote:

> *After reviewing my Journal and giving it much thought, I think I've covered everything. However, I think it would benefit all if there was more time between assignments (weekly discussions) so as there would be more time and thought put into it. For example, Week 12 for me needed more time to get answers to some questions I was asking and I had no time to get the facts and answers. However, I will be asking anyway and I hope you will too. So when someone like myself comes to this or any school, we will be well informed without assuming and feeling discouraged and separate from [other students].Their eyes will be wide open.Thank you.This has been very good for me and I hope I've helped.*

The element of the local research design which was perhaps most crucial to the quality of information yielded was its intention that the local research process be a *reflexive* one—that is, that both students and teachers, through their participation in the research, would begin to critically assess their conditions and experiences. The survey questions were constructed to engender such a process; the questions themselves proceeded from a set of assumptions about how Adult Basic Education should be organized. For example, implicit in the questions about facilities and services at the sites, was the assumption that Adult Basic Education students—like students in all other levels and types of education in this country—should reasonably expect to have safe, comfortable and attractive classrooms, libraries, access to counseling and special educational services, access to food services and the like. As they discussed the conditions of their classrooms and whether they had access to any or all of these resources and services, students also began to ask themselves and each other why they did not (if they did not). Similarly, questions about financial supports assumed that students had a right to a reasonable standard of living as well as additional supports (such as child care and transportation expense coverage) to enable them to attend their programs. As they discussed their financial circumstances and levels of support, students became more aware of their own situation and the ways in which it compared to that of other students. In some cases, they actually became aware of avenues to access additional support; in others, the discussion itself proved to be of value. As one student wrote, in answer to whether she had sought or received help with her financial problems:

> *The only help I really receive [with my problems] would be from talking in these [project research] discussions. Like we talk about things and it seems like everybody tries to help everybody.We get talking and people come up with solutions and it's so good because we take our hour, or whatever, have our talk and everybody just helps everybody. Everybody can talk freely, they don't have to be scared about what they should say or if they hurt anybody's feelings. Everybody just tells everybody how they feel, so that's a really big help.*

This dynamic operated to make the students, as a whole, more conscious of conditions and more inclined to disclose their own information and opinions in their group discussions as well as in their journals. The entire process resulted in a richly textured body of information and opinion from the student research participants—a body of information which establishes beyond doubt that Adult Basic Education students are needful of—and ought to be entitled to—a great deal more in every respect than they now receive.

Conclusion

This chapter has described all aspects of the research which forms the basis for this report, including the principles of its design, the plan and implementation of the two component parts of the research—local and general, and the steps which were taken to ensure the complementarity of the various components and the full and meaningful engagement of all participants in the research. The local research has been described in particular detail, since it was essentially innovative and its success rested, in large measure, on the careful planning which preceded it and the conscientious participation of individuals (and groups) whose roles were not primarily as researchers, but as students and teachers.

The chapter has also evaluated the component parts of the research in terms of their contribution to the overall objective of presenting a dynamic and, as far as possible, comprehensive picture of Literacy and Adult Basic Education provision in this country. The conclusion is that, while the general (social policy) research has provided important and up-to-date general data on Literacy policy and practice in this country, the local research has perhaps been the more fruitful in that it has yielded both data on social policy as it operates at the local and provincial level and an in- depth understanding of what these policies mean to the individuals who are in need of adult educational upgrading in this country. It is the local research findings which make up the bulk of this report, though the integration of the local and general research findings, presented in Chapter 7, constitutes the most comprehensive and analytical aspect of the report.

Chapter 3

A 'Window' on the Practice of Adult Basic Education

The Local Research Sites: Four Canadian Examples

Chapter Summary

A central objective of the local research component of this study was to provide a 'window' on the diversity of practice in publicly provided Adult Basic Education programs in Canada. Four sites, at which Adult Basic Education is provided either directly or indirectly through public institutions, were selected for this purpose. Although it was recognized that the full variety of public provision in this country could not be represented in four examples, the sites were selected, in part, for their relative representativeness. The sites include an urban-based and a rural-based college in provinces where colleges are an important component of the public delivery of adult upgrading programs; and an institutional-based and community-based school board program in provinces where school boards are the primary public providers of the service. This chapter provides a summary description of the four sites. Surveys of students and teachers, conducted at the four sites in the Fall of 1997 and the Winter of 1998, are the focus of the following three chapters.

Introduction

Adults who return to school to complete their basic education in Canada may encounter very different types of programs and very dissimilar conditions for learning. Even within a region or a municipality, wide variation in programs, facilities and services for adult educational upgrading may exist. In part, this variation is a function of the fact that Adult Basic Education is not a fully mandated 'public' service in any Canadian jurisdiction. Responsibility for delivery of Adult Basic Education is—to a greater or lesser extent—discretionary in every province and territory and, in comparison with other areas of fundamental education, there is relatively little regulation.

In most jurisdictions where educational services for the under-educated adult population are delivered, there exists a mix of public and private (both not-for-profit and for-profit) deliverers whose services frequently overlap. In many jurisdictions, however, there is no access to adult upgrading programs at all; in others, the only opportunities are those which may be provided by agencies—either public or private—as, and when, funding becomes available.

It is clear that, whatever private and voluntary provisions may exist for the delivery of adult upgrading opportunities,

there can not be an individual entitlement to the service; nor can the goal of universal access be pursued unless there are agencies or institutions which are mandated by statute and adequately funded to provide programs which are open to the entire population in need. In terms of education generally in this country, such a role is reserved for our public educational institutions. Adult Basic Education has, however, to a large extent 'slipped through the cracks' of public education mandates. Most community colleges and school boards have what may be called a 'permissive' mandate to provide educational upgrading programs; that is, they may choose to do so if they wish or they may choose not to do so. Institutions which have a 'permissive' mandate may or may not be provided with targeted funding to deliver programs.

Where institutions are provided with targeted funding from either level of government for the delivery of educational upgrading programs, there is typically considerable institutional discretion in terms of how these funds will be spent. Where either colleges or school boards are actually *legally* mandated to provide the service (that is, where they are obliged by statute to offer programs), there is also a wide margin of institutional discretion in terms of the amount of programming they may offer and the conditions under which program delivery may take place. This set of arrangements may be described as constituting the *social policy framework* for the provision of adult educational upgrading opportunities in this country.

One objective of the local research component of this study was to document some of the impact(s) of this social policy framework on access to programs at the local level. This objective was pursued through detailed surveys of Adult Basic Education delivery at four sites, regionally distributed. The sites selected represent the principal public delivery agencies for adult educational upgrading programs in this country, school boards and community colleges. They include an urban-based and a rurally based college in provinces where colleges are an important component of the public delivery of adult upgrading programs and an institution-based and community-based school board program in provinces where school boards are the primary public providers of the service.

The value of the four selected sites to this study is not in their unique and particular characteristics but in the extent to which they illustrate the variety of arrangements for the public provision of Adult Basic Education in this country at the present time. There is, therefore, no advantage to be gained in identifying a site or locating it geographically; nor is there any intention to do so. The four sites are referred to throughout this report as *Site A*, *Site B*, *Site C*, and *Site D*. This chapter describes the four sites in terms of the host agency and its organizational arrangements for the delivery of Adult Basic Education and, where applicable, the way in which these arrangements

fit in the broader provincial framework for delivery of the service. It also describes briefly the survey participants (the ABE students who completed survey journals at each site), the programs in which they were enrolled and the facilities in which their programs were located. The student groups at the four sites are representative of much of the range of adult upgrading from the Literacy level (at Site C) through pre-high school (at Sites B and D) to high school level (at Site A) and including a special needs Adult Basic Education group at Site B.

Description of the Local Research Sites

Site A

Site A **was the main (urban) campus of a multi-campus college, serving a large geographic region and a diverse population. The campus at which the research class was located is centrally situated and easily accessible to residents of the urban section of the college's region. The college plays an important role in the provision of all levels of Adult Basic Education in its region.[1] In addition to its on-campus ABE programs which are run at both the main campus and two regional campuses, it also runs Adult Basic Education programs at locations outside the campuses—including, for example, a downtown community centre.**

Adult Basic Education in the province in which Site A was located encompasses adult educational upgrading up to and including the level equivalent to secondary school graduation. Applicants to Adult Basic Education programs in the province must be at least eighteen years of age and have been out of the public school system for one year or more. There is a provincial adult upgrading program which is divided into four levels of instruction: the first level encompasses the basic Literacy level to Grade 8 equivalency; there are three discrete levels beyond that—Grades 9-10 equivalency, Grade 11 equivalency and Grade 12 equivalency. At the Literacy level, the emphasis is on the development of reading, writing and number skills. At the three higher levels, a variety of course options are provided in language (writing and critical reading), sciences, mathematics, social sciences and computer studies. Depending on which courses they successfully complete, students may achieve a provincial diploma which is recognized by the province's postsecondary institutions as the full equivalent of secondary school graduation. Alternatively, they may achieve a college ABE certificate (at either the Grade 9-10 or the Grade 11 equivalency) which provides them with the prerequisite to enter career and vocational programs[2] throughout the province

[1] Although school boards also provide educational upgrading services, all but a small fraction of school board upgrading programs are at the high school completion levels.

[2] There are a number of vocational training programs available to students who have less than secondary school completion in this province. These include, for example, a Registered Care Attendant Program (20 week full-time certificate program recognized throughout the province),a Home Support Attendant Program,a Personal Care Attendant Program and a Landscape Horticultural Program.

and which is also accepted by most employers. The Grade 11 equivalency diploma is sufficient for entrance into most trades and some technical programs.[3]

Within the college organization, there is considerable scope for teachers to extend time limits (which are not clear in any event) to ensure that students meet their educational goals. Sponsoring agencies may, however, impose limits on the amount of time a student will be financially supported to attend a program.

The Adult Basic Education Department at Site A had the equivalent of ten full-time instructors teaching all levels of ABE at the time of the local research. Teachers were fairly evenly distributed across all four levels, though the classes at the lower levels were smaller. At the higher levels, ABE students may choose to participate in a self-paced class where instruction is individualized and there is a 'continuous intake' policy or in a 'paced' class where all the students start the program at the same time and move through the material together.

There is no specific grade score required for acceptance into the ABE program and no standardized testing used in initial assessment and placement. Applicants to the program are assessed, for placement purposes only, through completing a mathematics assessment test and producing a piece of writing. After the initial assessment, students meet individually with an ABE instructor in order to develop a 'learning plan'.

At the time of the research, the college charged a tuition fee for ABE courses at the three higher levels, up to a maximum of $637.50 per semester. No tuition has been charged for Literacy level programs, however, and in May 1998 the provincial government announced that there will be no tuition fees charged for any level of Adult Basic Education at public post-secondary institutions effective July 1, 1998. There is limited grant funding available to Adult Basic Education students who can demonstrate need. However, the grant funding is not pre-approved and students have to register for the program—and, in effect, be prepared to incur the full costs themselves—before they can apply for this funding. The funding, provided by the provincial government and administered by the college, is capped so the amount available to any particular student depends on how many students are approved for assistance. Up to the time of the research, the grant funds had been used to cover tuition, books, transportation and day care; where many students were approved for the grants, however, the institution might

[3] It is significant to note that,in contrast to this province, a number of jurisdictions in this country require a Grade 12 or equivalent for entrance into all trades and technical programs.Mature students may enter programs but,when prerequisites are set so high,the content of courses also tends to assume a generally higher level of skill;consequently, mature students who do not meet the educational criteria are less likely to succeed.

decide to cover tuition only. In recent years at the Site A college, day care has been funded only very rarely through the ABE grant funding. At the time of writing, it is not clear whether the amount of provincial funding for the grant aid program will be affected by the change in policy on tuition charges—whether, for example, the funding will remain in place and more of it will be available for the non-tuition items or whether the grant funding will be reduced.

A recently instituted 'welfare to work' provincial initiative has seen the college take on a central role in the training of social assistance recipients who have been referred for training by the province's social welfare department. In the case of students who enter the college via the 'welfare to work' route, special procedures apply. The prospective student/trainee must first meet with a 'training consultant' employed by the provincial education/training department to develop an 'employability agreement'. The decision is made at this stage as to whether a training option will be approved, what that training will be (if any), and to which training provider the client will be referred. If the college is approved as the training provider, the student is then referred to the college's coordinator for the 'welfare to work' training programs. The employability agreement specifies the type of training to be delivered and the duration for which the student is approved to study. Most 'employability agreements' provide for eight to twelve months of training. The provincial staff and the college share information on the clients' assessment and training plan and the college has agreed to create new programs or modify existing ones to meet the needs of students referred through the provincial social security initiative.

The thirteen students who participated in the survey at Site A were all social assistance recipients who had had their training plans approved and had been referred to the college under the 'welfare to work' initiative. Of the thirteen students, twelve were women. All but three of the group were between the ages of 18 and 35. Twelve of the thirteen were parents of dependent children and nine were single mothers of young children. Ten were Canadian born. The remaining three had immigrated to Canada from Iran; one had lived in Canada for ten years but the other two had only recently arrived. The educational backgrounds of the thirteen varied widely. Of the Canadian-born students, five had Grade 9 attainment or less, three had Grade 11 or less and one had an incomplete Grade 12. The three immigrant students had had some post-secondary education in their native countries.

All thirteen students received a pre-approved training allowance under the 'welfare to work' initiative to attend the program. This allowance covered the cost of books, tuition and transportation. A day care subsidy was also provided by the provincial social welfare department. The subsidy was, however,

only sufficient to pay for part-time care in the college's on-site day care centre. This province had previously paid the difference between the day care subsidy and the actual costs of full-time child care for single parents on social assistance income who were enrolled in education and training programs. The 'top up' had been discontinued as of April 1997, however, leaving this clientele with the choice of making up the difference from their social assistance income or accepting a reduced level of care; the catch is that, in order to qualify for the full child care subsidy (which is sufficient to pay for part-time care only in most facilities), social assistance recipients must be in attendance in full-time programs. The college, in this case, developed a special program involving parents and children which allowed the single parents to be at the college on a full-time basis (thus qualifying for the full provincial day care subsidy) even though their children were only in the day care centre part-time. For the remaining time, parents and children were together in a variety of groupings and activities.

The students were not yet enrolled in the Adult Basic Education program but, as an initial step in the placement process, were registered in the 'College Preparation Centre'[4]. The centre had been specifically created by the college one year earlier in response to the provincial 'welfare to work' initiative. Its purpose is to make the college more 'user friendly' for social assistance recipients who require educational upgrading. A number of college instructors are assigned to the Centre for a part of their working week; instructors are drawn from other departments as needed on a semester basis and the mix of instructional expertise may vary from one semester to another. At the time of the research, the instructional mix included an Early Childhood Education instructor, a career counsellor, a personal counsellor and a coordinator. At the College Preparation Centre, students prepare for entry into the Adult Basic Education program or a college job-training program.[5]

Students at the College Preparation Centre are registered as students of the college and they receive a student card and have all the privileges of other college students; however, they do not accrue formal credits for the work completed while in the Centre. They may choose from a range of courses including computers, mathematics, language and second language training but, because their educational background/literacy levels are so diverse, all work is self-paced.

[4] It should be noted that,in order to avoid identifying sites,the actual names of divisions,centres,services and/or program have been changed in instances where they may be too specific.'College Preparation Centre' is not the actual name of the centre in this case; it does,however, embody the same concept as the actual name.

[5] Students referred through the social security reform initiative may also go directly into an Adult Basic Education program if they are assessed as in need of ABE and ready to start the program;or they may go directly into a job training program at the college.

The students who participated in this survey attended two classes each day—the first from 8:30 to 10:30 and the second from 10:30 to 12:30. At 12:30, those with a child or children in the on-site day care ate lunch with their children and continued together until 2:30 in a specially developed parent/child program. This program, referred to above, involved parents, children, daycare workers and counsellors in a variety of groupings depending on the daily program; the programming focus ranged from parenting issues and child development to stress management and career counseling.

The students were all new to the program at the time the research survey began. The majority were planning to go on to the regular Adult Basic Education program from the College Preparation Centre. The immigrant students planned to continue with second language training in preparation for other post-secondary programs.

The group was described by the teacher as being not typical of Adult Basic Education students in the region—in large measure due to the selection process of the 'welfare to work' program. This accounts, first of all, for the fact that all class participants were social assistance recipients. In general, Adult Basic Education programs in this region would also have a more even gender distribution, would include First Nations students, and there would be much more diversity among any immigrant student participants, reflective of the immigration to the region. A class composed predominantly of sole-support mothers is, of course, not typical of Adult Basic Education classes in any region of the country since their participation in programs requires a degree of support which is not generally available.

The building in which the research class (and the entire Adult Basic Education Department) was located was opened in January 1997, so it is 'shiny and new' with attractive architectural features and state-of-the-art facilities. It is fully accessible to persons with disabilities. There is abundant parking, available for $2.00 a day or $100.00 a semester as well as free off-site parking a short walk away. The building houses a cafeteria, bookstore, bank machine, counseling services, medical services, financial services, and a 'help centre' where students can get tutoring and study assistance. In the immediate neighbourhood of this building are a new and exceptionally well equipped day care centre which incorporates early childhood education, a large and very well resourced library, and a sports and recreation complex. The day care centre is available at a charge on a first-come, first-served basis. At the time the students in the research class registered, there were only half-time places available so, even though the project would have paid the difference between the provincial subsidy and the costs of full-time care, this was not an option for those students who chose to place their child in the on-site centre.

The classroom itself was large, comfortably furnished and well equipped. There was a reading area and a coffee area and, instead of desks, students sat at tables which could be reconfigured to meet various teaching/learning requirements. There were six computers equipped with a laser printer and Internet access as well as a television and video cassette recorder for the sole use of students using this classroom.

The period of the research was relatively stable for the students; unlike some of the other classes in the survey, there were no threats of program closure, for example. There were problems for the mothers in the group (the majority) relating to the lack of full-time day care, however—problems which the college took some trouble to try and address but which were not entirely resolved until the following term. There was also continuing uncertainty for several students about limits on the time they would be able to remain in the program; as all students were there through a 'welfare to work' initiative, they would only be able to remain in their programs for as long as the initiative approved and financially supported their attending.

Site B

Site B **was an 'adult high school' operated by a large urban school board which was in the process of amalgamating with the other large school board in the municipality at the time of the research. The class participating in the local research was an Adult Basic Education class; the school board's ABE program is run by the continuing education department which has a number of locations throughout the municipality. In addition to the ABE programs located in board facilities, the department also runs Adult Basic Education programs at a downtown 'learning centre' and in a number of workplaces; for the past several years it has also organized a number of programs in community-based centres.**

The school board which hosted the local research class has historically been the primary provider of Adult Basic Education services in the municipal region, though funding cuts and administrative restructuring have resulted in a significant decline in program offerings over the past two to three years. The local community college also provides some basic education services, as do a number of community and voluntary organizations in the region. School boards and voluntary organizations in this province receive government funds from the same funding stream for the provision of adult literacy services and, following a recent policy initiative, both are subject to annual review and funding approval. Colleges have historically received provincial government funding for the provision of adult upgrading programs from a skills-based funding stream and college programs have been, therefore, more specifically geared towards the preparation of adults for entry into college training programs.

Adult Basic Education in the province in which Site B was located refers only to adult upgrading programs from fundamental Literacy to the equivalent of Grade 8. At Site B itself, the ABE program was divided into four levels at the time of the research, though the divisions vary according to the number (and skill range) of students enroled at any given time.

Adult Basic Education programs have, historically, varied widely from one provider to another and, within the public school system, from one board to another. The province has recently made moves to assert some control over programs, however, by instituting a system of 'learning outcomes'. Every delivery agent which receives provincial funding is obliged to gear programming towards the attainment of these outcomes; programs are monitored for compliance by provincial authorities. Curriculum, learning materials, and assessment remain within the purview of delivery agents, however; consequently, Adult Basic Education opportunities in this province continue to be very diffuse with little possibility for students to make the transition from one program to another without being subjected to the other program's intake and assessment process.

Programs which provide educational upgrading at the Grade 9 level and beyond include 'adult high school' programs, which are run by school boards and which offer high school credits towards the completion of the provincial high school diploma, and 'college preparation' courses which are offered in the community college system. Although the college programs may encompass the full range of upgrading from fundamental literacy through high school equivalency, their primary focus, as noted above, is on preparing students for going on to college post-secondary programs.

While school boards in this province have historically been funded to provide high school credit courses for adults over the age of 18, the pre-high school (Adult Basic Education) programs have been a discretionary service offered by the boards' continuing education departments and funded at a fraction of the amount allocated for high school level programs. A recent provincial policy change has removed this discrepancy—though by "leveling down" the high school programs rather than improving the funding base for continuing education programs. In future, high school level programs for adults will be funded on the same basis as continuing education upgrading programs—in some cases, at about half of their current levels or less.

Within the school board system of delivery, students who complete all levels of the Adult Basic Education program are generally ready to enter 'adult high school' and do high school credit courses. The transition is not automatic, however; in many cases, graduates of school board Adult Basic Education programs are required to take a high school entrance test, just as all other applicants are.

The Adult Basic Education program at Site B had been relocated to an adult high school from a building dedicated to Adult Basic Education and Second Language programs in September 1997, immediately prior to the beginning of the local research period of this Study.[6] The relocation was the culmination of a period of budgetary cuts and administrative restructuring in the continuing education department which had resulted in substantial loss of programs and staff. The provincially funded Second Language programs had been suspended in the Spring of 1997 and Adult Basic Education program offerings had been significantly cut. The building which had housed these programs was closed in August 1997 and only a skeleton of what had been a comprehensive program of basic adult education services actually survived the cuts to the relocation stage. The class which participated in the research was one of five Adult Basic Education classes which had been relocated to the adult high school. They would all remain under threat of imminent closure for the duration of the research period—as, indeed, would a number of other basic education programs offered by the continuing education department in the municipal region.

The class which participated in the research operated from 9:00 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. daily from Monday to Friday. Scheduling choices offered by the continuing education department for Adult Basic Education included five hours or three hours a day—morning, afternoon or evening. There is a 'continuous entry' policy, which means that students may register at any time of the year. In practice, however, the majority of registrants enter the program at the beginning of semesters—September, January, March and July. There is no time restriction on students in the Adult Basic Education program. Technically if a student is absent for three consecutive days without explanation, they 'lose their seat', though the policy is rarely upheld in practice. The program charges no tuition fee, although students must pay a $10.00 fee every semester they register. This fee is known as a 'supplies fee' and it is used to cover the costs of folders, classroom stock paper, 'consumable' learning materials and the like. Students are required to purchase their own pens, pencils, writing paper and other such materials.

The intake procedure involves a brief interview in which the student is assessed for verbal communication skills, reasons for attending, degree of commitment to attending on a daily basis, need for supports such as daycare services and physical accessibility, and preference in terms of location and schedule. An informal assessment of reading and writing is used to determine the level of instruction needed. The student is then placed in the program which best fits his or her needs and wishes. As noted above, a

[6] Site B was also the site at which the student survey journal was piloted. When the pilot took place (July 1997), the programs were still located in the dedicated Adult Basic Education/Second Language building.

choice of program locations may be offered—adult high school,[7] 'learning centre' or community-based program.

A total of thirteen students registered in the class, though only nine—eight women and one man— completed the 13-week semester.[8] The group was predominantly in the 26-35 age range. All eight of the women in the class had dependent children of school age or younger; three were single mothers. Five of the eight women were supported by family employment income; three were receiving social assistance income. The sole male in the class was working, even as he attended the program, in order to support himself and his wife whom he had recently sponsored into the country.

Of the nine students, all but one were immigrants to Canada. They had been in Canada from seven to twelve years—the earliest having arrived in 1985, the most recent in 1990. Their countries of origin were Somalia, Eritrea, Lebanon, Sudan, Bangladesh, Poland and China. Their educational attainment in their native countries varied widely. Two reported less than seven years of education (one of whom had no formal schooling at all); four reported between 8 and 10 years of schooling; and two reported high school completion. It needs to be understood that reported years of schooling (including school completion) in the context of multi-national educational systems are unlikely to correspond to Canadian grade equivalencies; all of these students self-identified (and were assessed) as needing Adult Basic Education.

Five of the nine students were new to the Adult Basic Education program when they enrolled in the research class. The four returning students had spent an average of 15 months in the program prior to the start of the research project. Three of them had also been a part of the project's pilot class which ran throughout the month of July 1997. The class was multi-level—spanning Levels 2 and 3 of Site B's Adult Basic Education program. They were described by the teacher as a 'mid high' Adult Basic Education class for that school board. All but one student had identified high school graduation and/or college training as their ultimate educational goal.

According to the teacher's report for this site, the profile of this class is fairly typical of urban Adult Basic Education in this municipality—the shift towards a predominantly immigrant ABE clientele in urban areas having occurred in the last ten years.

[7] The relocation to the adult high school turned out to be a temporary one, though this was not known at the time of the research. The Adult Basic Education and Second Language offices and programs were slated to move again over the summer of 1998—in all likelihood back to the dedicated building they had been obliged to vacate a year earlier.

[8] One (male) student transferred to another class in Week 6 because he did not want to continue his participation in the research. This was the only student in all five classes who opted out of the research survey.

The adult high school which housed the ABE research class is a very large, well equipped adult educational facility located in the downtown area. Its primary function is the provision of credit courses for completion of the provincial high school diploma. The ABE classes shared the 4th floor of the five storey building with high school classes, but the administrative offices and support staff for the Adult Basic Education (and second language) programs were located on the ground floor. The Adult Basic Education program had its own computer labs and on-site day care facilities, both of which it had also had in the dedicated building.

The day care centre offered free child care services to students in Adult Basic Education and Second Language programs. The centre was open to the children of all registrants on a first-come, first-served basis. Students could have more than one child in the centre at one time, for as long as they were a student and the child needed the daycare service. Of the nine students in the research class, two had one child in the on-site daycare and another had two children there. Two other students had pre-school children in subsidized daycare other than the on-site facility. The Site B teacher reported that none of these five students could have attended the program if free or subsidized daycare had not been available.

In terms of other facilities and services, the ABE students had access to the school cafeteria and library as well as the parking lot, although there was insufficient parking space for the school population and space could not always be found. The ABE students were not recognized fully as students of the adult high school. They were not entitled to student ID cards and were not allowed access to many of the facilities and services which the high school students enjoyed including, for example, the drama club, sports activities and career counseling. ABE student access to lockers was also subject to availability after the adult high school students were accommodated.

With respect to counseling services, the only formal service available to the continuing education department's classes was counseling on issues related to the resettlement of New Canadians. A 'multicultural counselor' visited the site on a weekly basis for this purpose. Informally, the Adult Basic Education teachers could also consult with the adult high school's educational counsellor; diagnostic testing of one of the research class students was arranged on this basis.

Another class at this site also participated in the research for this study in the period January 5 to March 27, 1998. The program in which they were enrolled was the 'Learning for Independence' program—an Adult Basic Education program specifically geared towards the educational needs of adults with developmental disabilities.[9] The nine students who participated in the research were

enrolled in two separate Learning for Independence classes; they came together three times a week to participate in the research discussion and complete their journals. Apart from the two classes from which the research participants came (which operated from 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 noon, Monday to Friday), there were two other Learning for Independence programs at this site, operating from 12:30 to 3:30 p.m., Monday to Friday. Two other classes for developmentally disabled adults operated from 9:00 a.m. to 2:30 p.m., Monday to Friday. There was a total of 60 students registered in the classes for developmentally disabled adults at this site.

The Learning for Independence programs are specifically tailored to the needs of developmentally disabled adults with relatively high intellectual functioning. The goal of the programs is to develop each individual's capacity for literate functioning within the context of their lives as developmentally disabled adults. Reading, writing, budgeting and life skills represent the core of the curriculum but students are also engaged in practical training while in the program. This has included, for example, cooking and shopping and preparing a publication for mailing. Each student has a 'training plan' in which they have articulated their educational and social/employment goals. In any class, there is a wide range of cognitive capacity and teachers gear the learning materials and educational objectives to individual capacities and needs. Most of the students remain in the program for several years, as their learning needs are great, their rate of progress is relatively slow and retention of learning depends on continued practice in the skills acquired. Some students go on to the regular Adult Basic Education program, where they are given any extra support they may require.

The Learning for Independence program is a part of the Adult Basic Education program at this site and functions under the same guidelines. There is no tuition charged, though students pay a $10.00 (per semester) fee. Adults are generally referred to the program by a 'service coordination' agency of Social Services. The intake procedure involves an initial interview to determine reasons for attending, degree of commitment and support requirements followed by an informal assessment of reading, writing and numeracy. Placement in a particular class is based on the students' requested learning schedule, the supports required and the results of the academic assessment. There is a 'continuous intake' policy and there is no pre-determined limit on the amount of time a student may stay in the program.

There were nine students in the research participant group—five men and four women. The age range of the group was from 24

[9] It should be noted that,in order to avoid identifying sites,the actual names of divisions,centres,services and/or program have been changed in instances where they may be too specific.'Learning for Independence' is not the actual name of the program in this case;it does,however, embody the same concept as the actual name.

to 69. Four of the nine were 48 and older, and the average age (of 43) was higher than the other classes in the research sample. The majority had attended segregated schools for children with special needs. According to the teacher, the research group was typical of higher functioning adults with developmental disabilities. Most had been in the Learning for Independence program for several years. All identified reading and writing as their primary reason for attending the program, though there were other equally important motivations for attending which they may have been less able—or less inclined— to articulate. These included the living/working skills components and the socialization aspect of the program.

Several of the research students worked in sheltered workshops and supervised (paid and volunteer) employment in the afternoons and during (school) holidays. Some were living on their own, some in group homes or small institutions, and some in family homes. One woman was married and another was divorced with an eight year old son. All were supported by social assistance, supplemented in some cases by small cheques from their employment.

Site C

Site C **was a former secretarial school, operated by a religious order, which had closed in the early 1980s. It had been re-opened by the same religious order in 1991 as a 'community-based' school for the provision of Second Language programs for immigrants and refugees. The Literacy program was arranged as a 'community partnership' between the religious order and a community education agency which was operating under contract from a large urban school board. School boards are the principal providers of all levels of Adult Basic Education in this province and are specifically funded by the provincial education authorities to do so. It is not uncommon for school boards to contract with community organizations and agencies for the delivery of adult Literacy and Second Language programs—as was the case with the class which participated in this study.**

At the Literacy level of upgrading, community and voluntary organizations also receive some financial support from the provincial government—though in the form of grants rather than per- student funding.[10] There is no involvement of colleges in adult educational upgrading.

Adult Basic Education in this province is accessible to anyone who is 16 years of age or older as of June 30 of the current year; it encompasses all levels of programs for adults who have not completed high school graduation. Literacy level programming is seen as one step in Adult Basic Education, but it is generally referred to

[10] In 1995-6, approximately 85 percent of adults in Literacy level programs were in programs delivered either directly or indirectly by school boards;the remaining 15 percent were involved in programs run by community and voluntary organizations.

as 'Literacy' rather than Adult Basic Education. Literacy programs encompass the equivalent of Grades 1-6 and they are generally organized in terms of (Literacy) Levels 1, 2 and 3.

There are three levels of Adult Basic Education beyond the Literacy level—Level 1, which is pre- secondary and Levels 2 and 3 which encompass the high-school curriculum to graduation. Each stage (including Literacy) has its own objectives which must be attained before a student can make the transition to the next stage.[11] Examinations are involved in the transitions between all stages of the Adult Basic Education program.

The provincial education authorities set the course content of portions of the Adult Basic Education program and, for some courses, there are compulsory provincial examinations. In the case of other courses, programs are developed cooperatively between the provincial authorities and school boards and the school board may elect to use provincial examinations or develop their own. All applicants to the high school levels of Adult Basic Education must pass an entrance examination. At the Literacy level, there is a provincial curriculum, part of which is compulsory—at least officially.[12] As of the academic year 1998-99, there will be a revised curriculum in place which will be based on 'units', all of which will be compulsory. Only the school board programs use the provincial curriculum; community and voluntary organizations operate informally and are not accountable for either program content, teaching methods or evaluation.

Provincial policy established in the 1980s placed a specific limit on the amount of time a person could spend at each level of the educational upgrading process. The limit for studying at the Literacy level, for example, was 2,000 hours (approximately two and a half years of full-time study) plus an additional 900 hours (approximately one year of full-time study) at the pre-secondary level for those who needed it. Each level of secondary upgrading was allowed approximately 1500 hours. Research for this project indicates that a policy change from 1996-7 eliminated the time limits for study at any level of Adult Basic Education, although this was not widely known in the field at the time of the research—it was not known by either the teacher(s) or the students at Site C, for example. Officially, there is now no limit dictated by the provincial government, though it appears that some version of

[11] At the pre-secondary and secondary levels,however, each course is treated separately. A student may be working at Level 1 of mathematics and Level 3 of language, for example.

[12] It should be noted that there is some difference of opinion among ABE deliverers in this province as to the extent to which the provincial Literacy curriculum is a compulsory curriculum or a discretionary set of guidelines.At the research site, the teachers viewed it as a compulsory curriculum and organized their teaching in accordance with its objectives. However, the social policy research in this province found that many deliverers viewed it merely as a set of guidelines and others ignored it.Since its used is not actively enforced by the provincial education authorities, the degree of compliance is ultimately up to the deliverer. Whether this would change with the institution of the new curriculum was not clear at the time of the research.

time restriction may remain in effect. The recent revision of the Literacy curriculum referred to above, for example, has organized the program into 'units' which, it estimates, will take 25 hours to complete; it is not clear how much latitude deliverers and teachers will have with respect to the timing of units and the ultimate duration of an individual's time at the Literacy level. At all levels of Adult Basic Education, the time limits have been replaced with estimated times for completion of specific sections of the curriculum.

Under the system in place until this recent policy change—and still in practice at the time of the research class—when adults used up the time available at each level, they either moved on to the next level (if they qualified) or were obliged to cease their upgrading. Provincially funded adult upgrading programs were no longer accessible to those who had used up their time limit(s) at any level without qualifying for the next, unless an extension could be secured.[13] A related requirement under this regulation was that students who were absent from class for five working days (with or without cause) were removed from the registration list, in order that the time not be deducted from their allowable hours. The full range of these regulations was in practice at Site C during the research period.

Under the contractual arrangements with the school board for the provision of Literacy programming at Site C, the mandate of the contracted community agency was to find community 'partners' who could commit to providing the space for one or two Literacy/ Adult Basic Education classes and recruit students locally to fill those classes. The program is then run by the contracted agency in collaboration with the community-based 'partner'. The contracted agency provides the teacher and the learning materials; the community partner provides the space in which to run the program and advertises in the local neighbourhood for students. The school board acts primarily, in such an arrangement, as the conduit for the provincial funds. There is, however, no funding provided in this arrangement to the community 'partner' who provides the location for the program. Classrooms (or instructional space), as well as any other space used, are provided on a 'grace and favour' basis.

The contracted agency for the Site C program, the 'Community Learning and Resource Centre', is an important organizer of Adult Basic Education programs in the city in which it is located.[14]

[13] Extensions of time were applied for and,provided the student could be shown to be making reasonable progress and demonstrating motivation,they were usually granted;according to the teacher at Site C, however, extensions had become more difficult to secure in recent years.

[14] It should be noted that,in order to avoid identifying sites,the actual names of divisions,centres,services and/or program have been changed in instances where they may be too specific. 'Community Learning and Resource Centre' is not the actual name of the centre in this case;it does,however, embody the same concept as the actual name. In addition to Adult Basic Education/literacy programs, the centre also works with community partners for the provision of second language programs,programs for adults with disabilities (physical or mental/intellectual),community education programs and a range of other social and educational services.

At the time of the research, it was involved with twelve community organizations around the city—in each case, under contract to the municipal school board. Through these partnerships, there were eleven programs operating on a full-time basis (20 hours a week) and eleven operating on a part-time basis (6 to 13 hours a week). A total of 380 students were registered in the twenty-two programs; eighteen teachers were employed.

Registration takes place at the sites where classes are provided. Students entering at the high school level are required to provide school transcripts, where possible. Adults who have nine years or less of recognized schooling are placed at the Literacy level. Adults at the Literacy level who enter programs organized by the Community Learning and Resource Centre are assessed informally at the time of registration. However, the agency requires that a series of language and mathematics tests be administered soon after the student registers in order to ensure that the correct placement has been made.

The school board which had contracted with the Community Learning and Resource Centre to provide these programs also operates a number of adult high schools throughout the city. Although these schools offer some Literacy level programs, their level of *direct* provision of Literacy has declined in recent years. Most now offer no more than five Literacy level classes, although one adult school in the urban region is entirely devoted to Literacy classes. The decline in school board direct delivery of Literacy programs reflects an absolute decline in the provision of Literacy programs in the municipality and, indeed, in the province. There has also been a significant decline over the same period in the number of Literacy programs indirectly delivered by school boards—through contractual arrangements such as the one at Site C. The Literacy teaching staff employed by the Community Learning and Resource Centre, for example, had declined by more than half (from 40 to 18) since 1992.

As noted above, the centre in which the research class was housed had previously been a secretarial school. Operated by a religious order, it is located in an area of the city which, in the current period, has a high concentration of refugees and immigrants and it is known locally for its role in working with these populations. Many of the centre's clients are referred there by the immigration authorities. There were eleven students in the 'partnership' Literacy class which participated in the research—seven women and four men. Eight of the eleven were immigrants to Canada, the majority having been in this country for a considerable period of time; one other had refugee status at the time of the research but it appeared unlikely that she would be successful in gaining citizenship status. Their countries of origin were Peru, Chile, Dominican Republic, Vietnam, and Haiti.

According to the teacher, the research group reflected the multi-ethnic character of the area of the city in which the program was located and would be typical of Adult Basic Education programs in that area. In the city as a whole, the teacher estimated that about 60 percent of Adult Basic Education classes would be multi-ethnic in composition while the remaining 40 percent would be composed of predominantly Canadian-born students. In the province as a whole—and particularly in suburban and rural areas—Adult Basic Education classes would be made up primarily of Canadian-born students.

The age range of the group was 35 to 48, with one 63 year old who was raising a 15-year-old son on his own. Five of the seven women were parents with two or more children at pre-school or school age. Four of the five were single mothers. Ten of the eleven students were supported by social assistance and all but one received some extra funding to attend the program. The eleventh student was supported by family income. The educational background of the eleven varied considerably—from three years of childhood schooling to grade 10 completion. Most students, however, had attained between five and eight years of schooling.

All the students in the research class were working at Level 2 of the Literacy program during the period of the research. Three had been students in the Level 1 Literacy class at this same community centre in the previous year. Five were in school for the first time since their arrival in Canada. They attended classes from 8:15 a.m. to 12:30 p.m., Monday to Friday. Reading, writing and numeracy formed the principal focus of the curriculum.

There is no tuition fee charged in this province for Adult Basic Education, but deliverers may charge other types of fees. Students in programs organized by the Community Learning and Resource Centre are required to pay a $40.00 'service fee' per semester—two semesters a year. However, students working at the Literacy or pre-high school level are exempted from these fees, as are students sponsored by government agencies. Literacy students are also not required to pay for learning resource materials such as text books and workbooks. Teachers are provided with approximately $160.00 annually (per class) for the purchase of any needed materials not ordinarily supplied by the Community Learning and Resource Centre. They are also provided with approximately $60.00 annually for costs relating to organizing 'cultural activities'. Students must provide their own pencils, rulers, folders, paper and other personal supplies; students supported by social assistance are allowed from $15.00 to $20.00 annually for the purchase of such materials.[15] Students who are approved by social services to attend the program may also receive additional funding assistance (typically in the range of $90 to $120) to attend. Day care costs are

covered for women with children in need of the service; public transportation fees are not covered.

Partnerships between the Community Learning and Resource Centre and community organizations are typically subject to negotiation—and renewal or termination—on an annual basis or even more frequently. This means that the Literacy programs organized by the Centre tend to be located in a wide variety of venues. The facility in which the program was located in this instance was, as noted, a former secretarial school now being used primarily for language programs for immigrants and refugees. It was, according to the teacher's report, well maintained and in good condition and, in most respects, better than many of the locations at which she had previously worked.

There were, however, some significant problems with this venue as an educational facility. It was located at the corner of two very busy downtown streets and there was no parking on the premises and very few spaces on nearby streets. There was, however, a municipal parking lot nearby. There was no wheelchair access to the building, though there was an elevator which could be used by physically handicapped individuals who were able to walk; the elevator was not available for the use of the general student body, however. The research class was located on the third floor, as were the other 'partnership' classes. There was no place for students to go during their 15 minute break, except in the hallway where there was a soft drink and coffee machine. The classroom was small—too small for the use of television, for example—and the students sat in narrow desks. The students were not permitted to leave things behind when they left the class because it was used by another group in the afternoon. They did, however, have the use of lockers which each shared with one other student. The teacher had access to limited storage space, which she also used to store students' materials.

There were few services available to the students in the building. There was, for example, no cafeteria, no library, no educational or career counseling,[16] no child care facility, no access to computers, and no place to meet with the teacher outside of the classroom. The only telephone available to students was in the combined teacher's room/administration office and offered no privacy. As the teacher noted, however, facilities vary considerably from centre to centre and, in spite of the relative lack of services, this was in many respects superior to the conditions which she typically

[15] The community 'partner' in this case managed the total amount of money due to students on social assistance for such supplies. They ordered necessary materials and distributed them to all the students in the class, regardless of whether they were social assistance recipients or not. The teacher noted that this policy met with the teachers' approval, since students who are not on social assistance frequently cannot afford to buy these necessities.

[16] The Community Learning and Resource Centre did, however, provide some counseling services. A counselor from the Centre paid a visit to talk to the students about their educational and employment goals during the research period.

experienced. She noted, for example, that this was the first time in her six years of teaching Literacy in the region that she had been in a "proper classroom", inadequate though it may have been.

Site D

Site D **was a regional campus of a provincial community college; it served a largely rural population in a geographically large and relatively populous region of the province. The college has been the primary deliverer of full-time Adult Basic Education programs since the province took steps to address the issue more than a decade ago.[17] Other agencies occasionally deliver full-time upgrading programs, but they are generally one-time efforts targeting specific clientele. School boards have significant involvement in the provision of part-time 'adult high school' courses on a cost-per-course basis.[18] A provincial literacy strategy, instituted in the last decade, in effect removed responsibility for the provision of Literacy level upgrading from the public education system and made it primarily the respon-sibility of voluntary organizations and ad hoc groups from the community—which may, however, include college and school board representatives in their make-up. Through the literacy strategy, the province has provided small amounts of government funding to these groups and organizations to deliver Literacy programs in their communities.[19]**

Adult Basic Education in this province encompasses all upgrading programs for adults who are over the age of 18 and have not completed high school. It is divided into four levels—Level 1 the equivalent of elementary schooling, Level 2 the equivalent of pre-secondary, and Levels 3 and 4 the equivalent of secondary. The Literacy level of upgrading (Level 1), as noted above, is entirely delivered outside the public educational system and, within communities, there is generally no ongoing access to Literacy level programming. Level 2 is also not normally available through the public educational system; programs are run when there is special funding available—through social services or HRDC, for example. At Site D, Level 2 programs were typically organized (when there was funding available) by the 'Outreach Services Division' of the college and located in rented facilities off-campus.[20]

The only levels of the upgrading program which the college system has been mandated to provide are Levels 3 and 4, and the

[17] The campus at which the research class was located had been a vocational school and had only become a part of the provincial community college system five years previously, however.

[18] The rate in the region in which the research class was located at the time of the research was $100.00 per course.

[19] The amount of funding per program is typically $6,500 annually, though in some circumstances greater amounts of funding may be provided.In other cases,programs may access smaller amounts of provincial government funding.

[20] It should be noted that,in order to avoid identifying sites,the actual names of divisions,centres,services and/or program have been changed in instances where they may be too specific.'Outreach Services Division' is not the actual name of the division in this case; it does,however, embody the same concept as the actual name.

mandate specifically provides for these program to prepare students for post-secondary college training programs. College Adult Basic Education certificates are not recognized by universities or other post-secondary institutions in the province though, because of the status of the public college system, they tend to be fairly well accepted by employers within each campus region.

Although they are within the mandate of the provincial college, Adult Basic Education Levels 3 and 4 are not funded out of the college operating grants; rather, they have been supported by HRDC 'seat purchases' or, in more recent years, by HRDC sponsorship of students. The amount of such programming has declined significantly in the past three to four years in the context of a reduced federal commitment to adult upgrading, in particular, and to the public college system in general. Five community college campuses had closed in this province in the two years prior to the research period. In the region in which Site D was located, the total number of Adult Basic Education seat purchases (both ongoing and contract) had been reduced from more than 100 to just 20 in one cut and a further five were scheduled to be cut in the 1998-99 academic year. During the period of the research, there were indications that the upgrading program might lose federal support entirely; the likelihood, should this occur, is that colleges would cease providing adult upgrading programs altogether in this province, leaving the school board part-time programs—and, at the Literacy level, the *ad hoc* community programs—as the only option.

There is a provincial Adult Basic Education curriculum for all levels of the upgrading program—including those levels (1 and 2) which are not a part of the normal course offerings of public institutions. At the Literacy level, general learning objectives in reading, writing and mathematics are outlined for two stages. At Adult Basic Education Levels 2, 3 and 4 specific learning objectives are outlined in the areas of mathematics, communications and science; the objectives at each level must be attained before students move on to the next level. Assessment is carried out through the use of unit tests, portfolios and final examinations. Each of the three levels must be completed in a twenty-week period.

Applicants to the college Adult Basic Education program at Levels 2, 3 and 4 must complete a standardized test of reading and mathematics. A minimum test score is normally required in order for a student to be admitted into a given level of upgrading. In order to be accepted into Level 2, for example—the level at which the students who participated in the research were working—an applicant would normally need to score at a Grade 7 or above on the standardized test.[21] An average score of grade 9 or higher is required for admission into the Level 3-4 program. Since regular college intake into Adult Basic Education programs does not

include Level 2, upgrading opportunities are really only available to those who can attain an average score of grade 9 or over.

The college charges an annual tuition fee of $200 for the Adult Basic Education program, Levels 3 and 4 combined. Books and materials cost students an extra $220 to $260. There are a small number of bursaries available from the college but Adult Basic Education students must compete for these with all the other students in the campus and, in some cases, the competition is province-wide. Student loans are not available to Adult Basic Education students. Students sponsored by either HRDC or social services normally have both their tuition and book costs paid by the sponsoring agency.

Up to the present time, the college system in this province has offered Adult Basic Education (Levels 3 and 4) in a 'lock-step' manner over a ten-month period from September to June—each level taking twenty weeks (5 months). At the time of the research for this project, however, it was announced that this would change; in response to the demands of the principal program sponsor, HRDC, the Adult Basic Education program would be offered on a 'continuous intake' basis. This will necessitate a move from group instruction to individualized, self-paced delivery.[22] There are also plans to implement a more extensive curriculum at these levels.

The class at Site D which participated in the research project was not a part of the regular college September to June Adult Basic Education program. Rather it was a Level 2 Adult Basic Education class which was set up by the college as a special project in order to facilitate the research for the national study. This Level 2 class was the first to be offered in this region for some time and, because the referral agencies (social services and HRDC, for example) did not normally refer clients to Level 2, there was no waiting list of clients whose educational needs were in this range. Since the opportunity was limited (both in the numbers which could be served by the class and the fact that it was a one-time offering), advertising was not undertaken; consequently, there were some problems filling the class. Several of those who came forward did not attain the test score required for admission and, therefore, could not join the class. However, because of the difficulty in filling the class in this instance, some whose scores came close to the required minimum were accepted.

[21] There may be some flexibility in this respect at the local level,however; if there is funding available to run a program but demand is down—as was the case with the research class—students may be accepted into the program with lower test scores.The problem which this presents for students is that the curriculum and the time limit of twenty weeks make it difficult for those with lower skills to succeed.

[22] It should be noted that this change, whatever its merits or problems,was initiated for bureaucratic/organizational purposes,not pedagogic reasons. Perhaps because of this—at least in part—the change was not welcomed by a significant proportion of those involved in teaching Adult Basic Education.

Unlike previous Level 2 classes, which have been held in rented facilities off-campus, this class was located on-campus. The room in which it was located was not part of the college facilities, however, but college space which had been set aside for use as a 'community literacy resource centre'.[23] When it was found that there was no college space in which to locate the class, and the project could not finance the rental of a facility, the Community Literacy Resource Centre staff agreed to allow the class to share its facilities on campus. The space in which the class was located was the resource centre itself, which was a former college classroom bounded by the offices of Community Literacy Resource Centre staff.

The room was, in itself, quite appropriate for use as an Adult Basic Education classroom. There was ample space and adequate lighting. It was equipped with tables which could be configured in a number of ways for flexible classroom arrangements. Being the Literacy resource centre for the larger community, the room also had a wide range of learning resources which both the students and the teacher could use. The major drawback, which is described in more detail in Chapter 5, was the fact that the room was not a dedicated classroom, but the working space of a number of people. Perhaps inevitably, there were tensions on both sides and some inconvenience on both sides as well.

The campus was a well maintained, relatively modern building with a full range of services including a cafeteria, a library, career counseling services, recreational facilities, computer labs and ample parking. There was also an on-site day care for the use of students. Day care spaces were limited, however, and tended to be filled in early Spring each year, thus making it inaccessible to many Adult Basic Education students.

The students in the research class were not required to pay tuition fees in this case. They also did not pay college student fees and, consequently, were not regarded as 'official' college students. This meant that some services were not accessible to them. However, they did have access to the equipment of the Community Literacy Resource Centre including, for example, television and video cassette recorder equipment. They also had access to the college computer lab, day care centre (though the only mother of a dependent child in the class did not use it), career counseling services and cafeteria.

A group of seven students initially registered in the program, although one was obliged to leave after three weeks when her part-time work schedule increased to nearly full-time hours. One other

[23] It should be noted that,in order to avoid identifying sites,the actual names of divisions,centres,services and/or program have been changed in instances where they may be too specific.'Community Literacy Resource Centre' is not the actual name of the centre in this case;it does,however, embody the same concept as the actual name.

applicant who had been accepted into the program was unable to attend because there was no public transportation and he was unable to arrange a means of travel. As already noted, all applicants to the program were screened through the application of a standardized test.

Of the six who completed the full period of the research, there were four men and two women. Two of the students were receiving social assistance income, two were receiving a disability pension income (from social services), and two were receiving training allow- ances from Human Resources Development Canada. One of the women had a dependent child below school age and this was the only student who had a need for day care. All were native-born Canadians. They ranged in age from early twenties to mid-fifties. Their educational backgrounds varied—three reported having attained a Grade 7, two had attained a Grade 9 and one had attained a Grade 10. Two had self-identified learning disabilities, which were confirmed by the teacher though not formally diagnosed during the research period.

The teacher indicated that this group was fairly typical of the Adult Basic Education classes in the region, although there is generally a higher proportion of women than was the case with this group. As already noted, this group also included a number of students who fell slightly below a reading score of Grade 7 on the standardized test, the normal cut-off point for admission into the program.

The class met daily, Monday to Friday, from 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m., with a break for lunch. Their schedule was largely confined to classroom work, though they did go to the computer lab once a week. The method of instruction was primarily group oriented; all students had to complete the same body of material during the research period. Although this program normally allows twenty weeks for the completion of each Level (1, 2 and 3), in this case a shortfall in funding meant that the students had to complete the Level 2 program in sixteen weeks.

Conclusion

This chapter had described the four local research sites in terms of their place within the provincial Literacy and Adult Basic Education system as well as in terms of the organizational arrangements which each made for the provision of Literacy and Adult Basic Education programs. As the descriptions of the four sites illustrate, there was considerable variation in both access to programs and the conditions under which programs operated. The following three chapters describe the experience of the students and teachers at each of these sites during the thirteen week period of the research—in the context of the diversity of learning/teaching conditions as well as the variation in access and supports.

Aspiring for More

4

Evidence from the Local Research Projects: The Students and Their Goals

Chapter Summary

This chapter is the first of two presenting the key findings pertaining to students' experiences of Adult Basic Education based on the local research. The findings are drawn, firstly, from responses to survey questions, as recorded in confidential student journals or on audio tape and in confidential teacher journals and, secondly, from teachers' formal reports submitted at the end of the local research period. This chapter describes the students who participated in the local research at the four sites in terms of general demographic data as well as educational and employment backgrounds and sources of financial support. It also describes the range of educational and employment goals which the students brought to the educational upgrading process and the ways in which these goals changed over the thirteen-week period of the research.

Introduction

This chapter, and the chapter which follows, describe the experiences of students in a number of selected Adult Basic Education programs across the country—in their own words as well as through the eyes of their teachers. The students whose experiences and opinions form the basis for these chapters were enrolled in five Adult Basic Education programs at the four selected sites described in the preceding chapter over the period September 1997 to March 1998. For a thirteen week period, from September 15 to December 12, 1997, four groups of students discussed a set of questions presented in a survey 'journal' and individually recorded their responses to the survey questions. The four teachers also completed weekly journal reports over this same period. The fifth group of students and their teacher—participants in a 'special needs' Adult Basic Education program for developmentally delayed adults—completed the survey journal over an eleven week period from January 5 to March 27, 1998. This class was located at the same site as one of the four programs which had participated in the September to December research period.

The teacher survey questions were designed, in part, to complement the information provided by the students.[1] Teachers were also asked to summarize the students' weekly

[1] Teachers were also asked to describe aspects of their own experience in their weekly journals, though the descriptions of teachers' experiences and working conditions were principally gleaned through their input in a 'daily log' and in their final report on the local research. The experiences and conditions of work for teachers are described in detail in Chapter 6.

discussion of the survey questions and comment on the students' engagement with, and verbal responses to, each week's questions and issues. There was one teacher in each of the five classes and each of these teachers participated in the local surveys and submitted reports in addition to the surveys. In one of the five classes, a teacher from another class facilitated the weekly discussion and assisted students with recording their responses; in another class, a staff person other than the class teacher assisted students who required help with writing their journal responses. In each of these classes, as in the remaining three classes, however, the class teacher had sole responsibility for reporting on students' discussion and responses.

All participants in the local research component—students, teachers, and host agencies—were assured that the information gathered in this component of the research would be confidential. In the case of students, this is ensured by the fact that journals were submitted without name identification. All direct references to individual students in this report use pseudonyms which, at the first usage, are starred. In the case of teachers and host agencies, every attempt is made to ensure anonymity. Host agencies are identified in these chapters, as they are throughout this report, as *Sites A, B, C and D*.

The Survey

The survey of students and teachers was incorporated into a weekly structured 'journal'. Students were given the option of writing their responses in the journal, having someone else transcribe their answers or answering orally through the use of audio tapes. Each week, over the 13 week research period, students were asked a set of questions relating to some aspect of their experience as participants in the Adult Basic Education program. In all but Weeks 5 and 11, students were presented with specific questions; in Weeks 5 and 11, they were invited to develop their own topics for discussion and journal response. Teachers also completed weekly journals over this same period. The teacher questions, as noted above, were designed to complement the information provided by the students.

The questions were organized in order to capture the students' experiences over time. Questions which required the student to have been in the program longer in order to be able to comment, or questions which required the student to feel more confident and at ease in the program, were intentionally positioned in later sections of the survey journal.

Beginning with questions which sought basic demographic information in their first two weeks of reporting in the journal, students were asked questions in six general subject areas over the following eleven weeks: *educational and employment goals; financial support and incomes; program-related expenses; circumstances of*

attendance **(for example, voluntary or compulsory);** ***levels of satisfaction with program; and quality of facilities and services.***

This chapter describes the general demographic makeup of the student sample, based on the evidence provided by the students themselves as well as the teachers; it also assesses the extent to which these five groups of students may be representative of the population in need of adult educational upgrading services in their region or province. In addition to the general demographic data, the first section of this chapter also presents the findings on students' educational and employment backgrounds as well as their sources of financial support while attending the program. As this section documents, the students in the sample came from a wide variety of backgrounds; perhaps contrary to popular perception, the majority had also had considerable work experience in a wide range of employment, and a significant minority had participated in variety of other educational and training programs. In general, these students demonstrated a clear orientation, and a high level of motivation, towards improving their future employment prospects through educational upgrading.

The second section of this chapter documents the extent to which students' educational and/or employment goals changed over the thirteen-week period of the research and examines the reasons for these changes. The evidence of the survey material in respect of these questions suggests that students' goals may be subject to considerable change over a very brief period. In general, changes in students' personal aspirations were positive—several of those in the sample reported increased confidence in their abilities to achieve more as a result of participating in the program; a very small minority shifted their sights downward within the first few weeks of upgrading. On the other side of this question, however, students found themselves confronting a range of obstacles, largely beyond their control, which inevitably dampened their aspirations.

To read the student journals over the period from Week 2, when they initially articulated their goals, to their final entries eleven weeks later is, in too many cases, to witness the erosion of hope and the frustration of effort. The mood of optimism—of real possibility—which had characterized virtually all student responses at the beginning of the term had turned decidedly pessimistic for a significant proportion of students. This was more marked at some sites than at others, but was a factor at every site.

The Student Sample

Type and Source of Demographic Data

During the first two weeks students were asked primarily to provide baseline information about themselves. In Week 1, they were asked to give personal demographic information, including age,

sex, marital status, dependents and educational background. In Week 2, they were asked questions about their employment background. They were also asked about their source(s) of income while they attended the program. The student journal information has provided the principal basis for the demographic summaries of the student sample in this section of the report.

In addition to the student journals, the journals and reports completed by teachers provided important information about the demographic makeup of the student sample as well. Teachers were asked to comment on whether the class constituted a typical Adult Basic Education class for the region or the institution/agency and, if not, what had influenced the demographic profile of this particular class. This was important as, although Sites had been selected for relative representativeness, the actual selection and/or constitution of the research class was a function of the institution/agency itself, not of the research team.[2] Teachers were also asked to comment on whether the class (and the agency's typical adult upgrading clientele) reflected the demographic makeup of adults in need of educational upgrading in the province.

General Demographic Summary of Student Sample

As the preceding Chapter has described, the students were located at four sites in four different provinces—referred to throughout this report as *Sites A, B, C and D*. The thirteen students in the research class at Site A (an urban site) were sponsored by the provincial government under a 'welfare to work' initiative. Ten of the thirteen were Canadian-born. Twelve of the thirteen were women. Site B (an urban site) had two classes in the study—a regular Adult Basic Education class, which ran concurrently with the classes at the other three sites, and a special Adult Basic Education class for adults with developmental disability which ran in the Winter 1998 semester, after the research had been completed in the other four classes. The regular ABE class at Site B had nine students, eight of whom were immigrants to Canada. Eight of the nine were also women. The class of developmentally disabled adults at Site B was composed entirely of native-born Canadians. Of nine students, there were five men and four women. At Site C (an urban site), the class was made up of seven women and four men. Of the eleven students, nine were immigrants to Canada. At Site D (the sole rurally based site), the class of seven was made up of four men and three women, though only six (four men and two women) completed the full semester and the full survey. All seven were native-born Canadians and all were from the immediate area in which the program was located.

There were 48 students in total in the five local research classes—35 women and 17 men. Twenty-nine of the students had

[2] As documented in Chapter 2,however, the host agencies were given parameters within which to constitute the research class.These included, for example, ensuring that—to the greatest extent possible—students could exercise the option of participating in the research class or in another Adult Basic Education class.

dependents; eighteen of them were single mothers, one was a single father. The high proportion of single mothers was especially influenced by the composition of the Site A class where half of the sample's total of eighteen single mothers were located. The proportion of students without dependents (40%) was influenced by the Site B class of adults with developmental disability, where only one of nine students had a dependent child. The majority of single parents had one or more children between the ages of one and thirteen years of age.

The age range of the entire sample was 19 to 69, with the age range of the different sites varying significantly. Of the entire sample of forty-eight, 17% were between the ages of 18 and 25; 37% were between the ages of 26 and 35; 25% were between the ages of 36-45; 15% were between the ages of 46 and 55; and 6% were over the age of 55. The proportion of students between the ages of 26 and 45 (62%) would have been more pronounced but for the two 'special' classes - the social security initiative class at Site A which was predominantly young single mothers and where 50 percent of the class was between 18 and 25 years of age, and the class for developmentally disabled adults at Site B where 44 percent of the class was over 46 years of age.

Educational Backgrounds

In the class of adults with developmental disability, the majority of students had attended segregated schools or segregated classes of special education as children. None had achieved a *bona fide* grade attainment. All nine had been in this program for an extended period of time prior to the beginning of the research period.

Among the 39 students in the other four classes, 54 percent (21 students) had attained Grade 9 or less in their previous schooling. Of those, nine had Grade 7 or less, eight had attained a Grade 8 and four had attained a Grade 9. Of those whose educational attainment was beyond Grade 9, five had attained a Grade 10, three had attained a Grade 11 and two had acquired credits towards Grade 12. The eight students in the sample who had attained Grade 12 or above were all immigrants. In their native countries, two had attained a high school graduation[3] and six had attained some post-secondary education.

Of those who did not complete their schooling (all except eight of the immigrant students), the majority reported leaving school around the age of sixteen—for Canadian-born students, the age at which it became legally permissible to do so. Several of the Canadian-born students had left at age fifteen, however, and several of the immigrant students had left school (in their native countries)

[3] The number of years of schooling signified by the qualification of high school graduation varied significantly in the countries from which the immigrants in the sample came. In one case, it signified nine years of schooling, for example, and in another case it signified thirteen years of schooling.

at age fourteen or younger. One immigrant student had had no previous formal schooling.

The students reported a variety of reasons for not completing school. Some cited problems with learning; in the case of older students, in particular, most had gone through schools where there had been no provision for addressing learning difficulties, or even learning differences. For many, family or personal issues had been the main trigger of the decision to leave. Among the younger students, a number had left home at the same time as leaving school. Among the older students, a number reported leaving school to earn a living or to supplement the family income. Undoubtedly, learning problems and personal/family issues combined in many cases to influence the decision to leave school. The majority of immigrant students who had not completed schooling cited war and/or social upheaval and poverty (in their native countries) as the reasons for leaving school.

Of the thirty-nine, just over three-quarters (30 students) were new to the program, although a few had attended other adult upgrading programs. Nine were returning students. Seventeen of the thirty-nine students (44%) had taken courses other than adult upgrading in the past. A small minority had achieved vocational qualifications (for example, hairdressing and carpentry) and had worked in the field. They cited medical conditions or shortage of work as their reasons for wanting to upgrade their educational levels and retrain. The majority of those who had taken other courses had taken short courses in a wide range of areas including computers and typing, retail sales, food handling and cooking, accounting, marketing, sewing, caring for the elderly, small engine repair, basic electronics, hotel and restaurant management, and job search. Most reported finishing their courses successfully but either being unable to find related employment at all or finding only sporadic employment.

Employment Backgrounds

Most of the students in the local research classes had had considerable work experience in a wide variety of jobs. Of the forty-eight students in all five classes, all but six reported significant work histories. Three of the six who did not report previous employment were adults with developmental disability but, even among this group, two-thirds (six students) were either working at the time of the class or had worked at a number of jobs in the past. Among the other four classes, the majority of students had worked for most of their lives. Most had worked in relatively low-paying jobs in service industries—as waiters and waitresses, retail sales persons, cooking assistants and cleaners, for example. Several had worked in domestic service as housekeepers and babysitters and a few had worked in processing and manufacturing industries—as factory seamstresses, machine operators, and assembly line operatives. A minority had

also worked in resource-based industries—berry farming, fish processing and apple picking, for example.

Some had patterns of employment which were quite stable, at least until the first layoff due to downsizing or company bankruptcy or, in the case of immigrant students, until they immigrated to Canada. Several reported having been in one occupation for ten to twenty years. Employment subsequent to the first layoff tended to be more short-term and less well paying. For many—and, in particular, the younger students—employment patterns reflected recent economic and employment trends. Jobs of six months' to one year's duration in service industries were most common. Many students reported being continuously employed in this manner—moving more or less directly from one short-term, low-paying job to another—from the time of leaving school. The reasons they were not now working included pregnancy and child-raising (for the younger women in particular) but, for most, the reason was failure to find other work in an increasingly competitive environment. A few reported that medical problems required them to qualify for less strenuous work.

Sources of Student Financial Support

Of the forty-eight students in the five research classes, thirty-six (75%) were receiving social assistance as their primary source of income. Of those receiving social assistance income, a few received other income as well. In some cases, single mothers were also receiving income support from their former spouses or the fathers of their children. In the class of students with developmental disability, a few were receiving some income from part-time employment Of those not receiving social assistance, eight (17%) were supported by their own or family income; two (4%) were receiving HRDC funding; and two (4%) were receiving disability pension income from social services.

The proportion of students supported through these various means was not uniform across all five classes. In two of the classes—the Site A class which was established as a 'welfare to work' initiative of the provincial government and the Site B class for developmentally disabled adults— every student was a social assistance recipient. In the second Site B class, six of the nine students were supported by their own or family income—one of these six worked full-time during the research period, attending the program when his work schedule permitted; the other three at the second Site B class were receiving social assistance income. In the Site C class, ten of the eleven students were receiving social assistance income and the remaining one was supported by family income. In the Site D class, two were receiving social assistance income, two were receiving a disability pension from social services, and two were supported by funding from Human Resources Development Canada through the 'reach back' provision for

Employment Insurance (EI) claimants whose claims had expired. The seventh student, who was supporting herself and was the sole income earner in her family during the time she was in the class, was obliged to leave the program within a few weeks of enrolling when her part-time job was increased to nearly full-time hours.

The degree to which students in the sample were actively supported to attend the Adult Basic Education program varied widely. In some cases no additional support was provided and in only one of the five classes was the support anywhere near comprehensive. This was the Site A class which had been established specifically to accommodate social assistance recipients who had been approved (and referred) for upgrading by provincial government authorities. In that case, the main *direct* costs associated with attending the program (tuition and transportation) were paid by the province. Tuition at Site A was charged on a 'per course' basis and could amount to a maximum of $637.00 per term. Childcare costs were also subsidized by the province although, as a result of a recent policy change, the subsidy was not sufficient to pay the full costs of full-time day care.[4] Students at the Site A class were responsible for meeting some of the direct costs and all of the indirect additional expenses of attending the program out of their regular social assistance income. These included the costs of materials and supplies for their schooling (pens, paper, etc.), the costs of lunches for themselves and their children and the additional costs associated with outfitting themselves for school and their children for daycare (clothing and footwear, lunch boxes, back packs, etc.).

At Site B, there was no additional support provided to students in either of the two classes to attend the Adult Basic Education program. Although this municipality had previously provided supplemental assistance to students on social assistance (covering a bus pass and a school supplies allowance), this had been discontinued two years previously. Unlike Site A, the Site B agency (in line with provincial policy on Adult Basic Education) charged no tuition, though a $10 per semester 'supplies fee' was charged to all students. The agency also provided an on-site daycare facility free of charge. Three students had a child or children in the on-site day care. Two others had a child or children in subsidized day care outside the school—without which, they stated, they would not have been able to attend. Students were required to pay all of the direct costs of attending the program, including the $10 fee each semester, transportation costs and the costs of materials and supplies for their learning. Like the Site A students, they were also responsible for the indirect costs associated with attending the program.

[4] As documented in Chapter 3,this province had paid a daycare "overage" for single parents on social assistance who were enrolled in educational upgrading programs.This supplementary benefit paid single parents the difference between the provincial child care subsidy and the actual costs of child care.This program of supplemental assistance was discontinued as of April 1997.

At Site C, there was no tuition charged for Adult Basic Education and nine of the ten students supported by social assistance income received additional support to attend the program. The level of additional support varied from one individual to another, although there was no clearly understood rationale for the variation.[5] The level of supplemental assistance ranged from $98 to $120 monthly. One student who was receiving social assistance income (a single mother) received no additional support to attend. In addition to the individually based supplemental assistance, recipients of social assistance in this province who attend upgrading programs are allocated between $15 and $20 annually for the purchase of materials and supplies (pens, paper, rulers, etc.). Individuals who are not receiving social assistance income must purchase these materials themselves. At Site C, the amount due to the students on social assistance was administered by the community centre in which the class was located; the centre chose to pool the individual allocations and purchase supplies for distribution to all students, including those not in receipt of social assistance—in this case, one student. There was no on-site child care facility at Site C, but each of the three mothers of pre-school age children in this class had one or more children in subsidized day care.

At Site D, neither of the four students on social assistance and disability pension received additional assistance to attend the program. One of the two students receiving funding from HRDC (a single mother) was paid child care expenses; the other HRDC-funded student received no additional support. The students in this class were not required to pay tuition for the term in which they were enroled in the research class; neither did they pay the college student fees. There was an initial handout of supplies (pen, pencil, ruler, paper, binder and eraser) and books were supplied.[6]

As documented in Chapter 2, students at all four sites received some financial support, as a result of participating in the research class, which they would not otherwise have received. Funding was available from the research project to students in need of either transportation or child care assistance. At Site A, project funding was required primarily to supplement the provincial daycare subsidy; bus passes were provided as a part of the 'welfare to work' training allowance. At Site B, project funding was provided to ensure that the on-site daycare facility could accommodate the childcare needs of the students in the research class; bus passes were also provided. At Site C, project funding covered bus passes

[5] It was not associated with number of dependents, for example. The consensus among students (confirmed by the teacher) was that the determination of whether a student would receive additional support—and how much support would be granted—was left up to individual case workers.

[6] As the teacher's report noted, however, those students who continued on to the Level 3-4 program in the college would have to incur all of these costs themselves. Book and materials were estimated to cost $220 to $260. This would be in addition to the $200 tuition fee.

for all the students and day care for the one woman who did not receive child care support from social services. At Site D, several students received bus passes out of the project funding.

Representativeness of Student Sample

As noted above, one of the questions which the teacher/researchers were asked to comment on was the extent to which the research class was typical of the composition of Adult Basic Education classes in the agency or the region. In two of the four classes (at Sites B and C), where the students were predominantly immigrant, the teachers indicated that the student group was typical of their Adult Basic Education clientele in the current period. In each case, however, it was noted that the typical composition of ABE classes has shifted in recent years from a predominantly native-born Canadian clientele. In each case, it was also acknowledged that this trend has been largely confined to urban regions of the province. So the composition of the classes—while representative of the regions in which they were located and, to some extent, of urban regions provincially—was not representative of Adult Basic Education classes provincially.

In another of the classes (the class at Site A), the teacher observed that the group of predominantly young single mothers was not typical of either the agency or the region, but was a function of the fact that the class was associated with a welfare reform initiative. In another case (Site D), the teacher indicated that, though the class was fairly typical in terms of origin, age and gender distribution, students' educational attainment and current level of literacy skills were lower than were typically accepted into Adult Basic Education programs by the college. As with Site A, the selection process for the research class accounted for this difference. In the fifth and final case (the Site B class for developmentally delayed adults), the teacher's assessment was that the group was fairly typical of the higher functioning section of developmentally disabled adults who participate in Adult Basic Education classes in the municipality.

Limitations on Representativeness

It was understood that, where the groups in this sample have been judged to be typical of the current Adult Basic Education population for the programs in which they were enrolled at the institutions or agencies in which they were enroled, this does not necessarily mean that they are representative of the *population in need* in the municipality, region or province. Since access to Adult Basic Education is not universal in any part of this country, those who enrol in programs are necessarily *select* populations. In the case of Site A, the selection process was explicit. Only those in receipt of social assistance and approved for training by the provincial authorities were enroled in the specially created 'college preparation centre'. As a class of predominantly younger single mothers, this group would not be representative of Adult Basic Education students

(or, indeed, any other student group) in any region of the country. In the other three cases the population was, in all likelihood, only slightly less 'select'. As documented above, for example, three-quarters of the entire student sample was supported by social assistance; this is not unexpected for a full-time day program of training in the current period.[7] Adults who are working generally cannot gain access to day-time programming at all; adults without income support generally cannot afford to attend training or upgrading programs on a full-time basis.

In each case, the student enrolment also reflects the fact that these students have been able to gain access to a program. This means that there has been a program made available in their region, the program has been advertised or the students have been recruited directly,[8] there is a form of transportation available which they have been able to access, they have been able to meet the required costs (however marginally), they have either not had conflicting family responsibilities (including care of dependents) or they have been able to make arrangements for these responsibilities to be covered. And they have not been prevented (or strongly discouraged) from attending an Adult Basic Education program—as, in many cases, recipients of social assistance or other public income support are.[9]

Students' Educational and Employment Goals: Aspiring For More

Sources of Information about Student Goals

One of the objectives of the local research was to examine how students made decisions about their educational/training and employment goals and what factors influenced whether these goals remained constant or changed. Students were asked at a relatively early stage in the term (Week 2) whether they had defined educational and/or training goals and, if so, how they had made their decision(s). They were also asked how long they expected it would take to achieve their goals. At a later stage in the term (Week 6),

[7] In the 1970s and early 1980s there was considerably more funding of adult academic upgrading by the federal department now known as Human Resources Development Canada. The amount of such support has been declining since the late 1970s and is now negligible. This leaves the provincial or municipal social services department as virtually the only other public agency which either supports adults to enrol in adult upgrading programs or allows them to enrol while they continue to receive assistance. In rare cases, ABE students may be supported by disability pension—from Workers Compensation, for example.

[8] Adults who belong to organized 'communities' or who are represented by service agencies or advocacy groups, for example, are more likely to find out about programs where advertising and public outreach is limited. They are also more likely to gain access to programs. These factors may have affected, in particular, the composition of the community-based class at Site C (and community-based classes in general in that region) and the class of adults with developmental disability at Site B. It may also account more generally for the changing composition of Adult Basic Education classes reported for the municipalities in which Sites B and C were located.

[9] Indeed, within the same town or region some adults receiving social assistance income (or disability pension income) may be permitted (even supported) to attend Adult Basic Education program while others are prohibited from doing so. One of the teachers, for example, noted the recent trends in her province towards prohibiting (or actively discouraging) social assistance recipients from attending ABE programs as 'fast-track' training for low-skilled work or mandatory work placements become the norm. She posits this as one of the possible reasons for the changing composition of ABE classes in her (urban) region, from a predominantly native-born clientele to a predominantly immigrant clientele.

they were asked about their employment goals. They were also asked a series of questions designed to determine how well informed they were about the choices they had made—whether they knew anything about the nature of the jobs or occupations to which they aspired (pay, benefits, conditions of work, etc.) and whether they understood what would be required of them (in terms of education and training, skills and experience) in order to gain employment in the chosen occupation. Teachers were asked to give their opinion as to whether the students, in general, had set achiev-able goals—in view of their abilities and personal circumstances as well as any (known) constraints on available time and funding.

In Week 9, students were asked to assess whether they would be able to meet the educational goals which they had initially set. This provided the opportunity for many to say whether their goals had changed in the seven weeks since they had first recorded them. At the end of the research period (Week 13), they were asked directly whether they had changed either their education or their employment goals and, if they had, what had influenced the change. Teachers were asked to assess the prospects for students achieving their goals and the factors which might influence this.

Student Goals

Virtually every student in the sample, with the exception of those with developmental disability, reported in Week 2 of the term that they wanted to achieve an educational credential which would enable them to get a job or qualify for a training program. At Site A, seven of the nine students with less than high school graduation aspired to complete Grade 12 or the provincial Adult Basic Education equivalent. Two-thirds of this group had already attained a Grade 9 or higher. The two who did not aspire specifically to Grade 12 were working towards attaining the academic prerequisites to enter occupational training programs of their choice—programs which did not specifically require high school graduation but which required a level of proficiency in certain academic areas. All of the students at Site A planned to continue their educational upgrading at the college in which their 'college preparation' program was located; this would be possible through a process of direct transfer on the recommendation of the teachers.

At Site B, seven of the nine students identified high school graduation and further training as their goal. Two identified improving their language skills sufficiently to find a job. The majority aspired to the immediate goal of entering the adult high school program which was located in the same building as their Adult Basic Education class. The move from the ABE program to the adult high school program was not a matter of direct transfer, however; students were required to pass an entrance test before they would be accepted into the adult high school program.

Preparation for writing this test was a major preoccupation of most Site B students during the research period.

The group of adults with developmental disability at Site B had all been students in their current programs for an extended period of time and their goals were less specifically focused on credentials and employment than in any of the other classes. In general, they attended the program to achieve *and maintain* their individual optimal levels of literate and social functioning. Some combined schooling with work and, in these cases, the one was seen as complementing and supporting the other; others wished to become employed, though they did not expect employment to replace schooling. All of the students also identified personal and social objectives for continuing in school. Their hope was that they could continue to attend the program for as long as they needed and/or wanted.

At Site C, where ten of the eleven students were immigrants to Canada, achieving full language fluency and literacy skills was an immediate goal of the majority. Seven of the eleven identified their longer-term goal as the minimum high school attainment which would qualify them for an occupational training program—a Grade 10 equivalency. Two identified a Grade 11 equivalency and one identified a high school graduation as their goals. Only one student (one of two native-born Canadians in the class) did not identify an educational or training credential as his goal. His only goal was the improvement of his reading and writing skills. For the majority whose goal was to complete some or all of the provincial high school program, it would be necessary to complete an entrance examination before they would be accepted into the high school program. However, there would also be the option of completing a pre-high school level prior to making this transition. Approximately one year of educational time was permitted at the pre-high school level, if they were successful in gaining access to such a program.[10]

At Site D, five of the seven students identified a Grade 12 equivalency as their goal; the remaining two students aspired to occupational training which required a Grade 10 equivalency and this was their academic goal initially—though one of the two adjusted her goal upward after only a few weeks in the program. The only option for students to continue past their current level of upgrading would have been at the college in which their program was located—either at the same campus or another. If they remained at the same campus, they would not have been required to pass a test in order to make the transition if they were able to complete all of the material in the Level at which they were then

[10] As Chapter 3 noted,the time limits which had been set provincially—and which had been in effect for several years—were evidently no longer in effect at the time of the research class.Neither the teacher nor the students were aware of this policy change, however, and both were planning with the time limitations in mind.The extent to which the limits will continue to operate at an informal level (or even formally at a local level) is not yet clear.

working. But, crucially, continuing on to the next level depended on there being a program available to them at the next level. As access to the higher levels of upgrading is extremely limited and generally open only to federally sponsored students in this province, this was by no means guaranteed in either the campus which they were attending or any other campus in the province.

Most students in the survey recognized the necessity of having educational credentials in order to get access to even those jobs which pay minimum wage and, for many of the students in the sample, the aspiration was for more than a minimum wage job. The choice of which credentials to pursue was evidently very much influenced by the options available, however. It would appear, for example, that where there were more occupational training choices for people with less than high school graduation, students' academic goals were more varied. At both Sites A and C, for example, there were a few trades and vocational training programs available to those with Grade 10 or Grade 11 equivalency. This presented a set of options which were simply not available to the students at Site D, where virtually every occupational training program available in the province required a Grade 12 graduation or equivalent. In other cases, students' goals appeared to be strongly influenced by the options which were most immediately at hand—or which seemed more accessible because of their proximity. At Site B, for example, the teacher reported that, with the Adult Basic Education class situated in an adult high school (to which it had relocated at the beginning of the research term), the ABE students tended to set their sights entirely on completing the adult high school program rather than looking more broadly at the range of training options available to mature students able to successfully complete entrance examinations. It is likely, of course, that these (primarily immigrant) students, in opting to gain the basic (and generally minimum) Canadian qualification of high school graduation, were choosing more wisely than if they had opted for more narrow training at that stage.

Changes in Student Goals

The attitude of most students at the beginning of the term—as evidenced in their responses to questions about their goals in the first weeks of the survey journal—was very optimistic. Many had been waiting for some time for the opportunity to upgrade their education and there was a general sense that, with this opportunity, they were beginning a new and more hopeful phase of their lives. The majority had experienced only dead-end, minimum wage jobs; they wanted more and they recognized that a continued lack of education would condemn them to repeating their past employment history throughout their lives. As one young mother at Site D wrote:

> *It's very near impossible to raise a family on minimum wage and I just never want to go back to that. I want to get my*

education. I want to be able to support my family. I feel in some ways a failure because I can't; this is why I'm going back to school.

Another student at the same site made the point that those jobs which do not require education also do not provide a living wage:

I understand that some jobs out there don't require an education, but if they paid better people would be able to support their families.

A student at Site C wrote that he had not looked for help with his financial problems while in the class:

[because] I know these problems will not be solved without proper occupational training.

Most of those receiving social assistance expressed a wish to escape the poverty of life on social assistance, which they saw as only being possible if they could obtain a reasonably well paying job. Those supported by family income expressed a desire to become financial contributors themselves; in most cases, supporting spouses earned only the minimum wage and family income was seriously inadequate. Many of the parents in the sample expressed the hope that they could both provide a more secure livelihood for their children and be more supportive of their children's education than they currently felt they could be.

It is difficult to say how realistic or, indeed, how *real* many of the students' employment goals were. Their responses to questions about their knowledge of the jobs or occupations to which they had said they aspired (presented in Week 6) indicated a general lack of understanding about either the nature and conditions of the work or the qualifications required. In this, however, they may not differ markedly from many students at both the high school and post-secondary level of study. It is likely that, in many cases, students had only a vague idea of their future employment possibilities (or desires) but felt obliged to commit to something when asked the question directly. Certainly, for many, the decision to go back to school is monumental in itself and they know that the road to their first goal (the educational credential) may be long and difficult. The decision as to what they will do afterwards can usually wait. As one of the Site B students responded, when asked what her training and employment goals were and how long she expected it would take to achieve them:

For me, I still have to move on to high school.As you can see, my spelling is not very good; neither is my math. So to answer this question would be premature at this time. However, without this program, I would not have a chance.

In some instances during the research period, discussion of what would be required in order to achieve their educational and employment goals threatened to undermine students' confidence. This was particularly so in the case of several students at Site C, where nearly two-thirds of the students had a Grade 8 attainment or less. The Site C teacher reported that the agency's efforts to provide career counseling during the research period—by having a counselor meet individually with each student to discuss what they would need to do to accomplish their goal and how long this might take—had a negative impact on several students. While they had, up to that point, been very focused on the task at hand—improving their literacy and numeracy skills in preparation for the next level of upgrading—they felt overwhelmed when they were obliged to think about the long road ahead. Her recommendation was that such counseling should take place after students had made some considerable progress towards their goal, not at the early stage when self-confidence may be low and students need to adjust to being in school after years of being away from it. This has obvious implications for the current trend towards the development of long-term 'training plans' and 'employability agreements' at the point of entry to educational upgrading programs—which was the case at Site A, where having a 'career plan' was a condition of being sponsored into the program by social services, and at Site B, where students were asked to commit to 'training plans' when they enroled in the program.

The Site C teacher's recommendation was supported by the teacher at Site D for somewhat different reasons. What he had found was that students frequently underestimate their potential when they first start the educational upgrading process and many initially set their sights relatively low because of this. Having students commit to an educational goal or an employment plan before they have an opportunity to assess their abilities and learn what is available may, he observed, deprive returning students of the opportunity of achieving their full potential. One of the students at Site D illustrated the accuracy of this teacher's insight particularly well. A capable and articulate student, and the proud mother of a one-year-old daughter, she had joined the class initially to meet the academic requirements for a program in the personal care worker field—a Grade 10 equivalency in that province. After a few weeks in the Adult Basic Education program, she was not only finding the work interesting but was also achieving scores of 90% and above. In contrast to her previous schooling experience, she was also enjoying mutually supportive relations with her classmates and a congenial relationship with her teacher and her conception of her educational possibilities had begun to change. She decided that she would like to (and could) achieve high school equivalency and go on to a more challenging and more financially rewarding occupation than she had initially envisaged; she saw the possibility

of providing not only a better livelihood but also a more motivating role model for her daughter.

Indeed, teachers at all four sites reported that, while some students adjusted their sights downward after spending some time in the program and realizing how much work and time were involved, it was more common for students to adjust their goals upward as they gained confidence in their abilities and became more aware of the learning opportunities available. For many, their initial schooling had been marked by the experience of failure and, frequently, conflict. After a relatively short time in the Adult Basic Education class, many found that they felt confident in their relations with their classmates and teacher and, for the first time in their lives, were experiencing success in education. The Site C students chose, in one of the open discussion weeks of the journal, to write about their conceptions of happiness. Two of them wrote:

> *I was overjoyed when I learned that it is never too late to do well. In spite of my age, I know I can finish high school. I have already tasted success and I am happy about that.This is happiness and this happiness encourages me to attend school every day.*

> *I think that true happiness is going back to school to learn more and be able to improve my living conditions. In spite of all the difficulties I have had in life, I am now regaining my desire to get ahead and work toward a better life. … Although I get out of bed at 4:30 a.m. every morning to get myself and my three children, ages five, three and 18 months, ready for school and daycare, I am quite content to do this. It gives me time for my own education.I will be able to help my children as they grow up.This is happiness.*

Although many students—particularly those at the lowest level of skill or educational attainment—did not want to examine too closely the issue of how long they would take to meet their goals at this early stage, the majority recognized that the attainment of educational credentials which would significantly improve their prospects for employment would take some considerable time. Most were expecting to spend from one to four years in educational upgrading and occupational training which, given their current educational levels, would appear to be realistic. Given that a high proportion of these students (40%) had also already been through the 'quick fix' approach of short courses, job search, and the like, their assessment of what would be required to effect real change in their employment prospects was not without a sound basis. As a student at Site C observed:

> *There is no sense in educating someone with only one two-week computer course. … It would be better for everyone to receive*

better education before entering the job market. We would be more motivated and feel more appreciated as human beings since we could become more responsible for earning our own livings. In other words, we would have greater self-respect and others would have more respect for us. We would finally have earned our rightful place in society.

Most of the students had come to educational upgrading after a period of thinking about what it would require of them and after considering what their other options were. The majority had prepared themselves mentally for a 'long haul' and many had significant moral support from their families to see them through it. Their journal entries over the first few weeks reveal their determination and, in many cases, their pride:

I need to get a good education for myself for at least two reasons: to make myself feel better and to make a better life for my (now one year old) daughter. I have goals and I need specific training and education to achieve them.

I don't see things getting any easier for me for a long while. However, I will give it my best shot.

I gave myself two years and this is my first year - so, if the program is still here, I will [meet my goals].

I have problems learning, but my reading and my writing are much better than before. I am able to write letters and resumes and I feel fine. I have more confidence in myself than before, thanks to my teacher.

Right now I feel encouraged to finish my high school. Having our program continue is the best hope of my life. Sometimes people think that winning money will make them happy. For me, I'd like to finish my high school.

If this program continues, I will be very joyful and will continue to attend. I really need to study a lot of English because I need to talk, to understand, to teach my children and to find a job.

I allowed myself three years to get my Grade 12 just in case I had any problems. But everything's going smooth and, with any luck, it will keep going smooth. Our program is only sixteen weeks long so we have to kind of cram all that in. We were told there might be another course for us to go into, so that makes finishing this program a little bit easier and you have something - you know there's going to be some place for you to go.

I picture my future as hopeful and positive, a chance to turn my dreams into reality, my goals reachable, obtainable. I can get off Family Benefit, be a positive role model for my children and others. I will be able to help my children and grandchildren (not yet born) with their school work, get a good job.

The teachers at all four sites gave a generally positive assessment of the students' potential to meet their goals. In only one or two instances did a teacher express the view that a student might not be able to complete the academic work required for high school graduation, given sufficient time and appropriate learning supports. Indeed, in a number of cases, students exceeded teachers' expectations in the thirteen week period of the research.[11]

All the teachers were, however, only too aware of the obstacles which many of the students would face in achieving their goals and the very real possibility that these obstacles would defeat them. Sadly, some of these obstacles had already begun to overwhelm many students before the thirteen week period was over; in too many cases, the obstacles were absolute and no amount of resolve and effort on the students' part could overcome them.

The following section reports on what happened to cause students to question or revise their goals—or to make them uncertain as to whether they could achieve their goals—at each of the four sites during the period of the research. It also reports some of the students' journal responses relating to their goals and the circumstances which they found themselves in as the term unfolded. The four sites are presented in random order.

Site A

At Site A, where all students were recipients of social assistance who had been approved for the program as part of a provincial 'welfare to work' initiative, externally imposed limitations on their training time forced several students to consider revising their goals within weeks of beginning their program. In some cases, the limitations were known at the outset but, in others, students seemed to only become aware of the time limits they were facing when they were well into the term. Certainly, it is possible that students had been told at the outset of a time limit but hoped (or assumed) that there would be flexibility after they started. Some students who had set themselves the goal of studying for two years were informed that the social services program would only support them for one year or less. In one case, a student had been approved for only an eight month period in Adult Basic Education. Though

[11] The best example of this was a student at Site D whose relatively low score on the entrance test might have prevented him from entering the Adult Basic Education program at all in ordinary circumstances. He proved to be both determined and hard working, however, and actually progressed more than any other student in the class. The teacher referred to this student as 'the big surprise'. He was, in fact, the only student in this class who both qualified and was supported to move on the next level of upgrading.

she had only previously attained a Grade 9—and despite the fact that she was the mother of a one-year-old and was forced to take a part-time (night shift) job during the term to help cover expenses—she nevertheless had hopes of accomplishing her goal in the time available:

> *I think if I work real hard and get lots of work done fast, I might get my grade 12 in the eight months allotted.*

Others were less optimistic in the face of what they recognized as impossibly short time limits. One student, who had been waiting to get into the program for a year, felt sure that she would not achieve her educational goal in the time allowed:

> *I was told that if I don't finish my goal within a year that I am out. I'm guessing that, going at a reasonable rate, I won't finish my provincial diploma for about two years.*

Another student, who had to complete a number of Grade 12 credits in order to attain a high school diploma, expressed anger at what she felt to be unfair and unnecessary pressure. She actually stopped coming to the program mid-way through the term:

> *So far my time limit is until the end of this term.That's how long my [employability] agreement [with social services] is for. I don't know if they will let me come back for another term or not.That really pisses me off because I shouldn't have to worry about whether I'll be able to finish or not.I know this term is definitely not enough.*

Other students at this site were aware that there was probably a limit on the time they would be supported to attend, but were not sure what that limit was, or whether the level of support would change. When asked if there was a time limit for her in the program, one student responded:

> *No one seems to be able to give me a straight answer. I don't know how long I will be funded for. … All of us are very concerned about how much funding there will be for next term.*

A number of other students at Site A were considering revising their aspirations before the end of the thirteen week period because they were finding attending the program simply too much of a struggle. Financial worries and the demands of child care and homemaking were paramount for this class of (predominantly single) parents:

> *… I am under such pressure that I sometimes feel I cannot continue this situation and I wish to find the first available job,*

even if it's not suitable.… I asked many times for full-time childcare so that I would be able to study in the college and take as many classes as possible;then when I got home I could spend time doing the housework and being a good mom.But I was not able to receive this help.About clothes, I talked to my worker and she accepted to give our family of three $250 for winter clothes as a crisis grant. [These problems] may make me choose the shortest academic route available and not the right one that is longer but more suitable.

Day care is a major priority. If my day care costs are not topped up next semester, I will not be able to attend school.

Since I started coming to college, I have confronted so many difficulties that, even though I love and enjoy education, I feel I can't continue for a long time; so I have to choose the shortest course that will help me … find a job.

Another student in this class who had been very hopeful up to the point of her Week 9 journal entries—even predicting that she might be able to meet her educational goals in less time than she first thought—was soon afterwards forced to confront the possibility that she might not be able to continue at all. In Week 11, she wrote:

I understand we are up in the air as to financing for our daycare.As far as I know (for sure),I will not be attending the Spring Semester if daycare is not funded somehow. I also feel restless in class with all of this uncertainty hanging over my head.

Two weeks later, in her Week 13 report, she was admitting defeat:

I cannot afford financially to get a loan, so I will not continue education after the spring semester. I'll try to work!

One student summed up the mood among the Site A group towards the end of the thirteen week period as follows:

Can we continue to go to school here? There seems to be no straight answer.We do not know if we are able to be funded for our daycare and school next semester.We all hope, but there is … no guarantee. … Because of the confusion of the coverage for day care—full-time being out of reach—we are all unsettled, all of us are confused and we have just a bit of faith and little idea of what our future, our options for next semester will be!

In fact, nine of the thirteen students who enroled at Site A in September 1997 were still at the college in January 1998 and the

four who were not had left for personal reasons. Eight of the nine who remained were ready to continue their upgrading in the regular Adult Basic Education or Second Language program. This was still relatively early in their upgrading process, however, and the uncertainties about funding and day care were by no means resolved.

Site D

Of the seven students who initially enroled at Site D, all but one were ultimately unable to achieve what they set out to do—and what they all felt they would be able to do—at the beginning of the term. Two of the students, who were receiving funding through the HRDC 'reach back' program, lost the financial support necessary to continue when the program's funding was frozen at the end of the term. They were the youngest students in the class and, according to the teacher, the ones with the "most potential to realize their ambitions". They were both near completion of the Level they were working at (Level 2) and had every expectation of moving on to the next level in January when they became aware that their funding would not be continued. In response to the Week 13 question about whether she had changed her educational or employment goals since starting the program, one of these two students wrote:

> *The only reason why I have changed my mind is there is no funding for me to go on so I am going to have to go find a minimum wage job.I have to change my mind about employment goals because I only have my Level 2. It really makes it hard because I really did have a lot of dreams.*

As the teacher's report documented, this particular student actually began fighting to get funding to continue the following term. She was both determined and resourceful—first lobbying local politicians and eventually talking to the Minister of Education—but, in the end, failed to get funding. After successfully completing the Level 2 section of the upgrading program, she was forced to quit when the research project funding (and the program) ended in December 1997. And, although she was at that time under the impression that she might be able to continue with the next level of upgrading the following September, the optimism and delight which characterized all her early journal responses were replaced by a mounting sense of frustration and disappointment as the term progressed and her hopes were dampened. The following is an excerpt from her taped response in Week 11:

> *It's so hard right now.What else am I supposed to do? I might not be able to go [to the next level] until next September. What am I supposed to do from now [November] until next September? Am I supposed to go out and find a job and then,when I get back in school, quit the job? I just don't know what to do. I've been so set, so happy that I knew what I wanted to do because I*

want to go back to school. Where I live a long ways away, it's hard. But I have a babysitter. And to me, I'm doing so well. Like this course - I've got so much out of this course and I want to thank everybody for that because someone actually took the time to sit down and teach me. I never had that in school. I love doing this [research] project and I love doing my school work and I just love being in school every day.

The second student supported by HRDC had, in the early part of the term, expressed real optimism about his chances of succeeding—and concerns about those students who had farther to go than he had:

… we have only been given 16 weeks our of a regular 20 weeks. But I was lucky enough to have had a grade ten and only out of school nine years. So I will be able to complete it much faster than most. But I feel people should get at least 20 weeks.

By the end of the term, however, he realized that he was not as 'lucky' as he had first thought. When asked about whether he had changed his goals in Week 13, he responded:

Not having funding can affect someone's goals. I am one of these people. I have a wife and two children and if I can't get funding for the next course, I am going to have to go back to work until September next year. But I will be attending school in September to finish my upgrading.

In fact, it was by no means clear that there would be funding for either of these students to return to school in September.

There was also uncertainty at Site D as to whether any students (apart from the two, described above, who at first expected to receive HRDC funding and sponsorship) would be accepted into the college's next level of Adult Basic Education, as the classes were normally filled by HRDC-sponsored students. This created a general sense of frustration and discouragement which threatened to undermine the group throughout most of the term. One student from this class expressed the frustration of the group when he wrote:

[There is the] frustration of no course [to go on to] or funding. It makes me feel like just giving up on trying to get my education. I feel like I am no better off than when I started. … Why even bother if the government is not going to have another level for you to go into after you finish a level in school? They say they want people off welfare, so why don't they spend the money for people to get educated so that they stand a chance of getting a job?

Another problem which students at Site D had to face was that the Level 2 program was four weeks shorter than it normally would have been—although the material which they were expected to cover was the same as if the program had run its full twenty weeks. This problem, as previously noted, was directly related to the fact that the program had been able to start because there was research project funding for the teacher's salary. The project paid for the teachers' salary at all sites for a six-month period, but this included a period for research preparation prior to the students beginning and reporting activities after the term ended. In discussions prior to setting up the Site D class, it was recognized that there would be a shortfall in salaried time of four weeks, but it was thought that this shortfall could be made up with funding from the local or provincial level. The extra four weeks of funding did not materialize, however, and the class was run for four-fifths of the normal duration of a Level 2 program. Two of the students were not able to complete the work in the sixteen-week period, and, although it was not clear that they would have been able to finish had they had the full twenty weeks, the shortened time frame put pressures on them (as well as on some of the other students) from an early stage in the term. As one of these two students wrote:

> *Programs like this should be long enough for most people to achieve what is started in the beginning.*

Only two of the students who participated in the research class went on to the next level of upgrading (Level 3) in the college in January 1998. In each case, because they were supported by social services which is not a sponsor of the college upgrading programs, special permission had to be gained in order for them to be accepted. This took some considerable effort on the part of the teacher and it was not certain that anyone would move on until very near the end of the Level 2 program. Two weeks before the class finished, one student commented:

> *There are six people in our class and four of us are able to move on [because they had finished the Level 2 material], but we're not going to be able to … So here we are able to move on, but we can't because we have no money to move on. I have a daughter to look after, other people have rent to pay and it's so hard because you're kind of stuck.It feels that every time you try to get a bit farther in life, it kicks you in the butt and sets you back. It's not fair; it's really not fair.*

In the end, one of the two who did manage to move on to Level 3 was forced to withdraw from the program when he made application for a Canada Pension Plan (CPP) disability pension—having, until then, been on a seriously inadequate disability allowance from

social services. The CPP regulations prohibit disability pension recipients from attending school.

This particular student had been informed by social services during the Fall term that, because of his age (early 50s) and physical condition, he would not be permitted to continue into post-secondary training. It was just such training that he felt he needed in order to qualify for work other than the physically demanding jobs he had done in the past, because his health now prohibited him from doing such work. As the teacher reported, the knowledge that he would not be allowed to go on to take post-secondary training had considerably undermined his self-confidence. He felt that he should not be in the Adult Basic Education program—that he was taking a place which another student with more prospects might be able to use. The teacher, however, had persuaded him to continue—pointing out that he should feel as entitled to an education as anybody else. He had recovered his confidence and went on to complete Level 2, only to be blocked at the next stage. As of the last report (February 1998), he had stopped coming to the Level 3 program in order to qualify for the CPP disability pension which would provide him with a somewhat more adequate livelihood.

Site B

Although at all sites the uncertainty about whether they would be able to achieve their goals was shared by many—if not most—students, the uncertainty at Site B was more expressly *collective*. This was because, for both of the groups which participated in the research at this site, there was a very real threat that their program would simply close.[12] In the case of the regular Adult Basic Education class, the threat was that the program would close at the end of the research period in December 1997. Indeed, both the students and the teacher feared that it could happen during the term and their journals expressed this uncertainty. In the case of the class for adults with developmental disability, the threatened closure very nearly came about during the course of their Winter 1998 term, while they too were participating in the research. Although the students with developmental disability were shielded from the knowledge that their program might close until it became a virtual certainty,[13] the students in the other program were aware from early October of the possibility that their educational upgrading could be over in December or even earlier.[14] For many, this created a very

[12] The school board which delivered the classes at Site B was in the process of amalgamating with another large board in the same municipality. This restructuring, in addition to an extended funding crisis, had resulted in a period of uncertainty for all adult education program which had begun months before the research class began. There had already been substantial program cuts and the threat of more cuts was very real.

[13] In fact, the program was 'rescued' at the last minute with interim funding and funding was later found to continue it into the next academic year.

[14] Indeed, the returning students had gone through a similar crisis in the previous Spring term and had already seen substantial program cuts. The provincially funded Second Language programs had been cut completely and only a fraction of normal program offerings had been run in the Summer term.

serious pressure to prepare for the adult high school entrance exam so that they would have another option; for others, this was not a realistic goal, given their current level of skill and the short amount of time available. One of the students in this class, who had started the program with great optimism, wrote in answer to the question of whether there was a limit on the time she could spend in upgrading:

> *[There is no time limit] for me personally. However, if this program goes under, I will not be able to achieve any of my goals - which are to spell properly and do math and then go on to high school to get my grade 12 - then go to work or to college or university.*

When they were given the opportunity to discuss (and report in their journals) topics of their own choosing in Week 5, the class unanimously chose to talk about the threatened closure of their program. Their journal entries reflect the depth of their disappointment and fear:

> *[If this program is canceled] I picture my future as not very hopeful, discouraging, deprived, angry, controlled, frustrated, limited and powerless because [so much] will have been denied me. [It would affect] my children's future and other children's too because many teenagers today, for whatever reason, can't or won't finish school. Like me, they won't have a chance to come back.*

> *Without this program, we can't increase our education. Every student will be disappointed because education is very important. Education is our future.*
>
> *I hope this program is not canceled because it is close to where I live. If it is canceled, I have to change where I live.*

> *If this program is canceled, I will feel very confused. I don't know what I can do in the future. It is not easy to find a job and I won't be able to do anything with my life. I can't expect my husband to be responsible for my life.*

One student, who in the middle of the term reported that she was making better progress than she had ever thought she would, wrote:

> *If this program is canceled, there will be no hope for the future. I feel stressed and worried that I won't be able to reach my goal.*

In fact, the program was not closed in December, but continued after the Christmas break. Several of the students had written the high school entrance exam in December and four of them qualified for admission into the adult high school program. Of these, one did

not enter the high school program but went directly into an occupational training program. The teacher predicted that the students who had failed all or part of the exam in December would eventually succeed—four of them, she predicted, might qualify for high school as early as June 1998 and another by September 1998. At the time of writing (July 1998), the Adult Basic Education program at this site had still not had provincial funding confirmed for the 1998-99 school year.

Funding for the Adult Basic Education program for adults with developmental disability at this site was re-instated at the last minute and the program did not actually close its doors in the Winter 1998 term. Funding for the 1998-99 school year was also confirmed. However, there may well be some long-term fallout for this program from the period of uncertainty and the possibility of future (annual) uncertainty. Several guardians (or care givers) of the students in this class responded to the uncertainty and the threatened closure by examining other (non-academic) program options for the adults in their care. As the teacher/researcher in this class observed, students could end up being denied access to Adult Basic Education (and the very real intellectual and social benefits which they derive from it) unless care givers can be assured that the program (and the students' lives) will not be subject to disruption.

Unlike students at the other three sites, Site B students' uncertainties about achieving their goals did not appear to be particularly linked to their financial circumstances. This is not to say that the students did not have financial problems—which will be elaborated further in the next chapter—but, at the time in which they wrote in their journals, it would seem that they were managing to attend school with their current incomes and that they did not expect any significant change. Unlike either of the other sites, of course, the majority of Site B students were supported by their own or family income. Of the six self/family supported students, however, one stopped coming to the program in the Winter term in order to take a job; another, who had qualified for the high school program, was combining full-time work and school, a fact which would undoubtedly slow his progress through high school.

Although there were no time limits set on those receiving social assistance at Site B at the time of the research project, it is by no means certain that the situation will not change. In fact, the students in the regular Adult Basic Education class at this site who were receiving social assistance were asked to attend an information session in the school auditorium just prior to the end of the semester. It was explained to them that upgrading programs such as the one they were attending would be viewed as 'community participation', one of three components of the 'welfare to work' program then

being implemented in their province. All of these students, as noted, were attending of their own volition, without assistance from their social workers and without additional financial support to attend. All were incurring additional costs related to going to school, but considered it a necessary sacrifice in order to improve their chances of working and earning a living wage. All but two of the ten participants in this class estimated that their upgrading and training would take between two and four years and all were 'in it for the long haul'. It is unlikely that a program which supported adults to attend educational programs—but whose first priority was to get people off welfare—would allow them to continue in a program which would take as long as these students anticipated.

Site C

At Site C, where the provincial education ministry has, for the past several years, set a limit on the time which adults can spend at each level of educational upgrading[15], several students expressed concern that the time available would not permit them to achieve their goals. As one student expressed it:

> *My goal is to take a cooking course. I do not think that I will have enough time for this because the number of hours is limited. … I would like to have one year longer. This varies from person to person. I have more trouble with language and not much education. It is easier for someone who has already studied in his or her native country to advance more quickly.*

Another student at this site, in response to the question of how long he expected to achieve his educational and training goals, indicated another source of constraint:

> *I don't know exactly. I will take whatever time is required. It depends upon whether my case worker agrees to allow me to take occupational training.*

Although the students at Site C expressed less direct concern about being able to achieve their goals than the students at the other three sites, this did not necessarily indicate that their program was more secure or that they would not encounter obstacles. On the contrary, the teacher's report for this site documented a number of factors, apart from the time limitations, which could jeopardize these students' prospects for achieving their goals—some of which related to provincial policy, some to organizational issues at the local level, and some to the individual circumstances in which students found themselves.

In the case of one student, a refugee, the upgrading process was blocked in January when her social assistance income was cut.

[15] As noted in Chapter 3, and elsewhere in this chapter, this policy has evidently changed but was assumed by the teacher and students in the Site C class to be in operation at the time of the research.

Indeed, her attendance in the program in the Fall term—even with social assistance income—had been possible only because the project had paid her child care costs. As a refugee in this province, she would be required to pay $110 a week for child care—more than four times the cost of subsidized child care for social assistance recipients.

The project had also paid the transportation costs of a number of students; this had, according to the teacher, made it easier for some students to attend and *possible* for others. Without such help with transportation (which ended when the research period ended in December), the teacher predicted that several students would have difficulty attending. Some would have to walk to school, she observed, and others would simply have to miss school when they ran out of money to pay for their transportation each month.

There was also continuing uncertainty at this site as to whether the community agency which hosted the program and provided the classroom space would renew the contract for another year. There had been a similar uncertainty in the previous year. In fact, the program did continue at this centre in January 1998 but, since the contract is based on goodwill only—there being no monetary incentive for the community agency to continue to provide space—it appears unlikely that the situation will ever be stable.

Apart from the refugee student who was not able to return in January, there were two others who also did not continue after the Fall term. One found work and the other was about to give birth. The teacher predicted that they would both return at a later date. One other student (the sole student to identify literacy alone as his ultimate goal) was very close to the limit of the time he was allowed in the program and it was expected that he would soon have to stop attending; it is unclear at the time of writing whether these time limits will continue to be applied, however.

The teacher predicted that two of the students in this class would be able to go directly into adult high school at the end of the year (though they would be required to write high school entrance examinations), two would start the high school preparation course at the centre prior to writing the entrance examinations and the others would require more time to complete the Literacy level. Even with the provincial time limits in place, students who have managed to gain access to programs have been allowed approximately two and a half years of study at the Literacy level.[16]

[16] It should be noted that this does not mean they were funded for this period but rather that they were allowed to have a place in a program.Even those who required no funding would not be permitted to participate in programs beyond the time permitted,except by securing an extension.Extensions,according to the teacher at Site C, used to be fairly regularly granted to students who were making what was deemed reasonable progress but, over the recent past,had become much more difficult to attain.

Two of the students in this class expressed the general attitude of determination and hope among those who continued into the second term. In the last week of the survey, in answer to whether they had changed their (educational and employment) goals since starting to write in the survey journal, they wrote:

> *No, I have not changed my mind. I am determined to finish high school.[and] No,I have not changed my employment goals. I am now better informed about what I would like to do.I will need [high school graduation] and this will take [some time].*

> *No, I have not changed my mind. I still want to finish my studies to find a good job and help my children. I have the desire and the ability to finish [high school] if possible.*

Of course, both the teacher's predictions and the students' plans and hopes were based on there being a program for them to continue to. But, as the teacher reported, this is becoming more and more uncertain as provincial funding for Literacy and Adult Basic Education more generally declines. In the current period, a class at the Literacy level of upgrading in this province can only be started if fourteen students register. Programs are subject to closure at any point in the term if student numbers go below 14. Another aspect of this policy which makes for a particularly unstable environment for both students and teachers is that school boards are only funded for students who are present in the class, regardless of the number registered, so student absenteeism could actually close a program. Provincial policy dictates that students absent for more than five working days (with or without cause) are taken off the register. As the Site C teacher observed, the threat of course closure during the school year has become "par for the course" in this province.

Since the teacher's salary was paid out of the research project funds, student numbers were not of particular concern during the period of the research; they became of paramount concern in January, however, and would continue to be a source of uncertainty.

Conclusion

This chapter has described the students who participated in local research classes in terms of their educational and employment backgrounds as well as their educational and employment goals. It has also examined the ways in which their goals changed—and, in

many cases, were forced to change—over the brief thirteen week period of the research.

Contrary to popular perceptions of adults who have not completed their initial schooling, the students in this sample reported both extensive work histories and significant involvement with various types of formal courses prior to making the decision to upgrade their educational credentials through Adult Basic Education. Their decision to take up the considerable challenge which Adult Basic Education represents under present conditions was, in the majority of cases, based on a determination to improve their own and their family's standard of living.

Unfortunately, as this chapter has documented, the achievement of their goals is dependent on far more than their own motivation and courage. The obstacles which most immediately threatened to frustrate the aspirations of the majority of students at the four local research sites, as documented in the preceding pages, ranged from the threatened closure of existing programs to the lack of access to further levels of upgrading to the imposition of time limitations by the program itself or sponsoring agencies. As the evidence of this chapter has also suggested, however—and the following chapter documents in detail—the obstacles to students achieving their goals are not only these immediate ones. They also include the longer-term challenges of sustaining interest and motivation when social and financial supports are inadequate (or non-existent) and of making progress when the conditions of learning militate against it.

Learning the Hard Way

5

Evidence from the Local Research Projects: Supports for ABE Students

Chapter Summary

This chapter is the second of two presenting the key findings pertaining to students' experiences of Adult Basic Education based on the local research.The findings are drawn, firstly, from responses to survey questions, as recorded in confidential student journals or on audio tape and in confidential teacher journals and, secondly, from teachers' formal reports submitted at the end of the local research period.This chapter describes the survey evidence relating to supports for students in Adult Basic Education programs.As presented in this chapter,'student supports' include financial assistance, social agency and/or family backing,and the programs,facilities and services which shape the students' educational experiences.

Introduction

Following Chapter 4, which described the students in terms of general demographic data as well as educational and employment aspirations, this Chapter examines the evidence on a range of issues affecting the extent to which students were, or were not, supported in the pursuit of their goals. The findings presented in this Chapter are those which relate to the following broad areas of the student and teacher surveys:

- *Sources of financial support and general levels of incomes*

- *Students' assessments of expenses incurred in attending the program as the term proceeded and the adequacy of their incomes to meet these expenses*

- *Circumstances under which students were attending programs (whether voluntary or compulsory) and the degree of personal support and encouragement (from family and/or social agencies) which they received. Linked to this were questions about the students' ability(or motivation) to concentrate on studies and their likelihood of achieving their goals.*

- *Students' levels of satisfaction with the educational program and both students' and teachers' perception of progress over the period of the research*

• Students'experience of the physical setting in which their learning took place and their place in that setting.Linked to this were questions about the quality of the facilities and services and students' assessments of their adequacy

The findings overall reveal wide variation in support for Adult Basic Education students as well as in the conditions under which programs are provided across the country. But they also point to the broad similarity of many elements of adults' experience as Adult Basic Education students, irrespective of particular program conditions. Financial problems and concerns dominated the lives of the majority of students who participated in the research. Financial problems were, however, only one of a wide range of barriers which in too many cases threatened to frustrate the efforts of those who made up the student sample for this research.

Student Supports: Financial

Sources of Information

One important objective of the local research was to find out whether students in Adult Basic Education programs have levels of income/financial support sufficient to allow them to take best advantage of the programs in which they are enrolled. At several points in the survey journal, students were asked to provide information about their financial circumstances—beginning in Week 2, when they were asked to say what their main source of income was while they attended the program, whether their income was the sole or primary income for the family, whether they were receiving income support (such as a training allowance) specifically to attend the program, and whether those receiving public income support had been given additional support to meet the expenses of attending the program.

In Week 3 students were asked to provide specific information about their monthly income and expenses. They were asked to estimate what portion of their monthly income was spent on shelter, food, transportation, utilities and clothing and whether there were other regular monthly expenses. In Week 4, they were asked to estimate the extra costs (if any) they incurred as a result of attending the program—in particular, costs associated with transportation, learning materials, lunches and clothing. Those who were receiving additional financial support to attend were asked whether this support was sufficient to cover their extra costs. All students were asked to estimate how much financial assistance would be sufficient to support Adult Basic Education students.

In Week 12, one week before the end of the research period and, for most students, one week before the end of the term, they were asked whether they had had financial problems related to

coming to the class and, if so, whether these problems had made it difficult for them to concentrate on their studies. They were also asked whether they thought the problems would make it difficult for them to reach their educational and employment goals.

Teachers were asked to comment on the general economic profile of students in the class. They were also asked to comment on whether any students had shown signs of financial hardship and, if so, whether financial problems and concerns were having an observable impact on students' attendance or performance.

General Summary of Students' Financial Conditions

With the exception of the Site B class of adults with developmental disabilities—most of whom had their finances managed by parents, guardians, or other care givers, a large majority of students in the study reported experiencing financial hardship during the course of the research period. The Site C teacher could have been speaking of the majority of students in the sample when she asked:

> *How, despite all of these problems, do my students manage to concentrate in class? It is a miracle of strength,will,determination and resourcefulness, and I have limitless admiration for them. If all of the energy that is spent on surviving were invested in their education, imagine the results in our literacy classes!*

At Site A, eleven of the twelve students who completed journals reported serious financial concerns and increased financial pressures related to attending the program. In the second Site B group, six of the nine students who completed journals cited financial concerns as among their most pressing issues; all six reported that attending the program presented additional financial pressures. At Site C, only one of the 11 reporting students did not identify financial concerns in relation to attending the program; one other student identified financial problems but stated that these problems were ongoing and were not increased by attending the program. At Site D, three of the six students who completed the thirteen week period did not report financial problems during the course of the research class. Two of these had their (HRDC) funding withdrawn at the end of the research class, however, and were prevented from continuing with their upgrading for financial reasons; the third anticipated having her disability pension cut off and having to face financial difficulties at the end of the academic year. As one of them wrote in her journal:

> *I've had no financial problems in this course but, after I'm done this course, that's when my problems will begin.*

Two students in this class reported serious financial problems—one of whom was the student, described in the preceding chapter, who would be obliged to quit the next level of upgrading

as a condition of receiving a (Canada Pension Plan) disability pension. The other student (by his own and the teacher's testimony) experienced extreme financial hardship including, for a time, homelessness. A seventh student at the Site D class was obliged to leave the program after three weeks in order to take up full-time work; she completed only the first three weeks of the survey journal but, before the term ended, produced a letter explaining why she had had to leave the program.

The actual levels of financial support provided to students varied considerably. The highest income levels were reported by students at Site A, but they also lived in a region where rents were considerably above the average in the other three sites, and social assistance rates had just recently been cut.[1] Consequently, a number of Site A students were obliged to spend a disproportionate share of their income on rent, leaving a significant shortfall in available funds for utilities, food, clothing and other expenses. The teacher at this site reported that, while only one of the students was showing signs of financial hardship by the fourth week of the study, later in the semester all of them were. As she wrote:

> *One day Genevieve* just sat at the computer typing and crying.She was behind on her [telephone] bill and they were threatening to cut off her telephone. Each of them worried about how to properly clothe their children and pay for extras like birthdays and Christmas. On the last day of the class Mariana* confessed to the group that she was $200 behind on her rent and would probably have to get another part-time job to get herself out of the hole.*

The report on the social policy researcher's visit to this class towards the end of the research period confirmed the teacher's observation. One mother, for example, had mentioned "having to discipline her teenaged son for sneaking glasses of milk, as it was all she had for her toddler". The social policy researcher noted that, for this woman, "the financial stress of managing under these circumstances while attempting to succeed at school was overwhelming".

At Site B, two-thirds of the students (six) were supported by family income but only two of the six reported that the family income was adequate. The other four reported financial problems similar to those experienced by the three single mothers in the class who were receiving social assistance income. One was, in

[1] Statistics comparing the cost of living and income assistance rates were available for the province in which Site A was located. These were provided in the teacher's report for this site;they indicate that, for most of the categories of social assistance support, only 2-4% of the available housing falls within the maximum shelter allowance available.The statistics also indicate that the actual cost of living exceeds the social assistance monthly allotments by nearly three to one for single adults and by one and a half to one for a single adult with a child.

fact, working full-time in order to support himself and his wife and attending the class when his work schedule permitted.

At Site C, the one student who was supported by family income did not report serious financial hardship although she reported that she would not be able to afford to buy a bus pass when the project support for transportation expired at the end of the term. The other ten students reported spending the greater part of their income on rent and the teacher reported evidence of serious financial hardship for most of the students. The majority, she reported, were obliged to "obtain food from food banks or from support services, and find used clothing from different community agencies". As already noted, the students at Site C were in some respects better supported to attend the program than students in some of the other sites, as all but one of those on social assistance income received additional support in the range of $100 monthly to attend, and all the students in the class were provided with school supplies. Nevertheless, as the teacher reported:

> *All students are undergoing great financial hardship. I am always astounded to see them coming to class every day, and I admit that I can't really understand how they manage to concentrate on their academic work when they have so many financial difficulties.*

The most serious cases of hardship were reported at Site D, the rural site. In the case of two of the students—both men without dependents, the social assistance income provided only $35 over the cost of shelter (in a 'welfare boarding house') monthly. This left each of them with $35 to cover food and any other expenses for the month. One was obliged to take out a loan of $200 in Week 4 to cover the cost of food for the period; the other, having spent the first week or so of his time in the program without shelter, was entirely dependent on charity for his sustenance throughout the sixteen-week period. He had to miss class several times during the term in order to try and find food for himself at local church-run food banks. The teacher, who had been very instrumental in getting social assistance support for this student's shelter, was obliged on some occasions to assist him with finding food as well.

The students at this site were surprised to learn (from their group discussions) that there were widely varying policies on support for those receiving public income assistance—and widely varying levels of support. Among some, there was a feeling that the process was not only arbitrary but also unfair. One middle-aged man who received $238 a month in social assistance—no allocation for rent and no extra money to support his returning to school—expressed his frustration about this:

The money I receive from Welfare makes it hard to do your work because they do not give you enough money. Everyone should get the same amount for going back to school.

Financial Conditions as Experienced by Students

As noted above, students were asked at a relatively early stage in the research period whether their incomes were adequate to meet their needs. Their answers attested to the inadequacy of the income and the resulting stresses which this created in their lives:

I feel very broke right now and frustrated. I have not paid any of my bills since I've started school (this is Week 5), and it's really stressing me out. There is just no money. We are all so poor; it is not fair. All we want is to be equal, and not have to struggle tremendously just to pay a $15.00 Hydro bill. My rent is $160.00 over what Welfare gives so, right there, that comes right out of food money. There is not one place that I could rent for the price Welfare gives. It's very sad; all we want is to be healthy and to live a good life. We should not have to live in a dump when we have a child … This week I'm very stressed out.

Financially, there's nothing I can do. I've done everything I can. I've even had to borrow which has added to my bills.

Right now alone I pay $200.00 a month for rent out of my food money and you only get $500.00 for food a month.

They were also asked whether attending the program was creating financial problems they would not otherwise have had. Their responses underline the fact that attending an adult upgrading program is not 'cost-neutral' but, on the contrary, entails substantial additional expense. At Site B, where supplemental assistance for social assistance recipients attending school had been discontinued two years previously, one student supported by social assistance income wrote in her journal:

I've been told I must manage with what I get for my son and my self.… Just for me to start school (September 1997), it has cost me $450, give or take a dollar or two. And to maintain my going and staying in school, it will cost me about $140.00 a month - that's for a bus pass, lunches, paper, pens and pencils.

Several other students responded in a similar vein:

No [the financial assistance I receive] is not enough. We never even got extra money for books. Our cheque from Welfare is still $359.00 a month and it has not changed a bit. This is still the second month of school and we got GST this month, but I have no

extra money and I have to struggle, struggle, struggle, which is very stressful [and] which is not a good state of mind to learn. … to go to school for one semester, for my daughter and I, I think [we would need] an extra $300 to $400 a semester.

I have received money for a bus pass and day care subsidy because I am committed to being a part of this survey, but after this semester apparently I will have to make up the difference for day-care somehow. I am discouraged, because my rent is already $200 more than Welfare gives me. I am struggling—I don't smoke or drink, I can't afford new shoes for the children. All our money goes towards good, wholesome … food.

Because of the extra expenses, I am behind in my bills and I go without, making sure my son is cared for. I'm on Family Benefits and I have a 15 year old son. He's growing fast; he's almost six feet tall and still growing. Shoes, boots and clothing, he grows out of fast. I go to the second hand stores for myself and him. However, I can't always get what we need there. … I go to food banks too. When I ask [my social worker] for help for anything like a bus pass and glasses, I am told no, due to cutbacks and I don't qualify.

I will have to buy my own bus pass in January. That will be a financial problem for me.

I have had to buy books, paper, pens, pencils, binders, clothing, winter coat, boots, bus passes for two persons [son also going to school], lunches - I even had to buy my glasses. I have asked for help with all of the above, but was told no.

Several of the mothers in the study reported discovering that having children in daycare meant a whole set of additional expenditures which were not provided for in the daycare subsidy. Lunches had to be made, which entailed the purchase of different and generally more expensive food than the family typically purchased—and they had to be packaged appropriately according to daycare centre requirements, so parents found themselves having to purchase plastic food containers and lunch boxes. Dressing children for daycare meant having to purchase new (or new 'used') clothes and, since finances strictly limited the amount of clothing which could be purchased, there was more of a need for laundering clothes in order to keep children presentable. As unthinkable as it may be, several mothers reported that both they and their children were entirely unprepared for going outside in winter; before they enroled in the class (and enroled their children in child care) they had coped with the lack of money to buy winter clothes by staying at home and avoiding the worst of the winter cold. Many reported

being physically uncomfortable for lack of winter clothes and, at Site A, several applied for one-time 'crisis' grants for the purchase of appropriate clothing for themselves and their children. As the teacher observed of this group:

> *The main expense that they talk about (not rent or food) is the cost of properly clothing their children.That seems to be the thing they worry about the most and seem to have little control of in terms of cost.*

Their own journals describe some of the hardships:

> *My [one year old] daughter needed lots of new clothes when we started,because of all the supplies they need for day care. If we were still just at home, she could wear anything and, if it was very cold, we could stay in.*

> *If I received financial assistance to attend the program, I wouldn't be always worrying about next day's lunch and what would be the cheapest thing that I could prepare. I also wouldn't have to worry about my daughter's clothes and [be having] to wash some clothes every other day so that she can wear neat and suitable clothes.*

> *I don't have enough money for a pack sack even. Food is running out and I need footwear desperately. I am wearing damp socks now, and they are getting my feet cold.*

In some cases, students' financial problems were expressed in response to more general questions about problems and concerns which made it difficult for them to study or to concentrate in class:

> *Problems which make it difficult to concentrate in class? Yes. Sometimes I do find it stressful. If you do not have milk or food in the fridge, and you need to make lunch for your daughter. I get weak because I'm not eating well enough.… In September I will be going on a student loan and I just pray to God that I will have extra help.*

> *Since I am [in school] there are other expenses added to my normal expenses and I have no source to get this money which puts pressure on me. I don't have enough winter clothes and no money to buy any.*

> *I sit here worrying. It's hard to focus. … I'll have to learn to put my problems on the back burner.*

… I do have trouble concentrating because of housing problems.

The teacher at Site A attested to the general impact of financial pressures on the students' ability to do their work:

These financial concerns affected both their attendance and performance. It affected attendance when the students had to visit with their workers to obtain food vouchers or a crisis grant during school hours. It affected performance when they could not concentrate on their work because they were worried about outstanding bills and extra expenses. It will affect performance when they have to get part-time jobs to cover essentials like rent and food, while they try to attend school full-time and also be full-time single parents.

The level of hardship which many in educational upgrading programs endure, the sacrifices they are forced to make, and the lack of support available are, in many cases, simply astounding. Something as basic and as inexpensive as a bus pass can make the difference between a person's attending a program or not—several of the students in this survey expressed concern that, after the research project ended, they would no longer have a bus pass provided. As one Site C student wrote, for example:

For the time being, I don't have trouble getting to school because [the project] has given me a bus pass until December. After that, who knows?

The majority, when asked how much extra they would need in order to be able to meet their needs and better concentrate on their learning, stated their requirements in very practical (and extraordinarily modest) terms. Most estimated an additional $100 to $200 a month; the highest estimates of need amounted to no more than a few hundred dollars a term. In answer to the question of whether there were services which could be provided which would help them cope, one student wrote:

Yes, a bus pass for me and my son and maybe a student ID card. A student bus pass costs $46.75 x 2 = 93.50 every month. A student ID card with a picture would help with the cost of some things because with an ID there are discounts (on clothing, haircuts and other things). Yes, these things would help take some of the pressure off.

Another, whose husband's $9 an hour job supported the family of five, including three children under the age of six, responded:

> *The first one is child care, then a bus pass. If you don't have money, it is too difficult to pay for a bus pass. We need help with this situation if possible. … In January [when the project is finished] I will have to buy a bus pass myself.*

One of the teachers in the survey observed that she knew a couple who were obliged to go to school part-time so that they could share a bus pass—the woman going in the morning, the man in the afternoon.

The teacher at Site B described the situation of a student who experienced severe financial hardship, and who made great sacrifices, while he was a student in the class. He started the class intending to support himself and his wife out of his savings—having recently lost a relatively well paying job which he had had for many years. He found out shortly after joining the class that his savings had been lost, however, and was unable to get social assistance because he was sponsoring his wife as a new immigrant to Canada. He was obliged to find employment in order to support himself and his wife, but his minimum wage job hardly covered more than the monthly rent. He remained determined to continue his education so that he could secure better paying work in the future and, to this end, he tried to get the evening shift at work so that he could attend the class full-time. He was not able to arrange this but, with the teacher's agreement, he continued in the program—coming to class each morning for the first hour and fifteen minutes (from 8:30 to 9:45) and then leaving to go to work. The teacher describes his commitment and his extraordinary efforts to continue his studies in spite of the necessity to work at the same time:

> *He kept up with whatever we were learning, taking his work home to complete each day. He also negotiated with his employer to be off on Friday so he could be in class for the research project activities. Eventually, he was able to negotiate other concessions with his employer, including some evening and weekend work, thereby allowing him to attend school throughout the semester. … Throughout this period of time, [he] continued to search for other work.*

Student Supports: Social Agency, Family and Other Supports

Students were asked a number of questions over the period of the research designed to determine the extent to which they felt supported and encouraged to attend their upgrading program or, on the contrary, the extent to which they were attending in spite of a general lack or support. Those who were receiving social assistance or other public income support were asked whether they were encouraged by their social worker or employment counsellor to attend the program and whether the social worker or counsellor

had done everything they could to help them enrol and/or remain in the program.

All students were asked whether they were attending the program by their own choice or whether they had felt pressure (from family, friends, social worker or employment counsellor) to attend; students receiving public income support were asked whether they were obliged to attend the program in order to continue receiving financial support. Students with dependents were asked whether they had been assisted with arranging for the care of their dependents while they were in the program and, if so, whether they were satisfied with the arrangements which had been made. All students were asked whether these supports (or the lack of them) affected their ability to concentrate on their studies and their prospects for achieving their goals.

Social Agencies and Support or Obligation to Attend

The majority of students in the survey, whether they were supported by their own or family income or by a social agency, reported that their participation in educational upgrading was voluntary. Most were not compelled to go in order to continue receiving support; on the contrary, many had made considerable effort to get approval (from the supporting agency) to join the program. Most also reported that they had felt under no pressure (from family or friends) to go back to school. As one student responded to this question:

> *The pressure [to come back to school] comes from within. I really need to finish my upgrading to be able to pursue my career of choice.*

Another reported that she had, in part, found her motivation after she enroled:

> *I've definitely come to this program by my own choice because my education means so much to me now. I've actually realized that since I've been here.*

At Site A every student had been approved for the program by the supporting agency, the province's social services. The majority were strongly encouraged to attend though most were not initially obliged to, because they had a child or children under the age of seven years and provincial 'welfare to work' regulations exclude this category of social assistance recipient from the obligation to participate in training. In the case of several students, however, it would seem that participation became to some degree compulsory after they had taken the initial step and registered. One student, for example—the single mother of a one year old—reported that if she left the program she understood she would not get another grant to continue with her education. Another (the single mother of two

children) reported that, although she had sought out the program herself, she had to remain in it in order to continue receiving support: "If I back out now, they would cut me off". This student also reported that the 'welfare to work' program would not support her to get new skills, only to "update old skills":

> *My worker will not support schooling for new skills and, if I go to get schooling for new skills, they will cut me off and tell me to work. But they will pay for updating my old skills which I cannot do! It will not be enough to stay off welfare.*

In fact, this student was, at the same time, doing a correspondence course related to an occupational area which she wished to enter and was paying the monthly $40 fee out of her social assistance income. As the correspondence course could be seen to be contributing to the development of 'new skills', she felt she had to keep this information from her social worker.

The teacher noted that all of the students in the program were there voluntarily but, in the case of two female students, they were not there "entirely of their own accord"—that is, they had been forced to make a choice to go to school or work. As one of them wrote:

> *I was told that if I didn't attend [the program] or do something I would be cut off, so even if I get sick and end up not going to school for a week or two, then I don't know whether I'll receive my next cheque.That's not right.I am always worried whether I'll be able to eat next month or not.*

These two women were the only students reported by the teacher to lack personal motivation to attend the program:

> *The fact that they weren't there entirely of their own accord did have an impact on their attendance, performance and attitude towards the program.*

In fact, one of them stopped coming after a few weeks in the program and neither of the two continued in the college preparation program or in any other college program.

In addition to the material supports which all students in this class received (as documented in the Chapter 4), the majority had also received some amount of employment and educational counseling, either before the referral to the 'college preparation centre' or when they arrived. As noted in Chapter 3, the centre itself (a special initiative of the 'welfare to work' program) functioned to support career decision-making and access to other adult upgrading or training programs.

Many of the students, nevertheless, felt that they could have been better supported. As one wrote:

> *My social assistance program worker did not even tell me about this program, and wanted so much proof that I was in the program, I almost didn't bother.*

Indeed, the fact that she had a grade nine level of education but was approved for only eight months in the Adult Basic Education program would appear to confirm her feeling that she was inadequately supported.

The report on the social policy researcher's visit to the Site A class noted that a training consultant "had instilled fear regarding maximum funding, time limits, success requirements and attendance requirements, which put students under significant and unnecessary stress". In general, the student requests for additional financial support at this site were unsuccessful and, although—as noted above—several managed to secure a one-time 'crisis grant' for clothing, this was not without its price. As one student wrote:

> *I think the Ministry has caused most of the stress in my life. They don't seem to understand how much it takes out of a person to do their bidding. Getting estimates from clothing stores is a real hassle, even more so when you have children. Why not just give a cheque for a certain amount and give the Ministry a receipt?*

In the Site B class, where three of the nine students were receiving social assistance, all three reported that they had been neither encouraged nor discouraged by their case workers, with respect to attending the program. In neither of the three cases was there any obligation to attend.[2] The teacher reported that these students had complained that when they had asked their case workers about programs such as educational upgrading in the past, they were given no information. All had found out about the program they were now in either on their own or through friends.

None of the three receiving social assistance (all single mothers) was provided with support of any kind in order to attend, though they had requested it. One of them, for example, discovered after joining the class that she would need bifocal eye glasses in order to do the school work. As the teacher noted, the problem, which only became evident after she started school, was causing her eye strain and frequent headaches. After having the problem diagnosed and getting a prescription for appropriate glasses, this student

[2] The teacher noted, however, that this was expected to change in the very near future when a new provincial 'welfare to work' program became fully implemented.

approached her case worker to have the glasses purchased for her. Her request was denied. According to the teacher, the case worker suggested that she "sacrifice her phone and cablevision if she needed extra money". This was a municipality which had, until two years previously, provided supplemental funding to students on social assistance for the purchase of a bus pass and school supplies allowance; not only had the supplemental assistance been discontinued but, evidently, so had all support for educational upgrading.

Another student in this class had tried to get financial support so that he could attend the program full-time, but he was unsuccessful. No other student in this class was supported by a social agency.

In the class of adults with developmental disability at this site, all were receiving social assistance income and all been in the 'learning for independence' program for three years or more. None of the students was under any obligation to attend; neither did anyone receive additional funding to attend. No particular need for supplementary funding was indicated by the students themselves but, as noted previously, most of these students had their finances managed by others and may not have been as aware as students in the other four classes of the adequacy (or inadequacy) of their incomes. The teacher reported that she had seen evidence of hunger in certain students at various times in the past.

In the Site C class, ten of the eleven students were receiving social assistance income. Of these, nine were receiving additional financial support (in the range of $90 to $110 monthly) to attend the program, although one of the nine only began to receive the additional support towards the end of the Fall term. Students approved by their case workers to attend an educational upgrading program in this province may or may not be given a supplementary allowance. If they are given one, the actual amount of that allowance is determined by the individual case worker and, as the teacher observed, there is wide variation in the amounts which students receive. In addition to the individual allocations of supplementary funding, social services also provided an annual materials allowance of $15 to $20 for each social assistance supported student in the program[3]. Women with dependent children have access to provincially subsidized day care; the cost of public transportation is not covered.

Seven of the ten receiving extra support to attend the Site C program reported that they had been encouraged or advised by their social worker to enrol in the program and, although most said

[3] As noted above, this allocation was pooled by the community centre administration and the materials purchased with the fund were distributed to all the students in the Site C class.

that they had been looking for such a program themselves, several were not clear about whether they were obligated to attend or not. At least two of the students were under the impression that they had to attend or they would lose their income, but this was contradicted to some extent in other parts of their journals, so whether or not their attendance was compulsory remained unclear.

All students who live on social assistance in the Site C region must report their return to school to their case worker. The worker may permit them to go or may refuse them permission; according to the teacher, case workers can be "very unpredictable in taking their decisions as to whether they will allow an adult to take [an upgrading] course or not". She noted that this situation tended to put students in a very precarious position. Describing two students in particular, she wrote:

> *Carmen* and Michele* live off social assistance; their pursuit of education depends on the small supplement to their income as well as their [case] workers'agreeing to this pursuit.They live in constant fear that they will be 'cut', or that they will be 'refused',from one semester to the next. … They try to work harder and faster than the other students.*

She also described the situation of a woman who had been denied access to the program. The woman, in her fifties, was judged by the teacher as being able to "greatly benefit" from the upgrading course, but:

> *Her social worker told her,"If you can go to school,you can go to work". Not only wouldn't he let her come without giving her any extra [support], but [he] threatened to cut her off completely from welfare.*

One of the students receiving social assistance at Site C (a single mother of two young children) was refused additional assistance to attend the program. She reported that she had been discouraged from attending:

> *My social worker discouraged me but I am attending school all the same because I need it. … They didn't give me any forms, information, or financial support.*

What had made it possible for her to attend in the Fall term, without the support of her social worker, was the funding which the research project provided (to those who needed it) for transportation and child care. She had been in the class prior to the beginning of the research but, without the funding which the project provided, she would have not have been able to attend in

the Fall term. Unfortunately, the project's support provided only a brief respite; the student, who was a refugee, had her social assistance income cut entirely at the end of the term and was forced to quit the program at the end of the term. Her teacher described the situation thus:

> *The project … allowed her to return to my class from September to December. Now she is once again cut off from the rest of the world.This is enough to bring one to tears.*

According to the teacher's report for this site, access to educational upgrading programs for adults on social assistance has worsened in recent years, in the wake of social security reforms which have reduced income support and created new mandatory work programs. In response to decreasing job opportunities and increasing educational requirements for most jobs, she observed, large numbers of adults who lacked high school credentials had started to go back to school when they found themselves unemployed (and dependent on social assistance) in the 1980s and early 1990s. Due to the social security reforms and related policy changes, those numbers had dropped dramatically over the recent past. This, the teacher observed, accounted in part for the changing profile of Literacy classes and the virtual absence of native-born Canadians in many urban classes; it also accounted for a dramatic decline in the number of Literacy programs offered. She anticipated the situation becoming worse as the social security reforms become fully implemented as, under these reforms, social assistance recipients are being referred, not to educational upgrading programs, but to pre-employment training programs and low-skilled factory or manufacturing jobs. Her agency had already been formally notified of this change in policy. She expressed her pessimism about the implications for adults in need of Literacy education:

> *I think that all students who live on Welfare can be made to drop their education if their workers decide to place them in a workfare type of program. Few social workers consider that Literacy classes are necessary and of much value.*

At Site D, six of the seven students were receiving public income assistance but none was under any obligation to attend as a condition of continuing to receive their income. In fact, as previously documented, one of the six would be obliged to leave his upgrading program in the Winter term in order to apply for a more adequate disability pension. Another of the students was not receiving any income when he registered for the class, but was trying to arrange a training allowance from HRDC to support his participation in the program. He was unsuccessful in finding sponsorship from either HRDC or social services and actually spent some time on the street

before, with considerable assistance from the teacher, he was able to get social services to cover the cost of shelter.

Only two of the students were actively supported to attend the program. One had his Employment Insurance claim expire while he was in the class and was given a training allowance (under the HRDC 'reach back' program) to continue. The other received a 'reach back' training allowance based on an expired maternity claim. She was the only student in the class who received any additional support—in the form of a child care allowance—to attend. Both of these students reported that they had been advised by their employment counsellors of the program and encouraged to attend. As one wrote:

> *My Employment Insurance counsellor is great. She explained the program all out to me; she explained the work I'd have to do and she helped me with the babysitter. I honestly don't think I'd be in this course if it wasn't for her.*[4]

As noted above, however, neither this student nor the other who was supported by HRDC was able to continue their educational upgrading in January because funding under the 'reach back' program had been 'frozen'.

A fifth student who was receiving a disability pension was anticipating that the pension would be discontinued at the end of the school year and, though she would be far from finished her educational upgrading by that time, she had little expectation that there would be additional support for her to continue. For her, as well as one other student in this class, financial support for upgrading was something of an academic issue, however, since there were no full-time programs available at the level of instruction they needed after the research class ended.

Family Support

The majority of students in the survey reported that they had the full support of their families to go back to school. One young man expressed the view of many when he wrote:

> *Yes, every one of my family and friends are behind me 100%.They are very proud of the choices I have been making ever since I've come back to school.*

[4] The teacher at this site had a similarly positive assessment of the service provided by employment counsellors—and some thoughts as to the constraints they themselves are being forced to work under: "The majority of counsellors I have come to know are extremely dedicated individuals who work very hard to try and provide for their clients.Often,in this day and age, their jobs are as precarious as upgrading programs.As I explained to the students,in my former program I was in touch with the staff of HRDC regularly trying to get an extension and some of the people I was appealing to were either being laid off or transferred and yet were still working hard to help us".

The answer of one of the Site C students to the question of family support indicates something of the breadth of support which some of the students received:

> *My family encourages me. My children urged me to go back to school and my ex- husband helps me with mathematics homework.*

The teacher at Site B reported that the four single mothers in her class were very much encouraged by their children's support and pride. One of the students brought her children to her class on days when they had no school—according to the teacher, "so that they could see first- hand what their mother was doing in [her] school". All their children were interested to know what their mothers were learning in class and one student's daughter insisted on her mother's school work being included in the display on the refrigerator. In the class discussions of the survey questions about family support, this same student reported that one of the reasons she had separated from her husband two years previously was that he had discouraged her from pursuing her education.[5]

In the case of the student at Site D who was obliged to quit the upgrading program when she was offered nearly full-time hours at work, both her son and her husband had tried to persuade her to continue with her education rather than quit to take the work. The husband and son were both looking for work themselves and did not want her to sacrifice what might be her only chance at educational upgrading. Similarly, the only mother of a dependent child at Site D appeared to have an extraordinary amount of family support and involvement. Her aunt became her paid babysitter which, she observed, made leaving her young daughter much easier than it would otherwise have been:

> *I would find it very hard to come to this course if I thought my daughter wasn't happy with her babysitter, but I know she is so that makes it a whole lot easier for me to attend school.It's still really hard sometimes because, the mornings that she cries, I don't know what to do. But I just keep on telling myself I should go to school and, at the end of the day, I'll be home with my daughter.*

She reported that she felt her family all wanted to see her succeed and would continue to support her:

[5] Apart from this, there were no other reported instances among the survey group of spouses discouraging the students from coming.The teacher at Site D, however, reported that several of his former students had attended against the wishes of their husbands and suffered from it.One, he said,had dropped out because of this and another had quit twice but eventually returned to complete the course. The Site B teacher reported that she recalled two cases in which students had been discouraged by their spouses from attending. In one case, the (male) student eventually dropped out of the program;in the other case, she reported,"the student defied her husband and continued to attend school with her children's support".

My family and friends help me so much.They help me understand my work, they give me encouragement, they say I'm doing the right thing and they just help me along. My mom is so proud of me and it's the same with my fiancé - they're just so proud of me.They try to help me understand that going back to school is the best thing to do for my daughter and I found it really hard at first to leave her. I was so undecided about this course for the fact of leaving her. Now I've finally realized that this course is the best thing for me and my daughter and my fiancé, so that really helps but you have to have the support of your family. I don't think I'd be in this course really if I didn't. No one makes me feel like coming back to school is not a good thing.

Not all students experienced this level of support and encouragement, however. The teacher at Site A reported that only a couple of the single mothers in her class had support from their families; the rest, she observed, "were entirely on their own". As a student at Site D wrote:

I live alone with my children but I am self-motivated.

A few of the students (from all sites) reported ambivalent—and even negative—responses from family and/or friends on their return to school:

Sometimes I get mixed messages from family members. I haven't received much encouragement for being here from the outside world, but teachers and counselors in the school have been very encouraging.

My family makes me feel proud I came back to school,but my friend said that it's not a good thing to take small children to school.My children are small,I know it is hard.But I like to come to school.

Some of my friends are proud of me but some of them said you should stay home until your children are bigger.

The most serious case of a family failing to provide support was that of a young man in the Site D class. He had recently separated from his wife and was living at his mother's house when he joined the class. He was actually asked to move out because he had opted to go back to school rather than look for a short-term job. Although there is generally temporary farm-based employment in this region in the Fall, this student felt that it was more important for him to try and improve his educational qualifications (and his long-term employment prospects) while he had the opportunity.

The research class, which was the first Level 2 upgrading class offered in his region in a long time and would probably be the last for some time, represented an opportunity which he felt he could not afford to pass up. As a result of his decision to return to school, however, he was shunned by his entire family and, when he initially failed to get funding, was forced to live on the street for awhile. Unfortunately, though he was judged by the teacher to have strong potential, his attention throughout his sixteen weeks of upgrading became, by necessity, almost totally focused on survival.

Support for Families: the Special Case of Women in Adult Basic Education

Although the students were quite clearly appreciative of the moral support which their families generally provided, most of the female students faced particular difficulties relating to their family responsibilities which were not adequately provided for. In response to questions about problems and concerns which made it difficult for them to study or to concentrate in class, the majority of mothers in the study reported high levels of exhaustion and stress arising from their multiple roles as mothers, homemakers and students. As one wrote:

> *When I have to wake up so early, study hard,run from one class to another and then come back home and try to keep my family in their normal life (cook as usual and take care of my child, do the chores in the house), I don't have time to rest. … All these thoughts and things—and the stress of worrying about my future—cause pressures that really risk my health.*

The teachers also noted the strain which showed on most of the mothers as they tried to combine schooling with their other responsibilities. The teacher at Site C, in the course of describing one of the mothers in her class, attested to this general problem:

> *She sews all of her children's clothes. I have often seen her very tired in class. She often goes to bed at 2 or 3 in the morning. A lot of female students have late nights for the same reason.*

As the teacher at Site B noted, whether or not a mother is the sole parent, she is invariably the one who has to stay home when a child is sick or when school is canceled for teacher professional development days or bad weather. Those whose children were in day care for the first time found themselves having to cope with much more childhood sickness than they had previously been used to, as their children became exposed to a range of viruses for the first time. This caused a great deal of worry, particularly among the younger and less experienced mothers.

Absenteeism was markedly greater at the sites where there was a higher proportion of women with children at or below school

age. Whereas this did not present a particular problem for the students at two of the sites during the research period, it was potentially a serious problem—though for different reasons—at the other sites and at other phases of upgrading at all sites.[6]

One after another, a number of mothers in the student sample came to the realization that they simply could not keep up the pace without risking their health. The lack of full-time child care for the students at Site A meant that they had no time away from their children except during class; half-day child care also meant that they could not study as intensively as many of them would have liked or as they would undoubtedly need to if they were to be able to complete the program within the time limits imposed by social services.[7] And, although at Site A it was possible for the students to take advantage of the fact that their children were in day care to go to necessary outside appointments, this was not possible at Site B where students whose children were in the on-site daycare could not leave the building without taking their child. At Site A, the mothers had to eat their lunches during the last half hour of their own classes, following which they joined their children in a special mother/child program until the end of the school day. At Site B, mothers were obliged to spend the lunch period with their children and to pick them up five minutes before their own class officially ended.

> *Most of the students have [only] half-day daycare for their kids so,as soon as their classes finish,they have to accompany their kid home and do the chores for the family and take care of the kids. There is no time to review what they have learned or do homework and at night they are too tired,after all that,to study anymore which is another reason for stress.*

[6] At Site A, in particular, the program in which the students were enrolled during the research period, the 'college preparation centre', was especially attuned to the problems which new students might face in the first few weeks or months of upgrading.The centre's mandate was to make the college 'user friendly' to returning adult students and this included making allowances for mothers whose children were new to day care. There was no penalty for absences during the college preparation phase but,as they joined other, more structured classes,the students would come under more pressure to maintain nearly 100% attendance. Similarly, at Site B there was no penalty for absences and,since the class was self-paced,students could be away without jeopardizing their progress.When the students went on the next level(s) of upgrading,however, this could be expected to change.

At Site D, where the program was very structured and concentrated in a very short period of time, frequent or prolonged absences would inevitably compromise a student's chances of completing the work even if the teacher were understanding and accommodating. This was the case during the research period—the pressure being even greater than would normally be the case since the 20-Week program had been compressed into sixteen weeks.

At Site C, the situation was the most serious,though not during the research period when,because of the project's funding,the attendance rules did not apply. Normally, an absence of five days (for whatever reason) would result in a student being removed from the register. Although a student could re-register after a five-day absence, since class numbers had to be maintained throughout the term, one or more students being absent could result in the class being terminated.

[7] The teacher at Site A offered a somewhat different perspective on the day care issue than the student journals indicated. She reported that,while some students wanted to study more intensively, the pace at which they were able to work during the research period suited others.Some, she observed, were happy to have a less intensive period in which to adjust to returning to school.

[We get] no half hour for lunch.We have to eat while doing our school work and then see our children.Many people have mentioned they feel like crying at times when they finally get home.

I am unable to focus because I'm so exhausted. … I have no library time, no homework time.

I don't have enough time to study at home because I have three small children. I just learn in the class; it is not enough.

At Site A, full-time attendance was required as a condition of receiving daycare and one mother simply found the day too long—given that she had to start the day at 6 a.m.

I am finding school very difficult and would like to learn to focus more. I fall asleep on my books;being a mom of three I almost never stay on top of my homework! … I find the day is too long, but I will not get my daycare subsidy unless I am here full-time.

The only mother of a young child at Site D, in spite of having perhaps the highest level of family support, nevertheless found the dual role of student and mother to be challenging:

The only problems I've really had are learning to manage my school work and my home life. It's really hard because you can't tell an eleven month old baby, you have to wait because Mommy has her homework - you have to wait for your bottle, you have to wait for your diaper change.You just can't do that. So all that must come first and I'm stuck up late doing homework and I find that hard. I also find it hard if my little brother has the day off because I have to stay home and look after him.

Clearly, simple access to programs is not sufficient to make such programs truly accessible to many women; neither is support for the costs of tuition, transportation and child care sufficient to enable women to enrol *and succeed* in programs—though these are all absolute necessities, without which too many women are totally excluded. The voices of many of the women in the survey—many of whom have been quoted in this section—speak to the need for programs to be responsive to the varying situations of students. There is a real need, for example, for programs which are less compressed (the young mother quoted directly above, and the rest of her class, were expected to complete one whole level of Adult Basic Education—equal to three grade levels—in a mere sixteen weeks) and which allow for a range of scheduling choices, not confined to the usual choices of part-time (which generally means a very limited number of hours per week and a period of several

years to complete) and full-time (which generally means twenty-five hours a week).

Ultimately, however, the bottom line remains that, without child care provision, too many women simply do not have access to programs at all. Two of the Site B students attested to this absolute necessity:

> *I have two children in this child care and one in another daycare centre. If there was no childcare, I couldn't come to school.*

> *If I didn't have child care, I couldn't come to school. I am happy they [the school] have child care.*

Another Site B student reported that she had wanted to return to school (and get Canadian qualifications to resume her career as a secretary), but she had been unable to because of child care responsibilities. Only now that her last child had started school could she begin to think of her own future.

> *I didn't have trouble getting into this program. … My children are big now, but I had a problem before, because I couldn't get child-care. I was very angry about it. I could have finished school earlier.*

The comment of yet another student, a mother at Site C, pointed to the virtual certainty that her educational upgrading would end when the research project (and its financial support for transportation and child care) ended:

> *I have family obligations and I will not be able to attend school if the project does not cover my transportation and child care expenses.*

Supports for Learning: Programs, Facilities and Services

Sources of Information

One objective of the local research was to document some of the approaches to programming which exist within public delivery systems for adult educational upgrading as well as to describe some of the range of conditions in which these programs operate. To this end, the students in the survey were asked a series of questions directly related to their program, the facilities in which their learning took place and the services available. Teachers were asked to provide descriptions of the programs they were teaching—the types of materials and teaching methodology used, the degree of structure and the scope for flexibility—as well as the overall educational structure in which their program was located.

The questions relating to satisfaction with the program, as well as with the facilities and services, were recognized by the research team as potentially problematic questions for students. It was anticipated that many students would find it difficult to comment critically—in some cases because they would not have a basis for assessment and comparison and, in other cases, because they might be reluctant or fearful to be critical. The teacher's role in creating a climate of openness and trust was seen to be particularly crucial for these questions and the teacher research team spent considerable time discussing this issue and preparing for it.

Although the teachers did their best to ensure that students felt free to express their opinions on these issues, it is understood that students may, nevertheless, have been less forthcoming in their responses to these questions than to some of the others. In order that we might better be able to gauge this, the teachers were asked to comment on to the extent to which students' discussion of these questions reflected their own perceptions of students' levels of satisfaction; they were also asked to assess the degree to which their group of students might be expected to be critical or not.

The questions about the program, facilities and services were asked at just past the mid-way point in the research period—in Weeks 7, 8 and 9. It was anticipated that, at this stage, students would be fairly familiar with most aspects of their learning environment and would also have the confidence to form and express opinions about it. As with the other survey questions, however, student feedback on these issues was not limited to the weeks in which the specific questions were asked.

In Week 7 students were asked to answer questions about their level of satisfaction with their programs. They were asked, for example, whether they were satisfied with the learning materials they were using, whether there were things about the program which they did not like or would like to change, and whether they had made suggestions for change. In Week 8, they were asked to provide information about, and to give their opinion on, the facilities in which they were studying and the services offered. In Week 9 students were asked whether they were making as much progress as they thought they would when they began the program and, if they were not progressing as quickly as they expected, whether they knew why this was so. They were asked whether they were getting as much help as they needed in the program, whether they were able to spend extra time alone with the teacher if they needed it or whether there were other staff or resources available to students with special learning needs. They were also asked to think about whether they would be able to achieve the goals they set when they entered the program in the time they would have available to them.

In these three weeks, teachers themselves were asked to provide information on the program as well as the facilities and services and to evaluate their adequacy. They were also asked to comment generally on the progress being made by the group, any special learning needs which may have emerged, and the amount of time students would need to move on to the next level(s). They were also asked about the availability of services for special learning needs and the opportunities for moving from the group's current level to higher levels of upgrading or other training in their institution/agency or region.

The Learning Programs

The classes at the four sites utilized a relatively varied set of program approaches to adult educational upgrading. Perhaps the one which was most different in form and structure was the class at Site A; this was, in part, because it was not actually an Adult Basic Education class but a 'college preparation' program. Most of the students were preparing for the transition to a regular Adult Basic Education class at the beginning of the next term, but some were going from the college preparation program into further Second Language training and one or two planned to complete only the academic prerequisites for selected occupational training programs in the same college. The students were taking a variety of courses during this term including, for example, mathematics and computers; three were in the Second Language program. They came together with each other (and the research teacher) for the communications upgrading class and it was in this class that they participated in the research discussions and journal writing. No credits were awarded for this phase of their upgrading; there was no formal policy on attendance and no penalty for valid absences.

The level of educational attainment and literacy skills was widely varying, from a Grade 7 attainment to a partial completion of Grade 12 among the Canadian-born students; all three immigrant students had had post-secondary education in their native countries. Because of the range of abilities, and the centre's objectives of providing a non-pressured period for adaptation to college life, the program was necessarily individualized and self-paced. Each student had a contract specifying a variety of assignments they had to complete for this course—including, for example, constructing different types of paragraphs, writing essays, letters and book reviews. The choice of learning materials was up to the teacher and student. The student could choose to complete the required activities in any order as they saw fit. On a few occasions during the term, the teacher organized group instruction on specific topics as well. The project's research activities (discussion and journal writing) were incorporated into this course.

The Site A survey group was generally more inclined to express critical opinions than students at some of the other sites

were; however, their responses to questions about their program and their progress generally indicated a fairly high level of satisfaction. Since one objective of the college preparation program was to allow them the time to adapt to college life without the stress of having either their attendance or performance judged, there was little evidence of the kinds of academic pressures under which many students at the other sites were clearly working. As the teacher noted, this period of transition was very necessary for most of the Canadian-born students who were, as she described, "a fragile group". They were often absent for valid reasons—either their children were ill or they were themselves. Having their children in daycare allowed them to attend to outside appointments during school hours and they frequently took advantage of this. The 'down side' was that the relatively informal structure created an absolute need for strong motivation and self-discipline and, given the other pressing issues with which this group had to contend daily, it would have taken extraordinary effort of will to stay focused on school work without external pressure to do so. Absenteeism was an ongoing issue for this class, an issue which became worse as the term progressed; some students also struggled to find the motivation to really apply themselves to the work when they were in class.

For those students with a more self-disciplined orientation toward academic work—whose goals were already clearly defined and who fully appreciated the urgency imposed by limitations on their learning time—the lack of formal structure created a degree of frustration. As one of those students wrote:

> *… for some courses, there is defined instruction and you have to hand your work to the teacher on agreed time. In these course … it can force me to do better and progress. In contrast, sometimes there is less work than I thought.And I believe even the most self-motivated students need to have instruction and homework. I like it when my teachers ask me to hand in work at a defined time.*

To a certain extent, some of the differences in learning needs and preferences which emerged in this class were differences between the immigrant students and the Canadian-born students—the former (with a history of educational success) clearly articulating the need for structure and deadlines, the latter more appreciative of the opportunity to become accustomed to being back at school in a relaxed and non-pressured environment. The teacher reported, however, that several of the Canadian-born students had "lost their focus" toward the end of the term and a number were looking forward to the discipline of a more formally structured program. The process of pre-registering for the Winter term in November served as a "motivational factor" for many and several elected to enter a struc-

tured (rather than a self-paced) Adult Basic Education class where they would be expected to proceed at the same pace as all the other students. As the teacher noted, the group who chose this option "were excited about the 'paced' nature of the class and fully aware of the consequences".

Apart from issues relating to the amount of work and the degree of structure, there were a number of other educational issues raised in the Site A student journals. With respect to the physical organization of the class and the in-class resources and facilities, for example, there was general satisfaction expressed. However, there was a divergence of opinion on some aspects of class organization. Some students, for example, expressed approval of working at communal tables, while others expressed a need for more privacy. Some students found the relaxed atmosphere and the freedom for talk and discussion to be stimulating; others reported that the environment sometimes made it difficult to concentrate.

A minority expressed a desire to have a broader range of courses to choose from in their upgrading program. As one student wrote:

> *I think there should be more interesting electives to choose from than just the bland ones there are now to choose.*

In answer to the question of whether there were things they would like to learn which were not included in their program options, students listed such topics as history, geography and political science. In fact, the Adult Basic Education program at this site does offer the students options in social studies, history and geography—in addition to the more typical 'core' courses in language, mathematics and sciences.

The teacher reported that, when they entered the program in September, the students generally had high expectations about their rate of progress; many were disappointed to find, as the term proceeded, that they were not making the progress they had anticipated. She presented an insightful analysis of the issue:

> *Each student in the study experienced some kind of frustration with their rate of progress at some point in the term.The source of this frustration is multi-varied. Some were frustrated because of the self-paced nature of the program.They needed deadlines. Some were frustrated because the program is individualized; there are no structured, teacher-directed lessons. Some were frustrated by their own lack of focus and motivation.*

The transition to other college programs was automatic for the students in the college preparation centre and they could make

that transition whenever they felt ready. As they were already registered as students, all they needed to do was go through a pre-registration process which, according to the teacher, "practically guarantee[d] them enrolment in their choice of courses". For those who were making the transition to Adult Basic Education, the process was even simpler, since the two programs are directly connected and the teachers in both programs are aware of each student's preparation for Adult Basic Education.

At Site B, the students were enroled in Level 2-3 of the Adult Basic Education program, which was equivalent to a Grade 7-8 level of schooling. There are learning 'outcomes' for each level of Adult Basic Education, defined by the provincial education authorities. Within the parameters of these 'outcomes', however, there is scope for a fairly wide variation in learning materials and methods of instruction. The students in the research class did a considerable amount of group work and, though there was a range of literacy skills and educational experience in the group, the students expressed general satisfaction with the nature and pace of the work and confidence in their rate of progress.

Most of the students became focused at a relatively early stage in the term on preparing to write the high school entrance examination in December. Though, as noted, there was a range of educational backgrounds, they were all at a level of literacy skill to enable them to take on the adult high school program either at the end of the Fall term or within the next few months. The strong focus on preparing for this examination created a sense of urgency and purpose and, as the teacher reported, made the students somewhat impatient with the research project activities. Like Site A, however, absenteeism was something of an issue with this group—much of it, again as at Site A, related to family responsibilities.

One student in the class demonstrated a clear learning problem which was recognized at an early stage by the teacher, whose educational background included training in special education. The teacher was able to address her learning needs within the class and was also able to arrange for a formal assessment of her learning problems by the school board's Special Education Services. This student reported a high level of satisfaction with the diagnostic and teaching attention she received during the term (in contrast to her earlier schooling experience), but the teacher expressed concern that she might not receive the type and amount of learning support she needed when she moved on.

There was little feedback from the Site B group about their program apart from a general endorsement. The teacher at this site offered some explanation for this. She noted that most of the students in her class were not initially disposed to say anything

negative about either the program or the facilities and services. The majority, she observed, "felt grateful to have a program like this to attend, and this attitude prevailed during our discussion". This class also felt under threat that the program might close at any time so their sense of the adequacy of both program and conditions would likely have been strongly influenced by the thought that they might soon have no program at all. Another factor which may have had some bearing on the level of feedback from this group was what the teacher described as a general reluctance among immigrant students to express critical opinions; eight of the nine students in this group were immigrants.

The second class at Site B was a variation of the Adult Basic Education program, adapted to the needs of adults with developmental disability. Called 'learning for independence', the program integrates fundamental literacy and numeracy skills with social and life skills. The program has also incorporated some job training and practical employment preparation skills, but these are not core program elements. The students who participated in the research actually came together from two classes for the discussions and the journal writing/audio taping. All had been students in the 'learning for independence' program for a number of years and all reported a high level of satisfaction with the program. This program, along with the other Adult Basic Education programs, had been forced to relocate the previous September and, in the process, lost kitchen facilities in which students had been gaining practical skills.

The teacher reported that, in participating in discussions with the students on the survey questions, she realized that some elements of the program were based on assumptions about the students' lives (and, hence, about their learning needs) which were not correct. Most students, for example, had little or no involvement in the management of their finances—though key elements of the program had been based on the assumption that they did.

The Site C class was a multi-level class at the Literacy stage of Adult Basic Education. The program was individualized and self-paced. There is a provincial Literacy curriculum in place in the province in which Site C is located, and the teacher reported that fairly strict compliance with the objectives of this curriculum is required. There are formal examinations which students must pass in order to make the transition from one level to another. For the past several years, there has been an absolute limit placed on the amount of time students may spend at each level of educational upgrading—for the students in the Site C class, as for all students at the Literacy level, this time limit equated to approximately two and a half years of full-time study.

Within the parameters defined by the provincial curriculum, the teacher reported a fairly high degree of professional autonomy and, though the students were all working at their own level, group lessons on a variety of subjects relating to the students' personal needs and interests were planned and delivered. The teacher also reported that she regularly developed lessons on history and geography and other topics of general interest, and organized class outings and field trips of broad cultural and educational value. Students were encouraged to give feedback on their learning materials and, as the teacher observed, they had "no difficulty letting their likes and dislikes be known" to her.

The students at Site C presented a generally very positive assessment of their program and most reported an optimistic outlook for progressing. One of the few reservations expressed—by two or three students—was that there might not be enough time to finish the level. As with Site B, however, the teacher noted that the students were generally not inclined to express critical opinions. She observed that the majority of those receiving social assistance had not been able to find work and felt fortunate to have an opportunity "to continue their education … and so break their isolation". She also noted that, for the most part, these students lacked a basis for assessing their experience. None of them, she observed "had any sense of what an adult class was all about". As she pointed out:

> *Since they do not have a sense of what an adult class with full services might be like, they are [generally] satisfied with the conditions offered.*

It would also seem that students had some awareness of the constraints under which the program (and the teachers) worked and the limited possibilities for change. Students were asked, for example, whether there were things they would like included in the program. One student responded to this that he would like more computing because "I know that I will need it for the occupational course I wish to take". In answer to whether he had requested this, however, he wrote:

> *No, I have not asked because I think that it is impossible to include more since access to the computer room is quite limited.*

At Site D, the students were working at Level 2 of the (college) Adult Basic Education program, approximately equivalent to Grades 7 to 9. The program is highly structured—comprising a body of material in communications, mathematics and science which must normally be covered in a twenty week period. In the case of the research class, as previously noted, the lack of funding had resulted in the time being reduced to sixteen weeks. More than

at any other site, the pressure of time affected the experience of students in this class. As one wrote:

> *Some people need more time to learn.There is also too much to learn about and absorb in a short time. We are scared because we don't want to forget what we have learned.*

Student success in the program is based on the results of formal assessments; successful completion of Level 2 enables the student to proceed to Level 3-4 without further examination. The transition to further levels of educational upgrading is also dependent on there being a program available, however. In the case of Site D research students, the principal program-related concern expressed was, initially, whether they would be able to transfer directly from the Level 2 program when it ended in December or whether they might have to wait until the normal start-up time for a Level 3-4 program—the following September. As the term progressed, the concern became, more seriously, whether they would be able to enrol in a Level 3-4 program at all, since this program was ordinarily reserved for to HRDC-sponsored students. As previously documented, only one of the six students who participated in this class during the research period successfully made the transition to Level 3-4. Three others completed Level 2 successfully but were unable to find sponsorship and/or funding to continue.

For two of the students, the program duration proved to be insufficient and they did not successfully complete the material. At least one of these students was thought (by herself as well as the teacher) to have a degree of learning disability, an issue which was not able to be addressed in this program.[8]

In spite of the time pressures which came to bear on the Site D students from a very early stage in the term, they reported a generally high level of satisfaction with the program. Group instruction and the highly structured nature of the program created a strong sense of focus. There was a high degree of interaction among the students and between the students and the teacher. As the teacher observed, however, the time pressures make it difficult to depart much from the core curriculum subjects of math, science and communications. He noted that, although students generally demonstrate a need for basic social studies, this can only be incorporated into the program in a very limited way.

It needs to be acknowledged as well that, although this group of students generally expressed strong (and frequently critical)

[8] An update on this student,current at the time of writing, reported that diagnostic testing at a private testing agency had been arranged (and paid) for her by an HRDC counsellor. She was found to have a learning disability, but there were no programs available to her which could have addressed her disability.

opinions, any concerns they may have had about the program's form or content would likely have taken a back seat to the more pressing issue of whether there would be a program for them at all after the research period. There was a considerable amount of frustration (and sometimes anger) expressed over the organization of educational upgrading in the region/province and the general lack of access.

Facilities and Services

The questions relating to facilities and services stimulated more discussion and garnered more journal responses than did those relating to the programs. This should probably not be surprising considering that the students in the survey—in common with students in most educational program, perhaps—would have had little knowledge with which to assess their programs and little basis for comparison. The question of whether facilities and services were available and, if so, whether they were adequate was somewhat more straightforward. The survey was constructed to make this task easier as well. For example, students were asked specifically whether a range of services were available—library, cafeteria, counseling and child care. They were also asked to comment on the building they were in, as well as the classroom, in terms of safety and comfort, attractiveness, lighting and space. These questions were posited on the assumption that Adult Basic Education students ought to be able to measure the adequacy of their learning facilities and services against the same standards that students in other types of educational programs might. In this respect, the research questions stimulated discussions which might not have taken place had the questions been more open-ended.

The facilities in which the five classes were held varied widely, as did the services to which students could have access. Undoubtedly the best of the facilities were those in which the Site A class was situated. The building—one of a number at this college campus—was new, attractively designed and located in a beautiful natural setting. It was fully accessible to persons with disabilities. It housed a cafeteria, a bookstore, a bank machine, counseling, medical and financial (student loan and grant) services, a study 'help centre', and a special needs classroom. Adjacent to this building were the campus day care centre, library, and sports and recreation centre. Classrooms were spacious, bright and well equipped—the only complaint being about the (cool) temperatures. Students in the 'college preparation centre' enjoyed a particularly high standard of both facility and service—the class in which the language upgrading (and the research activities) took place, for example, was equipped with six computers with Internet access and a laser printer, a television and video cassette recorder, a coffee area and a reading area. Instead of desks, there were tables designed so that they could be arranged in a number of configurations. The teacher noted that, while most programs she had taught in the region had had similar facilities and equipment,

this building (and this centre) were the most up-to-date and the most comfortable.

The students at the Site A class were registered as college students and received student ID cards. They had the same privileges and enjoyed the same access to services as did all other college students—in this respect, differing from the students at the other three sites. The students at this site were clearly appreciative of their surroundings and the amenities. A sense of pride in being 'college students' and attending an obviously 'first class' institution is evident from the student journal responses to questions about their learning environment:

> *The campus is a wonderful place for education. I feel safe and comfortable in each part of it and it's really attractive.*

> *Our campus buildings are modern and new.We have trees outside our windows and move in between classes in an almost wondrous forest. We couldn't ask for anything more! The atmosphere here helps dramatically in our education—emotionally and physically.*

> *The classroom is very comfortable;the view is great out our windows; there are computers here.*

> *My child [in the on-site day care] loves going to Mom's school.*

> *The classroom is very comfy, there are lots of seats, tables and coffee, fridge and a telephone which is very much needed for business calls (appointments, etc.).The lighting is wonderful with just enough windows.An added bonus is the few computers we have to work on and make our final work essays neat and tidy.*

> *I really like the classroom.Lots of lights.There are no desks, just tables - so there's lots of group talk. But we're still getting work done.*

There was a drawback for these students with respect to the facilities and services, however. This was the fact that the daycare service was not full-time, which meant that they had little time in the college which wasn't scheduled—either in class or with their children. One student's account exemplified the dilemma which this posed for students. Thoroughly impressed with the college, she had written, "It [the building] is safe, clean, lovely, awesome, perfect". When asked if there were other services available, she had responded, "everything - good bus service, parking, health

services". But, on the question of whether services were available to her, she wrote:

> *There are special services for students who need extra help, but I can never come in at these times because my daycare runs out. And, yes, there is a library where students can work (but!), once again, I can't use these resources because I only have daycare until 12:30.*

Others responded similarly:

> *Part-time daycare takes away from me the opportunity to stay more in the college and use the library and computer lab (and do extra second language courses which I need).*

> *The daycare is great, but it's not full-time. I'm not getting any homework done. There are all these great extras on campus that could help in a big way if I had the daycare to take advantage.*

As previously noted, the daycare problem which these women encountered (and which potentially threatened their prospects for successful upgrading) was a function of a recent provincial government policy on access to daycare services for social assistance recipients. Whereas previously a supplemental benefit program had paid single parents going to school the difference between the provincial child care subsidy and the actual costs of child care, as of March 1997 this program was canceled, leaving parents forced to settle for a reduced (half-time) child care service or pay the difference (an average of approximately $180 to $250 per month) out of their basic income assistance payment. An added problem for the parents at the Site A class was that there were no full-time places available in the college daycare when they registered—so, for those who elected to have their children placed in the college daycare—full- time care wasn't an option even if they had been able to pay the difference.[9] It should be noted that the college made a number of scheduling changes and arrangements designed to enable the single parents to make the best use of the day care provision which they had; in spite of this, however, there was a general sense of frustration and real evidence of increased pressure on the parents as students during the period of the research. Further changes were made in the term following the research period; the teacher reported at the end of that term that the issue had been resolved to the satisfaction of the students.

[9] The project would have paid the cost difference for the period of the research, had a parent elected to place their child in a centre which could provide full-time care. However, the majority of parents chose to place their children in the college daycare, where they would be close to them, since they knew the project funding would not be there for January and they would be left with half-time care anyway.

Both Site B classes were located in a large 'adult high school' whose primary function was the delivery of high school credit courses. The Adult Basic Education program (along with the second language and special needs programs) had been re-located to this building in August 1997, the month before the research period began. The move had been a 'cost cutting measure' of the school board, in response to the pressures of reduced provincial funding and a pending school board amalgamation. The ABE and second language programs had previously been housed in a modest sized former school building dedicated to these programs and their support services. Prior to the move, there had been significant cuts in programming—provincially funded second language classes, for example, had all been closed the previous Spring and would remain closed throughout the research period. There had also been considerable upheaval among both the teaching and support staff and many had either lost their jobs or been relocated or reassigned.

The move to an adult high school represented something of a 'culture shock' for both the students and the teachers—quite apart from the inauspicious circumstances in which the move took place. For, although the building was large, well equipped and well maintained, they no longer felt as if they belonged. They had had to fit into available space at the new location and most of the Adult Basic Education classes were separated from the administrative offices and support services for the program by three floors. As one of the two teachers at this site observed:

> *It is a high school first and we in ABE have to adapt to losing our identity.*

This loss of identity was driven home every day when their classes were interrupted by announcements on the school's public address system—announcements which had nothing to do with the Adult Basic Education program, but which forced them to stop what they were doing for the duration.

The new location offered a range of services, some of which had not been available at the other building—notably, for example, a cafeteria and a library. There were other respects in which the move represented a loss, however. There was inadequate parking space, for example, which presented a daily problem throughout the term for the teachers as well as for those students who had cars; parking had been ample at the other building. The 'learning for independence' program was obliged to blend classes because it was no longer feasible to work in smaller groups as they had done at the other location. There had also been a cooking and catering component to this program which, for lack of facilities, was largely discontinued after the move.

The regular Adult Basic Education class was located in an 'interior' classroom which had no windows—and so, no natural lighting. As one student observed:

> *The setting takes some getting used to.It's not uncomfortable;however, it's not comfortable either.We have no windows in our classroom, but we do have two doors. … As for lighting, it could be better. I find it very dull; it makes me feel very tired.*

In fact, the two doors would prove to be a problem for the class. It was necessary to keep them both open as much as possible for the sake of air quality but, when they were both open, the adult high school teachers and students were prone to use the classroom as a short cut to the washrooms and coffee machines. This not only constituted a serious disruption to the class; it was also felt by both the teacher and the students to indicate a lack of respect for the Adult Basic Education group. One of the students described an incident in her journal:

> *I feel there's no consideration or respect for our class while in progress because students and teachers use our class as a short cut to get to the washroom and other classes.There was a student from another class who came in and sat down and started cutting paper.When asked what she was doing, she answered,"I'm cutting paper". She was then told,"You can't do that here." Her answer was, "Why not? You're not doing anything". She was then asked to leave and she did leave, but she left a mess.This makes me angry; it's like we're not there, because we're not part of the high school, as in Grade 9 and up.*

At the time students were asked to discuss the question of facilities and services for their journal, the teacher noted, there was a general sense that facilities were quite satisfactory. Indeed, there were several activities and services which some of the students were looking forward to taking advantage of. Towards the end of the term, however, the class had started to become aware that these services were not available to them.

The Adult Basic Education students had not been issued with student ID cards. This turned out to be not an oversight but a deliberate policy and, when one of the survey students went to request a student ID, she was told that she was not considered a student at the school. Those in the Adult Basic Education program, she was advised, were considered to be 'learners' and, as such, were not entitled to a student ID.

Not having a student ID meant that the ABE students were not able to use many of the services or participate in many of the

activities which they regularly heard promoted to the other students over the public address system and saw posted on bulletin boards—including, for example, sports activities, drama club, and career counseling. Even access to lockers was subject to availability, and Adult Basic Education students were only considered for lockers after all the high school students had been accommodated. But, as one student pointed out in her journal, the denial of a student ID not only meant that students did not have access to many of the services and facilities in the school; they also lost out on the financial benefits of having a student ID in the city. The discounts which many businesses give students on a range of necessary products and services could have helped these students (and parents) stretch their very limited incomes. She expressed the disappointment and frustration of the group when she wrote:

> *When I asked for a student ID card,I was told no because I'm not part of the high school. I've worked very hard over the last two years to overcome my fears in school and be part of it and, once again, I'm being treated as separate. All of [this] makes me feel disrespected and unimportant.*
>
> *It hasn't been until I needed something from the school and/or asked that I have found out that I may or may not have access to them.I assumed as a student in the high school,I had the same opportunities and access as the high school students as I consider myself a serious, hardworking, goal-setting, ambitious person, working and looking towards the future just like the high school students in the same school. It saddens me and p's me off that not only do we have to fight to keep our classes going,we may have to fight to be treated equal in the same school.Why? When I'm finished [this program],I'll be going to high school here anyway.*

In general, both the students and teachers in the 'learning for independence' program reported a more positive response to the move to the adult high school. The students had access to both cafeteria and lockers for the first time—and both were clearly appreciated. And, though the classroom was smaller than the one they had had at the dedicated Adult Basic Education building—a fact which, as noted above, had obliged them to adapt elements of the program—it was also more comfortable and more attractive. A few of the students would have liked to have access to some of the high school facilities and services which were not open to them, but they did not appear to feel the 'sting' of being excluded which those in the regular Adult Basic Education class reported.

The Site C class was located in an inner city building which had originally been a secretarial training institute run by a religious

order; it is now used (by the same religious order) principally for second language programs for the immigrant and refugee populations in the neighbourhood. There were two Adult Basic Education classes, as well as a second language program hosted by the same school board-community partnership, located in the building. Though funded by the regional school board, the three programs were located in this facility on a 'grace and favour' basis; there was no rent paid to the religious order for the use of the facility and the contract for its use was subject to regular review and possible termination.

The teacher reported that the building, although old, was in good condition and well maintained. Two serious drawbacks were a lack of parking (several students got parking tickets early in the term) and a lack of external wheelchair access. The three school board-community classes were located on the third floor of the building, along with two other classes run by the religious order. Students with handicaps were permitted to use the elevator, but the other students were not. The only available area for coffee breaks was in the hallway adjacent to the classrooms, where there was a soft drink and a coffee machine. This is where the students spent their fifteen minute break each day.

The classroom was quite small—so small, in fact, that the space between the teacher's desk and the blackboard was too small for her to sit and, as a number of students noted, the teacher had problems circulating around the room. The room was also too small, the teacher noted, for the use of a television. Students sat in desks which the teacher described as small and narrow.

The classroom lighting was adequate but the temperature control was less than satisfactory. When the room became too warm—which it frequently did—the only recourse was to open windows onto a very busy street and the noise level became a problem. As the classrooms were not sound-proof, leaving the door open was not an option because the sound interfered with other classes.

There was no library in the building; the teacher organized trips to the local public library, using bus transportation. There was no access for these students to the computer room in the building, as it was reserved for paying students. The students had two hours of computer sessions every fifteen days at the host agency's (the community learning and resources centre) facilities. Again, the students traveled there by bus.[10]

[10] It had been necessary for the research project to provide this class with a computer and Internet access in order for the students to participate in the Internet conferencing aspect of the research.By the end of the research period,however, the two Adult Basic Education classes at this site had obtained a computer, which they shared.

Like the ABE teachers and students at Site B, there was no sense of ownership and little sense of belonging at Site C; on the contrary, the ramifications of being 'temporary visitors' on a 'grace and favour' basis were manifested daily. Both teachers and students had to vacate the premises as soon as classes were over at noon. The students were not permitted to leave their books and other materials in the classroom because it was used by another group in the afternoons. The teacher had access to half a cupboard, half a filing cabinet and one desk drawer which she used to store both her own and the students' materials. Each student was obliged to share a locker (for the storage of their personal belongings) with three others.

It was not possible for the teacher to stay behind with a student (or students) if extra help or counseling was necessary. As the teacher's report indicated, if students requested to talk to her, she drove them to a coffee shop or other nearby location where they could talk. Students had access to a telephone in the teachers' room (which was also an administration office) but, as the teacher noted, it was not private.

The students' comments on the facilities and services indicate a general awareness of what they were lacking in services and amenities and, in some cases, the constraints on their freedom in this facility:

> *The building is old,the classroom is clean,[but] there is not enough space. … We can't leave anything in the lockers because it may be stolen.There is no place to take breaks. I would like to have an eating area furnished with tables and chairs.*
>
> *The building is clean and safe but I find that it is overcrowded. … There is no place to meet privately with the teachers. There is only one men's washroom. We are not allowed to move about freely … and we are not allowed to leave the building.*
>
> *There are four people per locker and we can't leave anything without risk of theft. There is no place to meet with the teacher or even to work alone.*
>
> *No,there is not enough space [in the classroom].It is very, very crowded and the teacher has no room to move around.There are enough windows and the room is well lit [but] there is a great deal of noise outside. We can never leave anything in our desks or in the classroom.*
>
> *No, the [class] room is not designed to respect our privacy. I cannot leave my books in my desk.*

When I get [here] early in the morning, there is no place for me to work privately.

In answer to the question of whether students could get extra time alone with the teacher if they were having trouble with a particular subject, one of the students replied:

No, there is no place or time after class but [the teacher] helps as much as she can.

Another wrote, in response to the question of whether she was getting as much help as she needed in the program:

No,we don't get any help in this institution.We need to talk to a guidance counsellor to shed light on the future and help us to avoid becoming discouraged. [The teachers] help us as much as they can, but they don't have the time. As I have already pointed out, there is no place to meet privately with the teachers after school.

And, in answer to the question of whether there were needed services which were not provided, another student at this site wrote:

Yes, a cafeteria,library, guidance counsellor, child care, computer room,[and] a place to meet privately with teachers and work on group projects.

The Site D class was located on the ground floor of a community college main campus building. However, the class was not a part of the regular community college educational upgrading program and the level of upgrading they were doing (Level 2) was nor ordinarily offered in the college. In fact, the room in which the class was located was not a college facility, though it was in the college building; it had been set aside for use as a 'community Literacy resource centre' which served as a library for Literacy teachers, volunteer tutors and students from the region as well as a volunteer tutoring site. As noted in Chapter 3, the Community Literacy Resource Centre staff had agreed to make the centre available for the use of the research class. There had been no other space available in the college building and, since the only funds available for this class were the teacher salary and student supports contributed by the research project, renting another facility was not an option.

The campus building was well maintained and offered a wide range of services including a cafeteria and a restaurant, a library, an on-site day care center, a student services division, a career counseling service, a gymnasium and exercise rooms, and computer

labs. The resource centre was well located in the building—in one of the main corridors and directly next door to the career counseling service. The room was large, well lit and well furnished. Being the literacy resource centre for the region, it was also well stocked with a wide range of learning materials which the students were able to use. Students sat at tables rather than desks; the tables could be configured in a number of ways. With only six students in the class, there was ample room and lots of working space.

Both the students and the teacher expressed a high level of satisfaction with the quality of the facility. As two of the students commented:

> *Our classroom is very cosy. I really like it.There are plenty of windows; it is a very nice and easy place to learn.*

> *We have six students in my class and we have lots of space, good seating, lots of windows, good lighting, and we have as much privacy [from each other] as we like.*

The one major drawback with the facility was that, like the Site C facility, it was not dedicated for the use of the class, but 'borrowed', as the Site C classroom was, on a 'grace and favour' basis. The regional literacy staff continued to use the offices which adjoined the resource centre on three sides; however, the fact that the class was in the centre meant that their work space was reduced. They were also obliged to rearrange their schedules to accommodate the class, as the normal activities of the resource centre (meetings, materials borrowing, tutoring) all had to take place after the group left the class each day. The teacher noted in the first days of the term that he felt "like a squatter". As he observed in his final report:

> *The students and I were never afforded the luxury of feeling truly comfortable in our surroundings and could never treat the classroom as our own. … We were in the middle of an office and frequently had people walking through. I was always looking over my shoulder to make sure neither the students or myself created more stress for the staff working around us.*

Another issue which affected the students in this class was that, like the students at Site B, they did not pay student fees and, therefore, were not given student IDs and not considered 'official' college students. Although the students at this site evidently did not experience the degree of exclusion which the Site B students reported, they were, nevertheless, affected. As the teacher observed:

They were never given lockers and at least once were barred from a computer lab because they didn't have student identification. It is amazing how much of an effect even a minor slight can have on the returning adult.

Conclusion

This chapter has reported the findings from the local research in respect of a number of issues relating to student supports. As has been documented, the types and levels of financial and social agency support varied widely from site to site and—within sites—from one individual to another. The overwhelming majority of students in the sample, however, reported a degree of financial hardship; in a number of cases, the hardship was extreme.

Although the majority of students at all sites reported a high level of family support, and several reported a reasonable level of satisfaction with social agency support, this was not the case for all students. Some were under a great deal of pressure—and continuing insecurity—directly related to the support they were receiving (or unable to receive) from social agencies. The majority of women were under considerable stress, trying to cope with the challenge of returning to education while having to continue to fulfill all the normal duties of their roles as parents and homemakers. Recent social policy changes—including cuts in social assistance rates and cuts in child care subsidies—have significantly increased the obstacles to their participating in educational upgrading programs.

While students at all sites reported a fairly high level of satisfaction with their learning programs, the survey questions relating to the environments in which they learn revealed a wide variety of standards in facilities and services—ranging from ideal (or nearly ideal) to seriously deficient. This section of the survey also raised serious issues relating to the integration of Adult Basic Education students.

This chapter and the preceding one have presented the bulk of the findings directly related to the experiences of students; the primary source for these two chapters has been the student survey journals. The next chapter, though directly focused on the employment conditions and working experiences of teachers at the local research sites, also contains considerable additional material relevant to understanding the students' experiences.

Chapter 6

Adult Basic Education as Work

Evidence from the Local Research Projects: Teachers

Chapter Summary

This chapter documents some important aspects of the working lives of teachers of Adult Basic Education in Canada,as experienced by the five teachers in the local research projects.The evidence presented here is drawn, in part, from the teachers' formal reports on the local research as well as their responses to a set of direct survey questions on working conditions. It also draws upon the picture of teachers' working lives which is implicit in their weekly journals and daily logs.Taken together, the body of reporting submitted by the teachers attests powerfully to the energy and dedication which is brought to this educational service on a daily basis. But their accounts are also testimony to the extraordinary challenge which Adult Basic Education,as it is presently organized in this country, poses to those educators who make it their vocation.There are many striking parallels between the struggles which Adult Basic Education students face and those faced by their teachers.

Introduction

In Canadian society, the terms and conditions of employment—including remuneration, job security and working environment—generally reflect quite closely the relative social value accorded the work. Importantly, the conditions under which people who provide public services are required to work are also a critical aspect of how the service is delivered. In documenting some of the conditions under which Adult Basic Education teachers work, this study has been able to shed light on the value which is implicitly attached to Adult Basic Education by those who organize its provision; it has also illuminated important aspects of the quality of service delivery.

But the study's enquiry into the working conditions of this group of Canadian workers was also based on the recognition that the organization of work is, in and of itself, an important social policy issue. The delivery of a service involves not only those for whom it is provided, but also—and equally importantly—those whose working lives are devoted to the delivery of the service. Too often, studies of Literacy and Adult Basic Education have not only ignored the conditions under which those who deliver the service work; they have also, either explicitly or implicitly, declared them to be unimportant. This study takes a fundamentally different perspective. It asserts that the working conditions of Literacy and Adult Basic Education teachers are important because they reflect the

conditions under which Literacy and Adult Basic Education services are delivered and the value which we, as a society, attach to both the services and the clientele; but it also asserts that the working conditions of Literacy and Adult Basic Education teachers (as a group of working people in our society) are important in and of themselves.

This chapter describes key aspects of the working conditions experienced by the five teachers who participated in the Study. Drawing on all elements of the teacher survey, their working lives are described—from the documentary evidence of their conditions and benefits of employment to the tacit information, which emerges powerfully from their weekly journals and daily logs, about both the nature and demands of the work and the relative value accorded this work by the institutions and agencies which organize it.

The Teachers

There were five teachers involved in the Study—one at each of Sites A, C and D, and two at Site B, where there were two classes of student participants. In the first week of the survey journal, the teachers were asked to provide information on their educational qualifications and teaching experience, with particular reference to their experience in Literacy and Adult Basic Education programs.

Four of the five teachers in the sample were women, a proportion which reflects the general Literacy and Adult Basic Education employment profile in Canada and, indeed, in most (if not all) other western countries. All five were fully qualified teachers with substantial educational qualifications and significant experience and/or related training in the adult education field. The teacher at Site D had had eight years of experience teaching and tutoring. He had taught for six years at all levels of the Adult Basic Education program and had also worked intensively (and voluntarily) with a special needs adult. He possessed degree qualifications at the Bachelors level (arts and education) as well as specialized training in Literacy and Adult Basic Education.

The teacher at the first Site B class had had six and a half years experience teaching at all levels of Adult Basic Education in a variety of settings as well as several years previous experience in counseling. Her educational credentials included degree qualifications at the Bachelors and Masters levels (arts and education), with specialization in Special Education, Guidance and Educational Counseling. The teacher of developmentally disabled adults at Site B had had seven years experience in the special needs adult education class and thirteen years previous experience in instructional and counseling work with developmentally disabled children and adults. She possessed diploma qualifications and was, at the time of the research, working towards degree qualifications. Her educational background

included both general educational and adult educational qualifications and specific qualifications for working with the developmentally disabled.

The teacher at Site A had had nearly five years experience teaching Literacy, Adult Basic Education and Second Language programs in a variety of settings. She had also had previous work experience in another province at both the college and the high school levels, including curriculum development for a (First Nations) high school completion program. She held Bachelors and Masters level degrees in arts, social studies, and education and possessed teaching certification from two provinces.

The teacher at Site C had had six years experience teaching in Literacy and Adult Basic Education, at all levels up to the high school level, in a variety of community-based settings including workplaces. She had also had twelve years previous experience teaching children with learning difficulties. She possessed Bachelors degrees (arts and education) with a specialization in special needs teaching. Her teaching credentials included provincial certification for second language training in both official languages.

Apart from their other teaching and related experience, the five teachers had, between them, a total of over thirty years of experience in Literacy and Adult Basic Education. This is remarkable for the fact that the thirty-plus years of experience had been accumulated in contractual work on a term-by-term basis for the most part. None of the teachers had held a permanent position in Adult Basic Education for any part of their time in the field. Nevertheless, they all described Literacy and Adult Basic Education as their "vocation" and each one of them reported that, after working in other fields or in other areas of education, they had chosen to continue in this work out of personal and professional commitment.

The Survey

As previously noted, each of the teachers completed a weekly Teacher Journal paralleling (and complementing) the weekly Student Journal. In addition, they all kept a 'daily log' in which they recorded the day-to-day experiences of the class, including their own experiences as teachers. The daily logs provide a particularly revealing glimpse into the day-to-day realities of the lives of both teachers and students. The teachers also prepared formal reports at the end of the Project and, as the final piece of their contribution to the Project, they answered a series of questions directly related to their working conditions.

Much of the teacher input into the survey, as previously noted, has provided the basis for the description and analysis of the

conditions experienced by Adult Basic Education students. This was one of the principal objectives of the teacher journals and the final report; but their evidence also provides a powerful commentary on the life of the Adult Basic Education teacher in this country at the present time. In some instances, the commentary is explicit; for much of the survey, however, the glimpse into the teacher's experience is indirect. As teachers describe what is happening in their classes—and in their students' lives outside of class—they also reveal something of the impact of these activities and events on their own lives, as professional workers but also as individuals deeply engaged with the issues and problems which affect the individuals who are their students.

Conditions of Employment

Perhaps not surprisingly, since it is dominated by women, the field of Literacy and Adult Basic Education has much in common with all work traditionally viewed as 'women's work'. Based on typical indicators of the social status of work (salary, benefits, working environment), this work is undervalued within the broader field of education and, more generally, within the realm of public service. Unlike any other area or level of education, for example, the use of volunteer labour (unpaid and frequently unqualified) as the primary deliverer of the service is routinely promoted, particularly at the 'literacy' levels of Adult Basic Education. The majority of paid work in Literacy and Adult Basic Education is part-time and contractual; remuneration is typically at an hourly rate with the minimum legislated benefits. Unlike education more generally, this work tends to be paid on a kind of 'piecework' basis. Classes start only when the requisite minimum number of students has registered and, in some instances, are subject to immediate closure if and when those numbers drop. Teachers are paid for 'contact hours' only—with 'contact' defined as active instructional time and not including time for student assessment and counseling, program and lesson development, professional development or any of the other duties typically associated with the education profession.

Salary, Benefits and Terms of Employment: Four Examples

The conditions under which the five teachers in this survey worked were, in all likelihood, better than might be typical of Adult Basic Education work. They were all working full-time during the period of the research—something which, in itself, is relatively rare since a substantial majority of Literacy and Adult Basic Education programs are delivered on a part-time basis. They were also all working, directly or indirectly, for public educational institutions so their working conditions were likely to have been more regulated than would have been the case had they been working for a private (for-profit or not-for-profit) deliverer.

Nevertheless, the conditions reported by the five teachers were far from what would be expected for educational workers in general and, particularly, for workers with their qualifications and experience. At Site B, for example, Literacy and Adult Basic Education teachers who work through the continuing education department, are contractual employees who are paid an hourly rate ranging from $15.50 to $28.80 an hour. The actual rate which an individual receives is based on a combination of education and accumulated adult education teaching experience; once the top of this salary range is attained (which can be at the start of employment if a teacher has had significant adult education experience prior to joining the school board program), there is no further opportunity for increase. They do not get a paid vacation period or statutory holidays but, in lieu of these, have 7% added to their hourly rate. The only other pay entitlement they have is sick leave reimbursement up to a maximum of 4% of the total salary for the contract period in which it is taken.

None of the teachers working in this department are permanent employees. They are contracted to teach for one term at a time; contracts may be terminated on forty-eight hours notice, however. They are not members of the teachers' union, as those who teach in adult high school programs are. They are paid only for the hours in which they are actively engaged in instruction, which is either 15 or 25 hours weekly. This means that any preparation for teaching and any assessment of students which is not done during class time must be done on their own (unpaid) time. One of the two teachers at this Site expressed the extent of the need for paid preparation time in her final report:

> *As a Teacher/Researcher in this project, I was allowed one hour of paid preparation time per day. What a luxury! While greatly appreciated, this hour could easily have been spent on the day-to-day preparation that I've previously done on my own time. Between regular preparation and the additional demands of the research project, the hour of preparation time was far from adequate and, as usual, work spilled over into the evening and weekend hours.*

Teachers at this site also have very limited access to paid professional development time. Among the few benefits they have are an entitlement to severance pay and eligibility for recall to available work. Teachers who hold a provincial teaching certificate may contribute to the provincial teachers' pension plan.

The two teachers at this site reported that these conditions are typical of Adult Basic Education work in the region with the exception of a very small number of permanent teachers at the local college. It should be noted, however, that the term 'Adult Basic Education' in this province encompasses only pre-high

school level upgrading programs. High school level upgrading programs have historically been funded by this province at twice the rate of funding for Adult Basic Education and those who work in high school level upgrading programs have enjoyed significantly better salaries and benefits than Adult Basic Education teachers have. However, a recent provincial policy change has cut the funding for adult high school programs by half, so conditions are unlikely to remain at their current level for those teaching high school level programs. What seems certain, given the direction of this policy change, is that the conditions for Adult Basic Education teachers are unlikely to improve in the foreseeable future.

The teacher at Site D reported that his salary, in the six years he had worked in Literacy and ABE programs in the region, had always been in the range of $20 to $25 hourly; but the funding base for programs really determined the conditions, he noted, and some programs in the region paid teachers as little as $10 an hour. All his six years of employment had been contractual, with no benefits provided. Contracts for teaching Literacy and Adult Basic Education, whether supported by federal or provincial government funding, typically pay only for the time in which a teacher is directly engaged in (in-class) teaching. As at Site B, preparation and out-of-class assessment are expected to be done in the teacher's own (unpaid) time. At the time of the research, this teacher was paid for 30 hours a week, all of which were scheduled as classroom time.

Part-time and contract Adult Basic Education teachers in this province are not unionized, although other community college teachers are. There are few opportunities for professional development, the one exception in the case of the Site D teacher being that he had had the fee for a provincial Literacy conference covered by his contractual employer in the previous year. There is no job security of any kind; teachers who work outside the (very limited) core Adult Basic Education program of the college are hired for the duration of a contract. At the end of the contract, they either go on to another contract or collect unemployment insurance benefits (provided they have had enough work to qualify) until another contractual job becomes available or their benefit entitlement expires.

In the Site A region, both school boards and colleges deliver Literacy and Adult Basic Education and, as the teacher at this site reported, the benefits and conditions of work vary considerably between the two deliverers. She herself was teaching in a college Adult Basic Education program during the period of the research but her position was funded by outside sources—not from the college's base funding. She was being employed on the basis of semester-long contracts and would only become eligible for permanent employee status if she was able to work in this way for five years. Teachers in college programs are initially paid on a 'per

section' basis—at a flat rate of just over $5,000 per semester. Provided the work is available, a teacher may work a maximum of eight 'sections' per year for an annual salary of approximately $45,000, which includes vacation pay and benefits. After teaching twelve sections, teachers move to the faculty salary scale. All teachers in college Adult Basic Education programs are members of the college faculty union and they have the option of being part of the employer-contribution pension and group insurance plans. They have 22 hours of teaching 'contact' time each week with paid preparation time in addition to this. At the college, there is a requirement that teachers spend one week engaged in professional development activities for each section taught; they are only paid for the sections taught, however, so the time spent in professional development (in the month or months after the teaching is finished) is paid by 'stretching' the total pay over a longer period. College teachers are also supported to attend conferences, and any direct costs associated with professional development activities are covered by the college; permanent Adult Basic Education teachers have an educational leave entitlement.[1]

The Site A teacher reported that, because she was employed on the basis of one-semester contracts, she has no job security at all. She is laid off at the end of each contract and only rehired if other funding is forthcoming. Hiring for contract positions is done on the basis of seniority. As of June 1998, the Site A teacher was laid off and, like the majority of teacher participants in the study, had applied for unemployment insurance benefits to help carry her over until further work became available. She reported that job security was even more precarious in school board programs where teaching contracts may be terminated without notice if student enrolment drops below the minimum level.

The teacher at Site C reported that full-time Literacy and Adult Basic Education teachers in the public education system in her region (and province) are paid on the basis of an annual salary which is based on educational qualifications and years of experience.[2] Part-time teachers (that is, those who have less than 15 hours a week of direct contact with students) are paid at an

[1] The teacher at this Site had also recently worked in a school board Adult Basic Education program in the region. Based on this experience, she was able to provide some information on the conditions and benefits of employment in school board programs as well. In contrast to the college, school boards pay an hourly rate of $38.88 for a maximum of 25 hours a week, which includes vacation pay and benefits. Some Adult Basic Education teachers employed by school boards are members of the provincial teachers' union, but not all are; they have access to group insurance, although at only 75% coverage. There is no paid preparation time; full-time Adult Basic Education teachers teach the full 25 hour week for which they are paid. School boards also generally make fewer provisions than colleges do for professional development for Adult Basic Education teachers; there is no educational leave entitlement.

[2] As noted in Chapter 3, about 15 percent of Literacy programming in this province is delivered by voluntary organizations with no links to the public education system. These organizations are grant-funded by the provincial government—generally at a small fraction of the amounts provided school boards for the provision of the service. The conditions and benefits of employment in the programs which they operate are not regulated in any way by the provincial government except through 'labour standards' legislation; neither is there any regulation of the qualifications for teachers. By contrast, this province has specified more rigorous (and more rigid) qualifications criteria for teachers in school-board delivered Adult Basic Education than any other province in the country.

hourly rate of $36.04 with no other benefits. All teachers, whether part-time or full-time, are members of a union. There is no paid preparation time; in the case of full-time teachers, for example, all 27 hours a week are assigned—20 with students in the classroom and the remaining seven as determined in any given period by the school principal. These seven hours are typically assigned for student assistance and counseling, special projects, research and other such duties. The scheduling of full-time teachers in this manner is province-wide. There is regular professional development time scheduled for Adult Basic Education teachers in this province as well—in the case of the Site C teachers, one 3-hour professional development session a month (scheduled at the beginning of the year and based on teacher input) had been the norm but it seemed that this arrangement might have been coming to an end at the time of the research.

Less than 10 percent of the Literacy and Adult Basic Education teachers in this province have permanent jobs; neither the teacher involved in the research at Site C nor any of her colleagues were permanent. Their contracts can be terminated by the school board at any time during the term if there is an insufficient number of students registered and, more recently, if the number of students drops below the minimum at any point in the term or if average attendance falls.[3] The loss of jobs as a result of such closure does not take account of seniority; the person whose class numbers fall below the minimum loses his or her job. At the end of the teaching year (end of June), teachers are laid off and, if they have had enough work during the year, may get unemployment insurance income. This means, of course, that although they may have worked an entire academic year, they are unable to take any vacation. While seniority is the basis for employment decisions generally throughout the school board region, a special agreement has been reached between the union, the school board and the contracted community agency in the case of Site C which allows the community agency to opt out of the union's seniority provisions. This is justified on the grounds that community centres or agencies do not want to have frequent turnover of staff. This, according to the Site C teacher, has some advantages for the teacher in place at a site since they cannot be displaced by senior teachers who are laid off from other sites; it also has disadvantages, however, since it doesn't provide the seniority protections which the union contract provides other members, and the security of an individual's job is much more dependent on the relationship between the teacher and his or her employer.

[3] Up to 1997,this province reimbursed school boards for the number of students in a program on the basis of the number in attendance on the first complete week of every month.Any student who was present in that first week was considered to be present for the whole month unless he or she had been absent for five days,in which case they would have been removed from the register. Under current policy, however, attendance is documented for every hour of every day and school boards are reimbursed for only the actual hours in which a student is in class.

Job (In)Security

As the preceding section documented, none of the five teachers in the Study had a 'permanent' job, though they had all been working continuously in full-time Adult Basic Education (most of them for the same employer) for at least four years. To say that they did not have a permanent position does not convey the full extent of their employment insecurity, however. For all but one of the five teachers, the spectre of imminent job loss loomed throughout the research period.

In the provinces in which Sites C and D were located, Adult Basic Education programming had been significantly reduced over the previous few years. At the Site C agency, for example, the Literacy teaching staff had declined from 40 to 18 since 1992. At Site D, the only Adult Basic Education program remaining in the region at the time of the research—apart from the research class itself, which was funded by the project—was the college's HRDC-sponsored program. This program accommodated only 20 students and, as noted in Chapter 3, did not employ dedicated Adult Basic Education teachers. During the research period, there were suggestions that even this minimal provision might be axed in the near future as HRDC withdrew entirely from 'seat purchases' in the college.

At Site B, both Adult Basic Education and Second Language programming had declined significantly in the year prior to the beginning of the research period and both of the ABE classes which participated in the Study faced the prospect of closure during the course of the academic year. Although the program for adults with developmental disability had been assured of funding for the next academic year before the end of March 1998, the regular Adult Basic Education program was still in the process of seeking provincial government funding at the time of writing of this report (July 1998). Under new funding regulations in this province, program funds will be granted on the basis of three-year contracts subject to the submission of annual 'business plans'—with no distinction being made between public educational institutions and voluntary organizations. Such a policy has real implications for deliverers' capacity for long range planning and it is likely to preclude entirely the establishment of permanent, full-time teaching positions.

The daily logs of all five teachers attest to the pervasive sense of insecurity which affected each of them throughout the term. At Site D, for example, even as the teacher worked to ensure that the students would have a program to continue in when the Fall term ended, he was preoccupied with the question of whether there would be a program (and work) for himself at the end of the research period. His daily log entry for December 15, the last week of the research period, expresses his understandable discouragement at the combination of his poor employment prospects and the failure to secure a transition for his students:

> *Usually when I reach the end of a program I am full of mixed emotions. I am looking forward to a break but anxious about the future and its uncertainty. It is strange after all my training and various jobs to find myself working in such a precarious job with no benefits, etc. In other courses, the sense of accomplishment from knowing that the students are moving on to better things was a really positive and rewarding part of closure. Unfortunately, I am being deprived of that here. Having to sit and deal with students' frustration these last few weeks has really been depressing and I am very stressed and discouraged.*

At Site C, the teacher's log recounts a daily struggle to ensure that student were not unnecessarily prevented from coming to class, as five days of absence would get them taken off the register and potentially jeopardize the continued existence of the class. Personal and family crises, surgery and hospital stays, disputes with landlords and problems with social services—all gave rise to anxiety for both the student affected and the entire class. At all times, the onus was on the teacher to help students resolve problems and her efforts in this regard frequently carried over into the evenings and weekends. Teachers were also ultimately responsible in this region for ensuring that the classes were filled in the first place. As the Site C teacher reported, for example, they regularly participated in "open house events, corn boils, evening socials and other local activities on weekends and evenings" as a means of making the public aware of their programs. Adult Basic Education teachers, she observed, "must show a lot of ingenuity in order to advertise their classes, especially at the beginning of the term, or when student numbers are lower than required".

In addition to the threat of the class being closed due to a fall in numbers, the 'community partnership' programs in this region (of which the Site C class was one) were under continuous threat because of the school board's lack of support for the rental of facilities. The Site C class was itself, as previously noted, a 'non-paying guest' of a community 'partner' and there was an ongoing concern that this particular 'partner' would not renew the contract:

> *The prognosis for next year, concerning a contract renewal, is very poor; the major difficulty [of the agency contracted by the school board to organize community programs] is to find partners [who will provide space free of charge]. There are three teachers who are facing similar difficulties next year, due to [the school board's] refusal to continue financing the rental for the building where their classes are located.*

It was perhaps at Site B, however, that the threat of imminent program closure was most serious and the teachers' anxiety most palpable. In early November, the possibility of the program closing for good at Christmas was being talked about by all the staff. In a November 6 entry in her daily log, the teacher wrote:

> *There's a real sense around here that our program is in imminent danger. [The program manager] is away for an undetermined length of time (one week? two weeks?) and there is much speculation about why. Without her at the helm, we feel pretty anxious. Rumours abound as to the future of this program beyond Christmas …. Also, the [research project team] teleconference has been canceled today. I guess it's a telling reflection of the state of things - when [the project staff person] told me it was canceled, I immediately thought, "Oh, no. Now the research project is in trouble!" Is It?*

The daily log entries of the other teacher at Site B—as funding for the program for developmentally disabled adults was axed and, a few days later, reinstated—bear eloquent testimony to the brutality of this constant state of insecurity:

> Friday, March 13,1998: *I am not usually superstitious, but today has brought very bad news. We started off so well, setting up and completing our (work experience) job. Two students who were away yesterday want to get involved as well so I show them what to do. These are the lowest functioning in the class but they do an amazing job. Our class is buzzing with activity. … Before break [the manager] tells me there is no funding for our program past March 31. I am numb. The hardest thing for me is to go back into the classroom. It is interesting how my body can go through the motions while my head is reeling.… Everybody leaves on a happy note and we tell them to have a good [March Break] holiday. Before noon [the manager] breaks the news to Mary* [the other teacher in the class]. It is almost too much for her to hear. She started these classes twelve years ago. … I'm worried about her. [She] left visibly upset . … I thought [she] would call me this afternoon but she doesn't. It's almost as if, if we don't talk about it, it may not happen. I know it will be a long week. I wish the March Break was over.*
>
> Wednesday, March 25, 1998: *Oh, Happy Day! [The Manager] secured funding for one whole year today. We were so relieved and told the students school would continue. I have potentially lost three of my students because of the uncertainty. Our students gave [the manager] flowers and gave her a round of cheers and applause. Joan* [a student] gave a little speech and we started*

to make soup and cheesecake for our celebration tomorrow. I was so tired I didn't look at the research.

Thursday, March 26, 1998: *The mood was one of relief today. Now we can start planning for the next semester. I'm feeling battered and bruised and somewhat reluctant to breathe a sigh of relief. Staff and teachers were offering their congratulations and good thoughts.*

Ironically, job insecurity also frequently obliges Literacy and Adult Basic Education teachers to take on work over and above full-time hours in order to ensure that they miss no opportunities or to provide a cushion against future unemployment. Such was the case with the Site A teacher during the period of the research. When a teacher in another department went on sick leave, a supportive supervisor encouraged her to take that teacher's assignment in addition to her own full-time assignment; this would help her gain a broader experience and increase her chances of full-time employment in the next semester when the research project would have finished. With a sense of resignation, she observed in her final report:

So I took on the extra work.This is the reality of the working life of a Literacy Instructor.You live contract to contract with no guarantees and little job security because funding for many programs is temporary.

Not surprisingly, she was reporting exhaustion at the end of the term. In her daily log, she had written:

So I have to stress myself out and spread myself thin in order to be able to take advantage of opportunities before the need arises.

As it turned out, she was fully employed in the Spring semester and the overwork in the Fall had been unnecessary. Because it had put her into another tax bracket, she estimated that it has also only netted her an additional two to three hundred dollars.

In the semester following the research period (Winter 1998), each of the five teachers still had a job, but the issue of long-term employment insecurity had not been resolved for anyone. As of April 1998, one of the two teachers at Site B had assurances that the program in which she worked would be funded for the following year; but, as of July 1998, the other was still awaiting news about provincial government funding for her program for the coming year. As noted above, continued funding would be subject to annual review by the provincial government, thus effectively eliminating any prospect for their attaining 'permanent' status

as Adult Basic Education teachers. Also, since the school board which employed them was in the process of amalgamating with another large board, there continued to be a high degree of instability, and the security of individual teaching and administrative support staff in the continuing education department was still very much up in the air. As one of the teachers at this site wrote:

> *The teaching staff feel demoralized and anxious.These are dedicated professionals who find their work genuinely rewarding. Given the choice of working elsewhere or continuing on in this program, most teachers would prefer to remain in their current jobs. However, the lack of security has eroded the normally high morale and sense of camaraderie among teachers. There is no system of seniority in our organization, so it is very difficult to predict who will lose their jobs in the event of cutbacks. For many, this job represents the sole or primary source of household income. In order to guard against this loss of income, it has become necessary to look for employment elsewhere, "just in case". It is very difficult to maintain one's professional focus while secretly looking for work elsewhere, or worrying about whether or not one will still have a job in two weeks or two months.*

At Site D, the teacher had managed to get another term's work after the research period but, as of June 1998, his prospects for future work in Adult Basic Education seemed poorer than they had in several years. He was advised by the program manager that, because of the low likelihood of future work in this area, he should investigate the possibility of retraining. His decision, a few years previously, to return to his native province and pursue a career in Adult Basic Education had not been taken lightly and the realization that he had probably come to the end of that career, after having invested so much of himself in it, was quite clearly painful for him. Anticipating the final layoff at the end of the Fall term, he had written in his daily log in December:

> *It is strange to come so close to the 'Golden Fleece' of upgrading jobs and now be heading back out onto the street.I know that I came to this profession late in life, as many upgrading teachers do, but it really makes it hard to look positively at the future when you are 45 years old and drawing unemployment. Oh well, another bond between teacher and students.*

The Site C class continued into the Winter term though, as noted above, there had been real uncertainty as to whether the community 'partner' would continue to provide the classroom space after December. Although the teacher had feared that she might have no class after December, she was employed until the

term ended in June, after which she applied for unemployment insurance benefits and started to worry about whether there would be a job in September. In the last pages of her final report, she described her return to the province which she had left 15 years previously and her struggle, on her return, to build a career in adult education. She trained as a Literacy volunteer, returned to university to study both English as a Second Language and French as a Second language, worked as a supply teacher with the municipal school board and, in this way, eventually found a position in the school board-community program. But, after six years in this program, things were still very precarious for her. She wrote:

> *I was fortunate. I fought, I won, and I kept on. I am still fighting,but I am more tired.I have 20 years schooling but no guarantee of employment for the next semester. But,when I am in class, I know what my students are going through because I haven't forgotten that I have lived it.I am still fighting and I want them to learn to keep fighting to win.*

Teacher, Counselor, Advocate: The Challenge of Adult Basic Education

Although it is rarely acknowledged in the organization for its delivery, Adult Basic Education is perhaps the most challenging area of educational service. Those who return to acquire basic literacy skills or gain basic educational credentials as adults invariably have greater educational needs than students in most other areas of education. They have generally had some kind of problem with learning or with social adjustment to school in their youth and many carry the experience (and the fear) of failure with them to the adult upgrading class. A high proportion have some degree of learning disability which, in many cases, can only really be properly addressed by formal identification and specialized instruction. Many others left their initial schooling without completing because of a myriad of personal, family and social problems—problems which are frequently still present when they return to school as adults.

For perhaps the majority, the lack of education has itself translated into a lack of opportunity throughout their adult lives, and daily life is a struggle for survival against poverty. The majority of students who participated in this study carried this struggle to school with them every day; the teacher's challenge was not only to ensure that they were successful this time around in their schooling, but to do this in spite of the enormous barriers which constantly threatened to undermine the efforts of both students and teachers.

Little Provision for Meeting the Range of Student Needs

In spite of the fact that Adult Basic Education students face such daunting challenges, there was little provision made for their special needs in the majority of classes which participated in this study.

Only Site A provided an array of counseling services, including personal and career counseling, as well as access to educational support outside of class time. As documented in the previous chapter, however, the lack of full-time child care somewhat restricted access to college activities and services for several students and, in spite of the existence of support services, the teacher at Site A found herself filling a variety of roles. As she observed in her daily log:

> *A Literacy Instructor is a teacher first and foremost,but the students view you as the most approachable social worker they've ever had. I am not a social worker, nor a counselor, although I am constantly thrown into that role.*

At the other three sites, most of the needed services were simply not provided. At Site D, for example, although one student demonstrated clear evidence of learning problems and another appeared to have significant learning difficulty, there was no avenue for formal diagnosis within the college. Indeed, even if their problems had been diagnosed, the nature of the program they were enroled in meant that their special learning needs could not have been accommodated. Yet this was the only full-time program option in the region—and it was the first such opportunity to study at less than high school level in some time. The onus for meeting these students' needs, within the constraints of a program which was clearly inappropriate both in terms of content and duration, inevitably fell on the sole teacher. Several students in the Site D class also encountered other non-educational problems during the term—problems which, in the absence of counseling services, the teacher was obliged to address.

At Site B, the one student who demonstrated a learning problem and who also had serious personal problems was fortunate in that her teacher had a background in both special education and counseling. The teacher was able to identify the existence of a learning problem and to arrange (informally) for the adult high school's educational counsellor to conduct diagnostic testing. She was also able to use her counseling skills throughout the term to help the student cope. The availability of specialized instruction and counseling had been a matter of luck for this student, however, and the teacher's final report underlines the lack of systematic and organized provision for such students:

> *Jill*, with her learning disability and myriad of personal problems, may be at risk to disappear from this program. She required much attention from me and a wide margin of understanding on the part of her classmates to make it to the end of the semester.This is a case where it will be important to maintain a high degree of consistency in instruction and handling in the Adult Basic*

Education program.While every teacher on staff in this program is both qualified and experienced, some teachers feel inadequately trained to deal effectively with learning disabled students. It was a happy coincidence that Jill was placed in my class in September, and that I was able to use my special education training to recognize and address her disability. It was also fortunate that we were able to utilize the school board's Special Education Services to have her assessed formally. Had this program not been part of [the school board], an assessment of this nature may have been out of the question.

At Site C, the teacher was on her own with the students—with only the materials she could store in the very limited storage space available. Her class was multi-level and there were many learning, personal and social problems; yet there was no access to counseling of any kind—except, in the case of career counseling, by a specially arranged visit of a counselor to the community centre. There was not even a place in which the teacher could talk with the students in private if, for example, additional teaching or counseling were needed. On many occasions she was obliged to deal with students' problems in her own time and away from the school. As previously noted, if students requested to talk to her alone (or demonstrated a need to do so), she would drive them to a nearby coffee shop or other public place where they could sit and talk.

These problems—the lack of diagnostic and remedial services in spite of the almost inevitable presence of learning disability, and the lack of professional counseling in spite of the fact that students faced serious personal and social crises on an almost daily basis—affected the teachers' working lives virtually from the first day of term. They were inevitably called upon to be counselors and advocates and to try and address the full gamut of learning needs in their classes, largely unassisted. Yet, all of these demands had to take a back seat to the pressure of time. For, with the exception of the Site A class[4], and the class of developmentally disabled adults, the students who participated in the study were under a great deal of pressure to do as much of the program work as possible in the time available. At Site B, the students began to feel the pressure of time in early October when rumours first began circulating that there would be no Adult Basic Education program after December. The majority of students had their sights set on moving on to the adult high school program and, when it looked as if there would be no further Adult Basic Education program, there was some

[4] This is not to say that time was not a factor for the Site A students;on the contrary, the majority were (or would be) working under real time constraints,as they were being sponsored by social services.During the term in which the research took place, however, they were in a special program designed to help them adapt to going back to school.They were not accumulating credits and,consequently, perhaps felt less immediate pressure of time than they might otherwise have.This would have changed at the beginning of the next term when they all entered credit programs of one type or another.

urgency to qualify for transfer in January if possible. All but one member of the group, consequently, became very preoccupied with preparing to write the high school entrance examination held in December. Several began to look upon the research exercises (group discussions and journal writing) as an interference and an unwelcome distraction. Since this was a multi-level class—including, as noted, one student with a definite learning disability—the single focus of the majority served to increase the challenge to the teacher of ensuring that individual learning needs were met.

At Site D, the pressure of time was perhaps greatest; the students were in a 'pressure cooker', required to complete the equivalent of two to three grade levels in a mere sixteen weeks. The challenge would have been formidable if they had all started at approximately the same level of skill; as it was, their literacy skills and educational experience varied considerably. In contrast to the typical Level 2 program in this region, several had been accepted in spite of the fact that their (tested) reading ability was lower than the norm for this level. Two of the six students, as noted, had a degree of learning disability which really warranted specialized assistance. Yet, this myriad of issues notwithstanding, the teacher's primary responsibility was to cover as much of the material as possible in order to ensure that those students who were capable of passing the examinations at the end of the sixteen weeks would do so. As the teacher noted, the pressure on both the students and himself, and the resulting anxiety, was intense:

> *Because [the program] was short,there was more pressure on both the students and myself to move at a faster pace. It is hard to appreciate the anxiety the students feel when time is running out and they are close to finishing. It is also hard to imagine the frustration felt by those who recognize the futility of trying because they cannot move at a faster pace …*

At Site C, every student was working on the basis of a limited amount of time available for upgrading and both the students and the teacher were under a constant pressure resulting from this. Absences and interruptions in the daily working schedule potentially created more pressures than in any other class except the Site D class. This class also had the lowest general literacy levels (and a wider range of literacy abilities) than either of the others, a fact which exacerbated the problem of time pressures.[5]

Yet, as the previous two chapters described, the pressure of academic work was only one of many pressures and stresses which

[5] Although the group of adults with developmental disability had lower literacy abilities,the objectives of that class were also different and the achievement of full literacy was not a goal.The educational challenges were, thus,of a different order than those of the four regular Adult Basic Education classes.

beset the majority of students (and their teachers) from day to day. Throughout the term, all the teachers were called upon to intervene on a range of issues on behalf of one student after another. At Site D, for example, the teacher's interventions included helping a homeless student secure shelter through social services and, on several subsequent occasions throughout the term, advocating with social services on his behalf; consoling and encouraging students as they repeatedly hit funding and sponsorship snags along the way; and working to ensure that the students in his class who were on social assistance would be accepted into the (HRDC-sponsored) program in the Winter term. As his initial daily log reference to this issue reveals, he clearly felt it his responsibility to intervene in such problems, even as he remained keenly aware of the potential risks to his own career:

> *It has come to my attention that there may be difficulty for my students to move into the level 3-4.It is sponsored by HRDC and apparently that may prevent the four on social services benefits from joining.This is terribly discouraging for both the students and me. I will begin an investigation and push to alleviate this problem. I must be careful not to burn any bridges here …*

His daily log throughout the term evokes a compelling image of a teacher fully engaged in students' daily struggles:

> Sept. 29: *The day started well until I found out that Gordon* was homeless and without money. … I don't understand why he has no funding!*

> October 1: *No Gordon! I have calls into HRDC and I have spoken to [the program manager] about possible monies for Gordon but, so far, nothing positive.*

> October 2: *Gordon has returned and has found some accommodations through Welfare. The real kicker is that yesterday was his birthday. I picked up a card and some small gifts and a birthday eclair which we presented to him at afternoon break. (It made a difference).*

> October 10: *Yesterday I took Gordon [to the food bank] to get some food. He seems more keen these days. It's hard to celebrate Thanksgiving, knowing how hard these people have it.*

Similarly at Site B, the teacher's daily log demonstrates the extent to which the teachers were prepared to struggle to understand and accommodate the variety of student needs:

October 16: *Jill is doing some things that I recognize as 'sabotaging' behaviour. She's very raw, very close to tears much of the time. I know she's worried about her son, but when we speak about it she comes across as very 'matter of fact'. She says she knows what has to be done and she's prepared to do it,but I see a lot of pain in her face.*

I have requested to have her tested for learning disabilities - I believe she has a visual memory problem.We spoke about this yesterday, and she seems reassured when I tell her there's a name for the problems she has with her spelling.

October 30: *I'm feeling anxiety about Jill again.She asked me today if I heard from [the educational counsellor], the man who tested her.She said she's not finding the work we've been doing very helpful - it's "not enough". I explained that I'm hoping to get additional direction from [the counsellor],and that the extra phonics work I've been giving her is one step toward helping her spelling problem. What I didn't say out loud, but thought, was that she missed all of last week and two days this week,which doesn't help matters.Also, she knows very well that [the counsellor] is affected by the [teachers'] strike, and hasn't been working this week.I feel some pressure from her, as I have felt before. I have to be willing to try different tactics to accommodate her, while at the same time I have to remember that I'm not responsible for this sense of urgency she displays.Today I think she's realizing how much school she's missed and she's lashing out at me when, really, she's upset and frustrated with herself.*

November 18: *Jill called - having trouble with her eyes; at the doctor's. [The educational counsellor] came by with her test results - agrees that she's learning disabled, wants to do a psychological test after Christmas. He'll come by next Monday to meet with Jill and go over the test results.*

November 20: *[The educational counsellor] was back today to see Jill.This seems to have brightened her mood (which has been grim of late!).*

This teacher's daily log entries, in reference to the same student, also point to the virtual impossibility of meeting the full range of student learning needs when deliverers are obliged to organize classes and group students without due regard for their educational backgrounds and their levels and types of need:

This morning in Skills, we were learning about Past Continuous tense. [Jill] clearly dislikes this stuff. I've told her many

times to rely on "what sounds right"if she finds the 'rules'and hand-outs overwhelming. I felt a lot of resentment from her as we were going over the work as a group. Perhaps I'm too sensitive about how she feels about me … I do know that these kinds of grammar points are critical for the other students because of their [second language] backgrounds.They have to know the rules;otherwise they have no guidelines. They can't tell if something "sounds right".

At Site A, the teacher found it necessary to help several of her students—all young mothers with a number of responsibilities and issues competing for their attention—learn to be students again, after several years away from schooling. She understood that, if they did not learn this now, they would likely not succeed in another program at the college. She demonstrated both resourcefulness and a real commitment to helping her students:

Over the weekend I designed an Education Contract for the students in [the class] who are having difficulty getting motivated.They need deadlines and I gave them deadlines. They said they needed consequences for inaction and I gave them consequences. The exercises are a combination of focused journal entries and a required assignment per week. Not everybody needed or wanted the revised contract but [names of six students] did.

In her final report, this teacher observes that the Education Contract had, indeed, helped several students focus:

… The contract forced the students to produce some king of written response on a daily basis. It also addressed the issue of absences. When students were away, they lost focus. The terms of the contract required that the student contact the school on the day of the absence and verbally answer the journal response question. The questions were designed so the students were continually thinking about their educational and career goals, the barriers to their learning, and how they were going to achieve the goals and get around the barriers.

At Site C, perhaps more than at either of the other sites, the students faced a daunting series of crises during the brief thirteen-week period of the research; in case after case, the teacher used her out-of-class time to assist them and, in several instances, to intervene on their behalf. Her daily log is a virtual catalogue of obstacles faced by her students and their combined struggles to overcome them. From the very beginning of the research period, students faced enormous personal difficulties which, if not resolved, would have seriously threatened any prospects they may have had for completing their educational upgrading. Two such cases are

recounted in the teacher's daily log entry for September 29, just two weeks after the start of the class. The first, a single mother of three children very nearly had her social assistance income cut off in September, shortly after starting in the program. The daily log entry for the day on which the problem was resolved demonstrates the student's absolute need for the kind of assistance which this teacher provided:

> September 29: *One of my students [earlier] … told me she had a major problem. Welfare was going to cut all of her income because she had not given them some required information. The cut would be effective October 1. She … is [an immigrant] and the mother of three children. Welfare was waiting for a letter from a lawyer telling them whether he could or couldn't find her husband. If the lawyer hadn't told her to wait three months before going back to his office, which she has respected, she would not have this problem. I found all the information and told her she had only a few hours to do what I told her. Also I found another student in the class who could help her. She did and the problem was solved [today]. Hurray!*

In the second case recounted on this same day, another single mother—with the encouragement and assistance of the teacher—appealed an exorbitant rent; she won the case but continued to face harassment for a period, during which the teacher continued to support her.

> *I also had [other] very good news today. I had written a letter to the landlord of one of my students, with a copy to a federal organization that helps people with housing problems. Following the reading of a text in the class, she had talked about the misery of her house and the price she was paying. It was terrible. Other students encouraged her to take action on it. Her telephone had already been cut off because she couldn't afford anything else but the price of that apartment. She is [an immigrant], the mother of three children and not used to fighting. I helped her type the letter, brought her the envelope with the address on it, got her to take pictures, told her what to do and asked her if there was news about it every day. She was extremely proud today. The owner will have to reimburse half of the amount of her rent for the last six months, and the government organization reduced the rent by half for the rest of the contract. She learned a lot, as did the rest of the students, who helped her a lot. We were even willing to help her move out of the house.*
>
> October 3: *Oops, this very same student was crying today and was unable to concentrate in class. For the second time, her*

landlord has sent her a menacing letter. And, as long as her case hasn't gone through court, she has to pay her incredible rent of $650 a month.So another student from the class accompanied her to give the landlord $350.I am waiting (at home) for her to call me back and let me know how it went. [If he doesn't accept this] she will have to increase her Hydro debt, which will be subtracted from her Welfare amount.She is afraid that something will happen to her children if she keeps fighting. Friday night: [She called to say] she did give the landlord the amount I suggested and it worked—until the next problem.

Yet another single mother in this class was denied child care support by social services; she was able to remain in the class only because the teacher arranged for her to receive child care funding from the research project. The teacher was subsequently obliged to intervene further when these funds had not come in time to pay the hired babysitter. She was also obliged to intervene to ensure that cheques were issued (and cashed) for the purchase of monthly bus passes for the students. Her log documents efforts, after school hours, to help another student find an apartment and to help the entire group find suitable clothing.[6]

Inclusion or Marginalization in the 'Working Community'

One critical aspect of their experience of work which clearly emerged from the teachers' reports, journals and daily logs was the importance of a sense of belonging to a 'working community'. The notion of 'working community', as the teachers expressed it, was related, in part, to the organization of the work and the physical environment in which their work was located—whether a program was located in an educational facility where there were other teachers as well as support staff and services, for example, or whether it was located outside the educational milieu either as a 'stand-alone' service or as a component of another type of facility. But, importantly, the sense of 'working community', as experienced by the teachers, was also strongly related to the place which their program (and, by extension, they themselves) occupied in the workplace hierarchy—whether they were seen as central, or marginal, to the core function of the institution or service.

All of the teachers in the sample reported a greater or lesser sense of marginalization in their employment, if not in their actual workplaces. Indeed, in a very literal sense, each of these teachers was marginal—either because they were not a part of the unionized teaching staff or, if they were, because they were on time-limited contracts which could be terminated at short notice.

[6] She brought the entire group to a second hand store to purchase clothing and footwear during the term,incorporating lessons on mathematics and budgeting into this very necessary excursion.She also noted that she regularly collected clothing to bring to her students:"I bring in what I can;I visit my mother and her friends,as well as my brother, and go through my closet.This is how I was able to find winter coats for two students in need …".

People may become aware of their marginality in a number of ways, of which the conditions and benefits of employment are but one—albeit a crucial one. Other manifestations of inclusion or marginalization include the quality of the working space (classroom and/or office) and the extent to which this space is 'owned' by the teacher (and students) or, on the contrary, the extent to which they are casual users and made to feel like outsiders. The degree to which on-site services are freely available for the use of an individual or group also influences the sense of belonging to a community of work. Conversely, any exclusion from the use of facilities and services—including uncertainty as to whether use is permitted or condoned—will likely create a sense of marginalization. All of these factors played a role in the teachers' perceptions of their position at the core or the periphery of their workplaces.

For all five teachers, the contractual nature of their employment, combined with the instability of public commitment to Adult Basic Education, meant that their working environment had been subject to frequent change. Perhaps the most positive report on the working environment for the period of the research was that of the Site A teacher. In spite of the insecurity of her work as a contractual employee, she reported that she felt fully at home in the college environment, where a spirit of collegiality prevailed. Adult Basic Education (including Literacy) had a particularly strong advocate in the college administration at this site and the teacher felt that she was being 'groomed' to take a place in a department which would likely grow. The college setting in this case also represented, for her, a very distinct improvement over other (school board and college) locations she had worked at in the past. This was, in part, a result of the fact that provincial infusions of funding and increased demand—both stemming from the training component of the social security reform initiative—had brought about some expansion of Adult Basic Education programming at the college, accompanied by additional services to support both Adult Basic Education and other programs related to the initiative. The additional program offerings were targeted specifically at approved social assistance recipients and the new provincial funds were in the form of grants and, thus, always subject to fluctuation; notwithstanding these limitations, however, a sense of optimism prevailed at this site—in stark contrast to the other three sites where funds were shrinking and program offerings were in decline.

At Site B, there were really two working communities—one, the embattled Adult Basic Education and Second Language section of the continuing education department and the other, the school board at large, most immediately represented during the period of the research by the adult high school to which the ABE/Second Language programs had been temporarily relocated. Within the first 'community', the ABE/Second Language section, both the Site B

teachers reported a sense of belonging; they felt appreciated and strongly supported by their immediate manager and they exhibited a definite sense of identification with the other teachers, as well as the support staff, in the section. This had already become a 'community under siege' by the time the research began, however; just prior to—and during—the period of the research, it virtually lost its identity as funds were cut, programs were terminated, and both teaching and support staff were laid off. It is important to note that 'community' in this sense is not an abstract concept, nor simply an issue of identity; rather, it signifies a body of expertise and a pool of knowledge which has taken a great deal of both time and effort to accrue. The impact of the loss—or diminishment—of such a 'community' on access to Adult Basic Education in the region cannot be overstated.

Notwithstanding these events, and the direct threat to both her program and her employment during the period of the research, the teacher of developmentally delayed adults at this site initially gave a generally positive assessment of the physical aspects of her working environment in the new location. For this class, the move to the adult high school had meant some improvements in facilities and services, including a more comfortable and more attractive (if smaller) classroom and access to a cafeteria and lockers for the students. The move was a temporary one, however; less than a year after the move (July 1998) this teacher reported that their classroom was being viewed during class time by prospective new users who would displace them in the new school year. Though there were only two months to go before the beginning of a new academic year, the teachers of this program had no idea as to where they might be relocated.

The teacher in the regular Adult Basic Education class at Site B found little to commend the relocation of her class from the building dedicated to Adult Basic Education/second languages to an adult high school. Apart from the problem with this group's classroom—which, as the previous chapter documented, was subject to being used by high school staff and students as a thoroughfare—both students and teacher reported that they had been made to feel outsiders in the adult high school setting. The teacher noted, for example, that just as her students had been made to feel inferior to the high school students, she had also been made to feel inferior to the high school teachers when she went to the school's office to complain that another teacher had parked in her designated parking space:

> *It was made quite clear to me that I didn't carry the same status as the high school teachers, and that perhaps I should find another parking space!*

In her final report, this teacher reflected on the general issue of the status of Adult Basic Education teachers at her school board:

> *… I believe my own perceptions and experiences closely parallel the perceptions and experiences described by the students. As a professional, I am completely committed to my role as a teacher of Adult Basic Education. This is a choice I have made over time, and I don't regard it as a consolation prize for not having been successful in my quest to find a "real" teaching job. This said, there are times when I, like the students, feel the "different-ness" between myself and other teachers. This has become more acute since the relocation of this program to an adult high school, where we are surrounded by "teachers". While I don't begrudge the high school teachers their status and collective power, I do resent the lack of recognition and support they have extended toward us as fellow education professionals, and the Adult Basic Education program which feeds students into this adult high school.*

As previously documented, the Adult Basic Education teachers at this site were not unionized, though the other teachers who worked in the building with them (the 'adult high school' teachers) were. This inevitably led to perceived differences (of community and solidarity) as well as actual differences of status, as reflected in the better conditions and benefits of employment enjoyed by the unionized teachers. The tension between the two groups was also likely to have been exacerbated by the fact that there was a teachers' strike during their first term at the adult high school and the continuing education classes were obliged to continue throughout the period of the strike.

Another incident during the period of the research, unrelated to the environment of the adult high school, reinforced this teacher's feeling of low status—even of being invisible to an employer for whom she had worked for several years. She described it in her daily log:

> *Yesterday I received my registration kit for the [provincial teacher registration body]. For some reason, I have to go through a much more involved process than the others who were registered directly through the school board, plus I have to pay more money. Why didn't I get registered through the school board? It's like they don't know I exist even though I've been with [this school board] since 1991. This angers me - I'm a certified teacher and I've worked for this school board for seven years, yet they didn't register me for the pension plan until last January and now the [provincial registration body] is treating me like I'm fresh out of Teacher's College.*

The teacher at Site D, like many Adult Basic Education teachers, had been used to teaching in off-campus rented facilities; when he first began teaching on campus at the beginning of the research period, he was not entirely comfortable. This was, in large measure,

due to the fact that, although his class was on campus, it was not in a college facility but in a room which had been set aside for use as a community Literacy resource centre and which was on (strictly temporary) loan to his class. His daily log in the first few days of the term betrayed a distinct sense of not belonging, of infringing on others' territory:

> August 26: *General preparation. Feeling like a squatter.*
>
> September 10: *Used [Literacy Centre's] photocopier and it jammed. I don't think I'll use it again.*
>
> September 11: *Things are becoming quite crowded; we are still comfortable but the [counseling] side is spilling over to our side and it makes for close quarters.*
>
> *I am finding my trips to [the outreach services, his employer] office for copying too frequent. I also feel a bit of tension being in there so much. I really appreciate our old program at [an off-campus rented facility].*

Although the sense of occupying someone else's territory remained with this teacher (and the students) throughout the term, he did report that he was enjoying many aspects of being on campus during the period of the research. He appreciated the interaction with other teachers and observed that the general attitude towards Adult Basic Education (and himself) at the college was positive. Nevertheless, at the end of the term, his sense of 'not belonging' was hardly less acute—owing more to the insecurity of his job than to his reception at the college. In his December 12 daily log entry, he wrote:

> *The community college Christmas party is tonight. I have declined to go, partly because I am leaving and would not feel comfortable.*

At Site C—like Site B, though for different reasons—the teacher's work involved her in two communities. The first was the agency which employed her, for whom she had worked for several years; the second was the centre at which her class was located, which she had just joined at the beginning of the research period. The employing agency provided a setting in which teachers who worked largely in isolation from other teachers (at various centres around the community) came together on one day a week to engage in a range of professional activities related to their teaching. The Site C teacher reported a strong sense of 'community' with her colleagues in this setting; like Site B's Adult Basic Education 'community', however, this had also become something of a

'community under siege'. Over half of the teachers had lost their jobs over the previous six years and everybody's job had become more precarious under new provincial regulations and reduced funding for Adult Basic Education and Literacy.

For this teacher, the centre in which the research class was located represented an improvement in her day-to-day working environment in many respects. She noted, for example, that this was the first time she had worked in a "real classroom". And, although the facilities at Site C were far from adequate, as she observed, they represented a significant improvement over other facilities she had been obliged to work in:

> *I am grateful that this year I have a board,there are lockers for our belongings … the trunk of my car is not the only storage place for my materials, [the] students and I don't have to use a pay phone, phone messages are relayed to me, I don't need to provide a clock,batteries, a mirror, a kettle, a coffee maker and refrigerator … as I had to do last year.*

This was also the first time she was not working in isolation for all but one day of a week. Having another Literacy class next door, she observed:

> *… allows me for the first time to exchange with a working partner, to share my ups and downs, my frustrations and moments of anguish,to plan class and curricular activities that are more interesting, as well as solve problems in a team approach.*

The evidence of this teacher also points to a general problem of stigmatization which affects both students and teachers in Adult Basic Education and which may be of quite a different order than that experienced within the educational institution by the Site B students and teacher. Of her previous experience teaching Literacy, all of which had taken place in non-institutional centers in the community, she observed:

> *…In all other sites where I have taught, Literacy students have been clearly despised and rejected; this has been a major recurring problem.Whenever we have had to face such situations, the entire class and I have decided to ally ourselves and show solidarity. I have never been aware of students leaving school for this reason; but, we've had to spend a lot of discussion time in class trying to understand such negative attitudes and find the motivation to continue …*

Conclusion

This chapter has presented the findings from the local research sites relating to the working lives of Adult Basic Education teachers. The strongest impression which emerges from the local research material in respect of teachers is the stark contrast between their levels of qualification, skill and commitment on the one hand, and the relatively poor (and worsening) conditions under which they must work to deliver this vitally important public service on the other hand. It is clear that public commitment to the delivery of a quality basic education service for adults cannot be realized without a recognition of the importance of recruiting the best teachers available, providing necessary access to ongoing training, and rewarding the work to the full extent which it merits. Improving conditions for Adult Basic Education teachers is a necessary goal in its own right; but, as this chapter had demonstrated, it is also vitally important to improving the quality of service which Adult Basic Education students receive.

Chapter 7

7 Adult Basic Education in Canada: Trends and Issues

Evidence from the General Research Component

Chapter Summary

This chapter presents an analysis of the state of Adult Basic Education provision in Canada in terms of the principal trends and issues identified by the general research component of the study. The starting point for the analysis of the general research findings were the issues identified by students and teachers at the local research sites. The main objective of the enquiry into the general research data was to determine whether the conditions experienced in Adult Basic Education programs at the four sites over the period of the research could be explained by the general social policy environment in which Adult Basic Education is organized in this country. As this chapter documents, the general research data provide solid grounds for arguing the 'generalizability' of the local research findings.

Introduction

Over the period in which surveys of teachers and students were being conduced at the local research sites, a team of seven researchers investigated key issues relating to the state of Literacy and Adult Basic Education provision in each of the provinces and territories.[1] The principal objective of the social policy research was to determine the extent to which the experience of students at the four local research sites could be viewed as more or less typical of the experience of Adult Basic Education students generally in this country. A second objective was to determine whether current trends in policy relating to the provision of Adult Basic Education are likely to alleviate or, on the contrary, exacerbate the types of problems and issues confronted by participants in the local research programs.

As noted in Chapter 2, the social policy researchers pursued these objectives in the province(s) and/or territory(ies) for which they were responsible through detailed enquires in the following seven broad categories: *policy, funding, organizational structure, delivery, regulation and monitoring, student supports, and social policy reforms.*

Limitations on Research Findings

Unlike most other areas of social policy, it is almost impossible to present a full *comparative* picture of the state of Adult Basic Education provision in Canada, since both the range of infor-

[1] As was also noted in Chapter 2, the social policy researchers responsible for those provinces and/or territories in which local research sites were located also visited the site in their area twice during the course of the general research. They interviewed both teachers and students on each occasion and, on one occasion, also interviewed administrative staff associated with the local research class.

mation available and the quality of this information is so highly variable. In virtually every province and territory, for example, the researchers experienced some degree of difficulty in ascertaining levels of funding for Literacy and Adult Basic Education; this was not necessarily because jurisdictions were unwilling to provide such information (though some were more forthcoming than others) but because, in the overwhelming majority of cases, there is no clear accounting of expenditures on these services. Where provincial/territorial budget figures for Literacy and Adult Basic Education are available, it is frequently unclear what they encompass—whether, for example, they refer only to direct provincial allocations from the education and training funding pool or whether they also include social welfare spending on training and/or federal training funds. In some cases, global figures for Literacy and Adult Basic Education may also include expenditures on income assistance for students who are sponsored by federal or provincial agencies to attend programs, though the documentation will not necessarily indicate this. Without such clarifications, comparisons of provincial/territorial funding commitments to the Adult Basic Education service are meaningless.

Similarly, it is very difficult to determine with any degree of accuracy the numbers of students engaged in Literacy and/or Adult Basic Education programs. In some jurisdictions, there is simply no attempt by government to compile this information and the researchers were, in many cases, advised that the delivery agencies themselves were the only source of the information. Such an option was, of course, not feasible given the variety of deliverers in most jurisdictions and the fact that their compliance with requests for such information would have been entirely discretionary.

In jurisdictions where aggregate enrolment figures are available, their value is generally limited. This is because of the uncoordinated nature of most Adult Basic Education delivery in virtually all jurisdictions and the variety of approaches employed in the enumeration of students. It is evidently a common practice, for example, for institutions to count a student who registers for three separate courses (or semesters) as three students. Similarly, in at least one province, it would appear that the official figures on the number of government-sponsored 'community' programs are arrived at by counting any program which applies for and receives a renewal of funding—which all programs must do annually if they want to continue—as a new (and additional) program. Another variable which makes comparison of enrolment numbers across jurisdictions difficult—if not impossible—is that, while some jurisdictions compute enrolments on the basis of 'full-time equivalents', others do not. It is obvious that counting a person who is tutored by a volunteer for two hours a week and a person who is engaged in fully supported educational programming for 25 hours a week as

statistical equivalents must yield a misleading picture of the extent of Adult Basic Education provision.

In spite of these and other related limitations on the research findings, however, it has been possible to construct a general picture of the state of the Adult Basic Education service in this country in the current period. The overall findings of the social policy researchers provide strong support for arguing the 'generalizability' of the local research findings as presented in the preceding four chapters. The general sense which emerges from the local research—of a somewhat chaotic and distinctly unstable service characterized by wide variation in access and in the conditions under which it is provided—is exactly the sense which emerges from the social policy research.

The starting point for the analysis of the general research findings was the local research itself; and the general research findings confirm that the problems and issues which emerged in the five local research classes over the thirteen week period of the student and teacher surveys were not a function of particular local conditions but a reflection of general policies as they translate into programs, practices and experiences at the local level. The following sections present aspects of the broad social policy context which account for the experiences of both students and teachers at the local level. As a means of ordering the discussion, these experiences (and the social policy framework in which they may be explained) are presented in terms of two principal categories: *access to programs and quality of educational service provided.* There is clearly considerable overlap between these two general categories which will become evident in the discussion.

Access to Programs

A number of factors affect access to programs, several of which were manifested at the four local research sites—some directly and others more peripherally. The first (and foremost) factor influencing the accessibility of an Adult Basic Education service is, of course, whether there are actually programs available in a particular community for those adults who may need or desire to upgrade their education. Other factors relate to the extent to which adults in need of such programs are able to take advantage of available opportunities. Variables influencing this may include access to affordable transportation; the extent and appropriateness of advertising and public awareness efforts; the availability of (and financial support for) child care services; whether programs require direct expenditures—on tuition and other fees, books and learning materials, for example; and whether there is financial assistance available either for income support or to offset the additional costs of attending programs. This section of the chapter

examines the issues relating to access to programs—as documented by each component of the study—firstly, in terms of *program availability* and secondly, in terms of the *factors which might either facilitate or restrict access* to available programs.

Program Availability

In three of the four local research sites which participated in this study, access to Adult Basic Education was directly undermined by the unavailability (or threatened future unavailability) of programs. The most serious restrictions on access were those recorded in the Site D region (and for the Site D province), where access for the *general public* to any level of adult upgrading is now virtually non-existent. The only ongoing provision in the Site D community college region at the time of the research was the college's Level 3-4 program, available only to those who demonstrated a reading ability equivalent to high school on a standardized reading test. Even for those who met this criterion, there were places available for only 20 students at any one time and all but a few of these 20 places were reserved for individuals sponsored through the federal agency, Human Resource Development Canada (HRDC). As of September 1998, the 20 places in the Level 3-4 program (in this large and relatively populous region of the province) were to be cut by a further 25%, thus limiting access to just 15 adults at any one time. The complete phase-out of the college Adult Basic Education program in this region (and province) was being forecast, as HRDC funding declined in preparation for full devolution of responsibility for training from the federal to the provincial government.

The program in which the Site D research participants were enroled (a Level 2 program) was offered on a 'special project' basis and primarily financed with research project funds. Several adults from the area who applied for this program were not permitted to enrol because their tested reading scores were either significantly below the Grade 7 level required or because they tested significantly above this level and were, therefore, candidates for the Level 3-4 program.[2] Those who were accepted into the Level 2 program would normally have had no college program option, since their reading scores would have been too low for acceptance into the Level 3-4 program. The only possible option for those whose reading levels were too low for admission into the (one-time) Level 2 program would have been a 'community Literacy' program. For most applicants, however, this was no more a possibility than the college programs since there were only five or six such programs ongoing in this large and quite populous rural region of the province; like many 'community' programs in this province, some of these were targeted at specific populations—one, for example, was open only

[2] This is not to say that they would have been accepted into the college's Level 3-4 program, however. As noted, access to this program was largely restricted to adults who had been approved by HRDC for sponsorship. As the experience of the research students at this site demonstrated,access to the Level 3-4 program is extremely restricted and sponsorships are not easy to come by.

to single mothers and another to adults with learning disability or mental health problems. Even if they had gained access to such a program, those whose objective was to attain educational credentials would likely have been disappointed. The programs operated under the community Literacy strategy in this province provide quite a different level and type of opportunity than the college upgrading programs do and only very occasionally is the type and duration of instruction able to provide students with transferable credentials. Government funding for 'community Literacy programs' in this province amounts to a mere $6,500 annually per program, and any additional funds must be raised—if possible—from local businesses and service organizations.

At Site C, the class which participated in the research faced the prospect of immediate closure (and consequent loss of upgrading opportunity) at any time during the school year if the number of students fell significantly below the minimum. In the case of the Literacy level, which this particular class was, the minimum number of students required to maintain a class was 14. Even if they were able to maintain the minimum numbers, there was the additional threat of losing the free classroom facilities. Since the school board in this region contracted with community agencies to establish Literacy classes but did not provide financing for rental of facilities, classes could only be held where a donation of space could be arranged. In the case of the Site C class, it appeared that the agreement with the owners of the building in which the class was located would soon come to an end and, if other free space could not be found, the class would simply be disbanded. Though some of the students might conceivably have found alternative programs, this was by no means certain. The number of Literacy programs in this large urban region had been cut dramatically in the previous few years in response to provincial funding reductions; an increasing proportion of those which remained were sponsored by the school board(s) on the same basis as the Site C class—available only if rent-free facilities could be secured.

At Site B, both classes which participated in the research—along with all the other Adult Basic Education classes operated by this school board—faced the very real possibility of closure during the school year in which the research took place. A combination of factors in the Site B province and municipality—including provincial taxation reforms, substantial cuts to funding for education, and school board restructuring—had left this large and historically prosperous municipal school board scrambling to cut costs. The number and range of programs available to the public in this municipality (in both Adult Basic Education and Second Language programs) had already been significantly reduced over the previous two years and the decision to eliminate all such programs seemed an inevitability at times during the research period. The school

board had based its decision to make the cuts in Adult Basic Education (and Second Language programs) on the grounds that its legislative mandate was to serve the needs of the under-21 population; any funds saved by eliminating what were seen as discretionary programs could be used to offset the impact of government cuts on what was perceived to be the 'core function' of the school board.

At Site A, there was no perceived threat of closure of the class in which the research participants were enroled; nor was there any indication that the current level of Adult Basic Education programming at the Site A college would diminish in the near future. A number of factors are worthy of mention in relation to the province in which Site A was located, however. The first is that overall funding to the college system is in decline; funding from federal sources (HRDC) has declined steadily in recent years and the provincial operating grant for the college system (the primary source of funds) has been frozen at 1996 levels. Over the previous two years the number of provincial college staff had been reduced by 450 full-time equivalents. Adult Basic Education had been receiving a diminishing share of the college operating grant and this trend was expected to continue; at the time of the research, the Adult Basic Education program provincially was being allocated only 3.3% of the total grant to colleges. This meant that an increasing share of Adult Basic Education funding had come (and would have to continue to come) from outside sources. The position of the teacher at the Site A class, who was being employed on a contract-by-contract basis, illustrated one important negative outcome of this funding trend.

A second factor impinging on the accessibility of Adult Basic Education in the Site A province was the 1996 establishment of a social security reform program which obliges adults and youth receiving social assistance to participate in educational upgrading or post-secondary training if they are deemed to need either in order to become 'employable'. This has impacted on access to programs in a number of ways, the first of which is that though the initiative has increased demand for programs, it has not been accompanied by a proportionate increase in funding for these programs. The funding transferred from the social welfare department to enable colleges to increase their capacity is strictly limited, translating on a per-college basis to a tiny fraction of the overall operating budget. Since the provincial legislation requires that youth deemed in need of upgrading or training be guaranteed accommodation in programs, it would seem inevitable that access to programs for adults receiving social assistance as well as other potential clients must become more restricted. Another feature of the social security reform initiative is that, even as it obliges some to participate in Adult Basic Education and training, it actually limits the right of social assistance recipients to attend such programs.

All adults in receipt of social assistance must participate in active job search, followed by assisted job search, over a nine month period; only when they have completed this phase of the program—and provided they have not been successful in finding employment—are they considered for sponsorship into an educational upgrading or training program. Individuals who had decided at the beginning of the nine-month job search period that they wished to participate in upgrading or retraining would not have been permitted to do so and continue receiving benefits. Indeed, even if social assistance recipients are unsuccessful in finding work in this period, they still have to be approved for a program before they may enrol and the decision as to which program they will be approved for is not theirs to make.

The social policy research confirmed that the issues relating to the *availability* of Adult Basic Education programs which arose in each of the local research jurisdictions are not anomalous; on the contrary, each site is in some measure representative of the general social policy context in which Adult Basic Education finds itself in this country at the present time. To begin with the example of Site D, the issue was one of a virtually complete lack of access to programs for undereducated adults. The Site D province, like several other of the less affluent jurisdictions in this country, had historically relied almost entirely on federal (HRDC) seat purchases in community colleges (through government-to-government block purchases as well as individual sponsorship of students) to fund its adult upgrading programs. The impact of recent federal government policies which have seen the withdrawal of HRDC from the seat purchase arrangement and the move towards the use of tuition vouchers for sponsored students has been dramatic in all such jurisdictions.[3] The impacts have not been limited to Adult Basic Education—they have included in some cases, for example, the complete closure of community college campuses and across-the-board increases in tuition fees to compensate for lost revenues. In most cases, however, Adult Basic Education has been among the first victims of program cuts and, since there was relatively little

[3] Public institutions in some jurisdictions have been particularly hard hit by the move to tuition vouchers since the amount of a voucher varies depending on the tuition charged by the institution which a student attends. In many provinces and territories, the tuition rates of the public institutions which provide Adult Basic Education (colleges and/or school boards) are controlled by government or by politically accountable boards; in the majority of cases, public institutions' tuition fees are nominal and, even when they are relatively high, they are in no way reflective of the actual cost of delivering programs. By contrast, private for-profit agencies set their tuition fees at a rate which is high enough to cover costs as well as pay profits and, even where their fees are regulated by government, they are generally permitted to levy much higher rates than public institutions are. In several jurisdictions, students who are sponsored by HRDC to attend public institutions would carry with them between $300 and $800 in public training funds (per semester) as a tuition voucher; those who attend private training institutions, by contrast, might carry with them several thousand dollars in federal training vouchers for training of the same duration. What this has meant is that an increasing proportion of federal training dollars has gone to private for-profit agencies while public institutions delivering training to federally sponsored students have been forced to rely increasingly on dwindling provincial funds for the majority of their operational costs. The extent of growth of private sector college level education varies considerably throughout the country. In two jurisdictions, for example, private for-profit training is practically non-existent, while in at least one province the private training sector—no more than one or two agencies a decade ago—has actually outgrown the public college system. The trend in virtually all jurisdictions is towards a rapidly increasing private training sector, supported in no small measure by public training funds, and a concomitant downsizing of the public training sector.

spending on this area of provision in the first place, the cuts have tended to be devastating.

Another feature of the access problems in the Site D province was that the principal option provided by the province itself was the 'community Literacy' option. As noted above, this is not actually an option open to the general public since programs tend to be targeted to quite specific sub-sections of the population and, in many (if not most) cases, programming does not provide a general upgrading opportunity but is tailored to specific objectives. In one such program in the Site D college region, for example, participants were actually engaged in low-level job training and the educational upgrading component was limited to the academic requirements of that training. In general, such programs do not provide recognized certification and there are no formally established links with other accreditable programs. These programs are also quite seriously under-funded and both their initial setup and their continued operation rely very heavily on the fund-raising capacity of the program organizers and the largesse of local businesses and organizations. Programs funded from the 'community Literacy' funding stream may receive funding over a period of years or they may disband after only one grant period. The implications of this variability for long-term upgrading opportunities are clear.

The social policy research revealed a growing trend in the majority of jurisdictions towards such a model of Literacy and Adult Basic Education provision, particularly for adults at the lowest levels of educational attainment/literacy skill. In virtually every jurisdiction, there has been some downgrading of funding support for public institutions which provide adult upgrading opportunities; in several jurisdictions there has been a concomitant shift towards funding organizations, volunteer agencies or *ad hoc* groups to provide basic education services. In virtually no case does the level of funding to such groups and organizations approach that removed from public delivery, however, and the net result is an absolute (and frequently dramatic) decrease in funding support for basic education services. Another result is that the quality of service provision is significantly reduced, since in most jurisdictions groups and organizations are typically provided with only token funding, completely unrelated to the actual costs of delivering educational programs in this country.[4]

[4] As noted above, for example, the annual funding for such programs in the Site D province was typically $6,500 per program. Average annual government funding for two other (provincial/territorial) jurisdictions was $10,000 per program in one case and $11,000 per program in another. Another jurisdiction sets an annual maximum grant amount per program of $15,000 and another allocates the same amount ($13,752 for 40 weeks or half that amount for 20 weeks) to all programs. In some cases, grants may only be spent on salaries for coordinators and/or teachers. In some cases, teachers were reported to have to fund-raise a portion of their salary. In such cases, all resource materials and any other expenses must be paid for by fund raising.

One feature of the situation at Site C, somewhat related to this general trend, was the school board's use of agencies and 'community partners' for the direct delivery of Literacy and Adult Basic Education programs. A central aspect of the contractual arrangement which compromised program availability was the fact that the school board (through which provincial Literacy funds were channeled) was not prepared to fund the agencies it contracted to provide programs for the costs associated with facilities. This meant that any long-term prospects the agency might have of providing Literacy in a particular region of that city were entirely dependent on charity—the donation of rent-free space by a third party. If such space could not be found, the area would not be served. The social policy research found that such conditions are becoming increasingly generalized as jurisdictions move away from public institutional delivery of programs and towards 'community' or *ad hoc* Literacy provision in the current period. In most jurisdictions where governments have shifted responsibility for delivery of programs to such groups and organizations, funding stipulations require that the deliverer (or the community) make 'in-kind' contributions including the provision of rent-free facilities. In many jurisdictions, funding to non-public agencies expressly prohibits capital expenditures; and in the majority of jurisdictions the only stipulation respecting program facilities under such arrangements is that they be rent-free.

The situation in the Site C region (and province) where literacy programs are only established when a certain minimum number of students has registered and are only continued as long as this minimum number is maintained was also found by the social policy researchers to be generally typical of conditions attached to the availability of Adult Basic Education and Literacy programs across the country. No jurisdiction offers Literacy or Adult Basic Education on demand, since the demand is only recognized (and accommodated) when it can be demonstrated to be sufficiently high. This means, of course, that there is no *right* to basic education in this country, in any meaningful sense of the concept of rights. In one jurisdiction, where provision of Literacy and Adult Basic Education has now been almost entirely shifted away from the college system to *ad hoc* Literacy committees, these committees can only apply to establish a literacy program *after* they have identified twelve adults who will participate in that program.[5] This means that student recruitment must be done in the absence of a program and that adults must be prepared to commit to attending a program which does not yet exist and does not even have a facility; it also means that no funding is provided for the advertising and

[5] If the committees succeed in recruiting students and their application for funding is approved,they are awarded only the first portion of a (40 or 20 week) grant;the second portion is dependent on the submission of a report mid-way through the funding period and is approved only if the student numbers warrant.

public awareness which would be necessary to ensure that student recruitment was anything more than a process of selection.

This jurisdiction's disregard for the necessity of supporting a vigorous and sensitive advertising and public awareness strategy as a central element of Literacy and Adult Basic Education provision was found by both the local and the general research to be somewhat typical of the situation generally in this country. Although some program deliverers use a broad-based advertising strategy—including non-print media—to promote their services, most do not. In most cases, educational institutions which deliver Literacy and Adult Basic Education simply include information about their programs in their global advertising.[6] Some colleges and school boards—as well as some 'community' and volunteer programs—have conducted advertising and public awareness campaigns more suited to the needs and characteristics of the populations targeted, but these have tended to be time-limited 'special projects', typically funded by external sources. Where institutions contract out the delivery of programs, they tend to leave student recruitment to the deliverer though, as in the case of the Site C school board, there is generally no funding earmarked to finance this recruitment. The majority of student participants in the local research (with the exception of the Site B class) had, in fact, found their programs through direct referral by a social welfare agency; this appears to be the single most common route to Adult Basic Education programs in all jurisdictions and, with the recent growth of 'welfare-to-work' social policy reforms, the trend is likely to become even stronger in many jurisdictions.[7] It is clear that the pre-eminence of direct referral as the means of filling a limited (and dwindling) number of Literacy and Adult Basic Education places must have an impact on the availability of upgrading opportunities for the general population in need. Without the widespread provision of programs—and without the public being fully informed of their existence—there can be no *right* to the service.

At Site B, the threat to program availability during the research period stemmed from the fact that the deliverer (a public school board) is not mandated by legislation to provide basic educational services to adults. When savings had to be realized, the board's response was to cut Adult Basic Education services, which it perceived to be discretionary—a perception which was, from a

[6] Flyers and brochures (either delivered to homes or distributed in the public doman) and newspaper advertising are the most commonly used forms of global advertising.

[7] In some jurisdictions,however, the institution of social welfare reforms have already had the opposite effect.In the Site C province, for example, social welfare agencies had,until quite recently, regularly referred a significant proportion of their clientele to Literacy and Adult Basic Education programs—and provided some support for them to attend.In the last two-year period,case workers have actually been directed by provincial authorities not to refer clients to Literacy programs.Though some are still referred (as the majority of those in the Site C class were),the drop in social assistance recipients in Literacy programs has been dramatic—a 90% drop was recorded by the social policy research in one area of the province, for example. The provincial directive has actually resulted in the closure of many Literacy classes.

strictly legal point of view, correct. This situation could conceivably be repeated in every single jurisdiction in this country—and, indeed, it has been in far too many. For, as the social policy research revealed, most jurisdictions simply do not mandate (by legislation) the provision of Adult Basic Education services. In most provinces and territories either community colleges and/or school boards have a 'permissive' mandate—that is, they *may* provide basic education services for adults if they wish, but there is no legal requirement to do so; this means, of course, that in these jurisdictions adults have absolutely no *legal right* to such services. In a very small minority of jurisdictions, public institutions (again, either colleges or school boards) are legally mandated to provide basic education programs for adults, but the mandate is a very liberal one, allowing the institutions themselves to decide how much programming they will offer and where. In fact, in each case where there is a legal mandate, there has been a progressive withdrawal of funding to support this mandate throughout the 1990s. In those jurisdictions where public institutions—either with or without a legislated mandate—are financially supported by government to provide basic education services to adults, funds are generally 'capped'—thus, effectively removing the capacity to respond to demand. In the few jurisdictions where funds have historically been available as needed to meet the demand, funding 'caps' have been applied in recent years.[8]

In the Site A province, the two factors which threaten to reduce general access to basic education services are, on the one hand, declining funding support for the public college system—the principal provider of Literacy and Adult Basic Education in this province[9]—and, on the other hand, the institution of social welfare reforms which increase the demand for adult upgrading programs without providing a proportionate increase in funding to support such programs. The general research found this convergence of social policies to be widespread throughout the country. The trend of declining funding support for the institutions which provide adult upgrading opportunities was documented for virtually every jurisdiction. In many cases, these institutions have not allocated any portion of their base funding to Adult Basic Education but, where they have, the proportion of base funds thus allocated has declined; the result has been either program cuts or increased dependence on outside

[8] It should be noted that,with one or two exceptions,no jurisdiction in Canada has provided unlimited funds for the provision of the lower levels of adult upgrading.The most liberal funding formulas have applied to the provision of senior high school level upgrading—for the most part catering to youth who have recently left school.A recent policy trend in a number of jurisdictions—allowing out-of-school youth from the age of 16 to enrol in adult upgrading programs—is likely to increase further the proportion of adult upgrading funds spent on the younger sections of the populations in need and the higher levels of upgrading. In at least one jurisdiction, school boards are permitted to transfer youth out of secondary schools into adult programs if they determine such a move would be in the individual's interest.

[9] School boards in this province also provide some adult upgrading opportunities but their involvement is almost exclusively at the senior high school level,leading to an adult equivalent of the provincial secondary school diploma.Although they have been funded in the past to respond to demand,their funding for services for adults has recently been capped.

(contractual) sources for the financing of Adult Basic Education services. Even those institutions which have only provided Adult Basic Education when external (non-base) funding has been available find themselves less able to do so as their facilities and support services are reduced under the pressure of cuts to general operating budgets.

The social policy research also found that an increasing proportion of the (generally declining) Adult Basic Education service is being directed towards achieving social welfare reform objectives in the majority of Canadian jurisdictions. In several jurisdictions, virtually all adult upgrading opportunities are restricted to adults who have been referred and/or sponsored by social welfare agencies. In most cases, there is some degree of compulsion involved; in some jurisdictions, the compulsion is absolute—adults who have been deemed in need of (and eligible) for adult upgrading programs must attend or risk losing their (social assistance) incomes. The targeting of Adult Basic Education programs to the unemployed (including those receiving social assistance income) is not a new trend in this country; virtually all full-time access to adult upgrading in the majority of jurisdictions has been restricted to these populations—beginning with the federal Occupational Training Act of 1967 and the establishment of Basic Training for Skill Development programs for unemployment insurance recipients. What is new in the current period is the widespread use by provincial and/or territorial governments of participation in upgrading (and other training) programs as a condition of receiving social welfare income support.[10] In most jurisdictions, the provision of programs to meet this enforced demand is supported, to a greater or lesser extent, by diverting funds from general Adult Basic Education budgets.

Increasingly, the types of programs to which social assistance recipients are referred under 'welfare-to-work' reforms are not the long-term educational upgrading programs which many undereducated adults (including the majority of the local research participants) aspire to, but a truncated version designed to 'fast-track' them into low-level, minimum wage jobs. This has actually resulted in a drop in the numbers of social assistance recipients in what are coming to be referred to as 'pure' Adult Basic Education programs in many jurisdictions. The general research in one province, for example, found that there had been a 10% decrease in the number of social assistance recipients referred to formal Literacy programs in the 1994-97 period.[11] This was expected to drop still further as a social welfare reform bill is currently before the legislature in this province. In another jurisdiction, the higher

[10] In one jurisdiction the responsibility for the administration of social assistance has been transferred from the health and family services department to the education and training department.This extraordinary social policy move not only makes explicit the current education and training priorities in this jurisdiction; it also presents the education and training staff with increased responsibilities having no relation to the normal mandate of such a department and it may very likely detract from their ability to effectively support education and training programs.

levels of Adult Basic Education are not offered at all. The objective of all upgrading in this jurisdiction is to provide only the academic skills required by the lower levels of training available in the jurisdiction—Grades 9-10.

Facilitating Access to Available Programs

The local research component of this study presented clear evidence of the necessity not only of providing programs but also of ensuring that adults in need of basic education services are able to access these programs. It is obvious that the strongest evidence of the inability of many to access available programs is not a part of the local research account, however; for all the local research participants had actually been able to access a program—and, though many were there in spite of extraordinary barriers, it is not difficult to imagine that, for many others, the barriers have been totally insurmountable and have prevented their attending programs at all. It is worthy of noting at the outset of this discussion that a number of recent reports and studies (at the provincial/territorial and national levels) have documented the increasing impoverishment of a significant section of the Canadian population.[12] Recent (and ongoing) social welfare reforms have exacerbated the problem by decreasing the level of support available to the unemployed—through both unemployment insurance and social assistance mechanisms.

Transportation

It is clear that public provision of Literacy and Adult Basic Education programs on the basis of need could only be ensured through comprehensive geographical coverage of all areas of the country, much as our public school systems are organized. A reliance on charity, volunteers or the spontaneous efforts of interested members of a particular community to initiate and organize provision must inevitably lead to uneven coverage and inequitable access. Yet this is the reality in most Canadian jurisdictions in the current period. The map of Literacy and Adult Basic Education programs is a map with a few relatively dense clusters where programs overlap and even, in some cases, compete with each other; but the more prominent feature of the map of Literacy is the presence of large distances between programs and huge blank areas where there are no programs provided at all. Under such conditions, transportation takes on a particularly important role, though it must be acknowledged that for many thousands of Canadians in need nothing less than air transportation would make access to an upgrading program possible.

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[11] Over this same period the provincial Literacy budget has been divided among four component programs,of which the established provincial Literacy program is just one.The other three programs, which are short-term and which focus more directly on preparation for employment,have become the first choice of social agencies when they are referring clients to programs.

[12] See, for example,Another Look at Welfare Reform:A Report by the National Council of Welfare, Ottawa,1997;Profiles of Welfare: Myths and Realities:A Report by the National Council of Welfare, Ottawa,1998;and Widening the Gap:A Comparison Between the Cost of Daily Living and Income Assistance Rates (BC Benefit) in British Columbia,Social Planning and Research Council of B.C.,1997.

Problems with transportation were manifested in one way or another at each of the four local research sites. At Site D, the college campus at which the research class was located serves a largely rural and relatively dispersed population. It is, therefore, within walking distance of a relatively small proportion of its potential clientele. The lack of public transportation in some parts of the campus region means that many potential students can only attend if they are able to make individual arrangements for transportation. At least one applicant who had been accepted into the research class was unable to attend the program when he encountered problems with his car which he could not afford to repair; although the project would have paid for a bus pass, he was outside the area served by bus transportation. Another student's participation in the program had been made possible, in part, by the provision of transportation assistance by her sponsoring agency, HRDC. Yet another student had a bus pass provided by a local service club. Some of the students lived within walking distance of the campus, a factor which had likely influenced their decision to apply for the program.

At Sites A, B and C the students identified the location of their class on major public transportation routes as one of the important positive features of the program. The price of monthly bus passes at Sites A and C amounted to a significant portion of their discretionary income, however; several students at each of these sites anticipated that, when the project support for transportation was discontinued at the end of the research period, they would have real difficulty meeting this cost. As the Site C teacher reported, students in receipt of social assistance income were frequently forced to miss class at some point in each month because they had run out of money for the bus. Though the Site C students in receipt of social assistance were provided with additional funding to attend the program, there was no specific allocation for transportation and the monthly amount (an average of $90 to $110) was not considerable. At Site B, a transportation allowance for social assistance recipients attending educational programs had been discontinued two years prior to the research period.

The social policy research in general supported the evidence of the local research with respect to the importance of transportation as a potential barrier to accessing programs. The findings indicated wide disparity across the country in terms of transportation assistance for students attending Literacy and Adult Basic Education programs. In some jurisdictions, adults sponsored through social agencies (or receiving social assistance) are supported for the costs of transportation but in others they are not, even when they may be to some degree obliged to attend programs. Training allowances may or may not include a transportation allowance, depending on the sponsoring agency.

For too many adults, the question of cost of public transportation is secondary to the question of whether there is public transportation available or whether the Adult Basic Education program is located near a public transportation route. The social policy research found that Literacy and Adult Basic Education programs are very scarce in virtually all rural areas of the country; any programs tend to be in larger communities—necessitating considerable travel for anyone from another community who might wish to access the program. In the majority of rural areas, access to public transportation is extremely limited or non-existent. Even in larger cities and in most towns, there tends to be only a very few locations where programs are provided. In one stark example from the social policy research, for example, one of Canada's largest cities was found to have a single classroom-based Literacy program available; there are also cities which provide no access to Literacy programs at all. In urban and suburban areas—as elsewhere—the location of Adult Basic Education programs is frequently based on the availability of free or 'hand me down' space no longer needed by schools or colleges, without regard for whether it is easily accessible by public transportation. In one jurisdiction, for example, adults in the suburban districts of a major city were electing to attend programs in the city itself (at a much greater distance) rather than in their own area because the city programs were located on a public transportation route and, thus, accessible when their own programs were not. A 1992 study in this same province indicates the extent to which transportation may limit accessibility even when programs are provided; though this province has among the highest level of provision of Adult Basic Education programming in the country, the study reported that one-third of students then in programs had experienced transportation difficulties.

Child Care

A second important factor influencing whether adults are able to access available programs is whether there is support for the care of dependents while they attend class. At all four local research sites, there was some degree of need for child care—the level of need in each case reflecting the proportion of mothers of dependent children in the program. At Site A, a class made up of predominantly single mothers, the issue of adequate support for child care was of central concern. In the province in which Site A was located, the child care barrier had become greater in the Spring of 1997, just months before the start of the research period. Prior to that time, a child care supplement had been available to parents receiving social assistance while they attended educational or training programs; the provision of the supplement had acknowledged that the provincial child care subsidy did not pay the actual costs of child care and that parents receiving social assistance would be hard pressed to make up the difference out of their food or shelter allocations. With the removal of the supplement, the onus for making up the difference fell on the mothers themselves.

As Chapter 5 documented, the reduced level of child care support was perceived as an impediment to educational success by several of the Site A students, in spite of the fact that some accommodation had been made by the college to offset the impact of the policy change.[13] During the period of the research, however, the real source of the day care problem experienced by the Site A parents was the lack of access to full-time places in the campus day care; the research project would have paid the difference had places been available. For one of the students, there had been no openings at all when she registered for her program and she was obliged to place her child in an off-site centre.[14]

At the other three sites, the majority of mothers in the class reported that without access to subsidized child care they would not have been able to participate in the program. One of the Site B students reported that she had been prevented from attending a program because she had been unable to get child care support, though she had wanted to for several years; she was only now attending because her children had all started school. The social policy research indicated that this woman is more likely to be typical of the majority of women in need of educational upgrading in this country than are the student participants who had managed to access child care support (however inadequate) and to attend programs while their children were younger.

In general, the social policy research indicated a growing need for the provision and adequate subsidization of child care in order to support access to Adult Basic Education. In several jurisdictions, the number of women participants in Adult Basic Education (and other training programs) has increased significantly over the past two decades. In the Site A province, for example, the number of women participants in college programs had increased by 85% in the 1984-94 period, compared with a 44% increase over the same period for men. In another of the country's larger provinces, 62% of all students in Adult Basic Education and related programs in 1997 were parents; 46% were single parents. To some extent, the increase in female (and specifically single parent) participation is a result of social welfare reforms which oblige recipients to actively seek employment or participate in training or upgrading programs as a condition of receiving income support. Sadly, these same reforms have generally been accompanied by cuts in the rate

[13] The provincial government's rationale for removing the supplement had been that child care support was a "deterrent to seeking employment".It is an irony that the policy was actually forcing the most highly motivated students in the Site A class to contemplate leaving their upgrading and training program and the prospect of future employment security and getting back into unskilled entry-level work which had,in the past,left them regularly facing lay-off and dependence on unemployment insurance/social assistance.

[14] Though the sole mother with a dependent child at Site D had not attempted to place her child in the campus day care centre, the teacher at this site reported that day care places were limited and usually fully booked in the Spring for the following academic year. As the teacher also noted,when the college moved to a 'continuous intake' system for Adult Basic Education (a move which was being planned during the research period) the ABE students would have little chance of getting day care places.

of income support and, more specifically, cuts in child care subsidies—both of which must seriously undermine an individual's ability to participate in a program successfully. The Site A province is a case in point, although in that province single parents with children below the age of seven are not obliged to participate in the 'welfare to work' program. In certain other jurisdictions, the age exemption is far more restricted; in one province, for example, mothers on social assistance are obliged to seek employment or participate in training when their children reach the age of six months. This same province has both cut the rate of social assistance and slashed child care subsidies as a part of the same social welfare reform package. The social welfare reform trend has reached virtually all jurisdictions in this country to some degree. At the time of the research, at least half of the provincial/territorial jurisdictions had implemented—or were in the process of implementing—social welfare reform measures which entail some degree of compulsion to seek employment or participate in training or upgrading programs as a condition of receiving income support.

The social policy research revealed that the child care issue is a major factor in access to education and training programs across this country, whether or not there are social welfare reforms which increase the participation of mothers of dependent children and, thus, increase the need for child care provision. In no jurisdiction for which the information was available are provincial/territorial child care subsidies equal to the actual costs of licensed day care services. In many places, access to licensed day care facilities is very limited or non-existent—particularly in small communities, and rural and sparsely populated areas. The problem is made all the worse by regulations which prohibit the expenditures of child care assistance for family members to provide the service. For, though care by family members is frequently the only option—and, in many cases, the preferred option—many jurisdictions will not allow for the payment of family members for child care services. The social policy research documented instances where adults were unable to access programs because they had been unable to access formal day care provision and had been prohibited from employing a family member to care for their dependents.

The research also confirmed the experience of students at Site A (and the teacher's report at Site D) with respect to the availability of on-campus day care places. It was reported that day care provision in public educational institutions is declining as operating budgets are cut and both colleges and school boards look for ways to trim expenditures. A 1992 study in the Site A province documented a serious lack of access to day care on college campuses. Colleges in this province, as elsewhere, have lost significant funding since that report was completed. The loss of day care in public educational institutions is all the more regrettable because they have generally

provided a superior level of care—typically incorporating Early Childhood Education and in some cases—as at Site A—including parenting classes for students whose children are in the centre. Of equal importance is the fact that having their upgrading program and their day care in the same location (where they are able to visit during the day) can not only ease students' concerns about leaving their children, thus enabling them to concentrate better on their studies; it can also save considerable time and money as children do not have to be transported to one location and parents to another each morning.

Financial Issues

As both Chapters 4 and 5 documented, the majority of students who participated in programs at the four research sites experienced considerable financial hardship which, in the short term, interfered with their ability to do the work required by their educational program and, in the long term, threatened to undermine their ability and motivation to continue. In general, the reasons for their financial hardship were a combination of inadequate income and the costs associated with attending the program. In many respects, the conditions which these students encountered during the period of the research were better than those which many adults who return to adult upgrading must face—and, indeed, better than they themselves might have to face in the future. None of the students had to pay tuition fees, for example, though some were required to pay small amounts of other types of fees. None of the students had to pay transportation costs during the period of the research; those who had not had their transportation paid by another agency were supported by the research project funds for the cost of their transportation. None of the students had to buy books and, at two of the four research sites, some amount of learning materials (pens, paper, etc.) was provided free. Nevertheless, for all but one or two students, finances were extremely tight and participation in the program necessitated both individual and family sacrifice.

The social policy research confirmed that financial hardship such as that experienced by the students at the four local sites is likely to be widespread among participants in Adult Basic Education programs, though there is considerable variation across the country in both the costs associated with Adult Basic Education and the types and levels of support available to students. The matter of tuition fees alone accounts for a considerable portion of the cost differentials across jurisdictions and, indeed, within jurisdictions.[15] In some jurisdictions, for example, there has been no tuition charged for any level of Adult Basic Education since at least the beginning of the Literacy campaigning movement of the mid to late 1980s; in other jurisdictions, a tuition exemption has

[15] In provinces where both colleges and school boards provide Adult Basic Education, for example, they frequently charge entirely different fees.In at least one province, high school delivered upgrading courses (mostly at the senior high school level) have been free while college Adult Basic Education programs (with the exception of the Literacy level) have until recently charged tuition fees in excess of $600 per semester.

been applied to the Literacy levels only. Recent policy changes at the provincial/territorial level with respect to tuition fees have varied extraordinarily. In at least two jurisdictions, for example, the existing tuition exemption for the Literacy level has recently been extended to include all Adult Basic Education. In other cases, however, policy has moved in the opposite direction. Jurisdictions which had exempted all or part of Adult Basic Education from tuition fees (typically in 1990, International Literacy Year) have reversed this policy over the past three to four years and are now charging fees for all levels. Some have, at the same time, substantially increased the fees charged or removed restrictions on the levying of tuition and other fees by deliverers. In at least one jurisdiction, tuition fees actually *doubled* in one year (1997) and only those above the age of 65 may be exempted from paying them.[16] Where fees are charged, they may vary from a nominal amount to quite a high amount and, in many cases, tuition fees for Adult Basic Education are the same as for all other training programs offered by an institution.

Yet, though the tuition fees (and the related costs of attending a program) may be as high for Adult Basic Education students as for other post-secondary students, in most cases they have much more limited access to financial assistance. In virtually every jurisdiction, Adult Basic Education students are prohibited from accessing any form of student loan, for example; the majority are also excluded from access to provincial/territorial grant programs. The Site A province is one of the few which has historically provided a grant program specifically targeted at Adult Basic Education students, but in recent years the average grant for students not receiving social assistance has been a mere $249. Students receiving social assistance receive grants from a different fund and these have been somewhat more generous. For both types of grants, however, students are required to pass all funded courses in order to remain eligible. In other jurisdictions, access to grants or other funding support may include either a performance or an attendance requirement.

Adults attending upgrading programs linked to social welfare reforms in some jurisdictions are removed from the social assistance program and placed on a training allowance when they enrol in the upgrading (or training) program. Though tuition, transportation and child care costs may (or may not) be subsidized under such an arrangement, students receiving training allowances typically lose access to other benefits which social assistance provided including, for example, health and drug coverage and rent subsidization.

[16] The monthly training allowance for a single person in this jurisdiction is $280,while tuition and related fees amount to $410 per semester, an amount which does not include the cost of books and other learning materials.Since there is no allocation from the training allowance for tuition (or books),students must spend well over one quarter of their total semester's training allowance on these items alone.

Scholarships and bursaries, generally available on a competitive basis, are rarely awarded to Adult Basic Education students. Where scholarships are specifically targeted at Adult Basic Education students, they tend to be quite small in relation to academic scholarships in general. Depending on the jurisdiction, scholarships, bursaries and grants may also be subtracted from social assistance income—thus eliminating any financial advantage to the student.

Quality of Educational Service Provided

It is clear that simple access to programs—though a vital precondition of access to educational upgrading opportunities—is not necessarily a reliable indicator of the extent to which the population in need of educational upgrading in a particular jurisdiction is enabled to achieve their objectives. Access to educational programs which do not provide appropriate learning environments is of dubious value; and there exists no evidence to suggest that appropriate learning environments for Adult Basic Education students require less of a social investment than they do for any other level or type of student in our society. On the contrary, adults returning to basic education—most of whom have already in some sense been defeated by schooling—are understandably vulnerable to feelings of disillusionment (and discouragement) if their initial experience of upgrading is in any respect negative.

Appropriate learning environments for Adult Basic Education should provide, as a minimum, adequate facilities and resources; qualified instruction of a sufficient intensity and duration to enable students to achieve their goals within a reasonable period of time; learning supports, including counseling and specialized assistance, as needed; and mechanisms for both recognizing and accrediting learning in ways which are of practical value to students as they make the transition to other upgrading programs, training programs or employment. The reality, however, is that Adult Basic Education students—having gotten over the initial (and considerable) hurdle of locating a program and securing access to it—all too frequently find themselves in programs which are significantly below the standards normally required of educational provision in this country.

The learning environments at three of the four local research sites—though offering, in many respects, a relatively high quality service compared to many Literacy and Adult Basic Education programs in this country—exhibited serious deficiencies which threatened to compromise students' chances of meeting their objectives. Perhaps the most serious deficiency was that of the time restrictions on the Site D students and the lack of an avenue for transition to further levels of upgrading for those students who managed to complete the program in spite of the restrictions.

Another problem at this site was the lack of access to educational diagnosis and counseling, and specialized instructional assistance, for the two students who exhibited learning difficulties. This was potentially a problem at Sites B and C as well. Facilities at these three sites also presented problems—albeit in different ways—for both the students and the teachers.

At each of the four local research sites, however, the students were fortunate in that they were connected (even if somewhat marginally) to a *system* of educational upgrading. Their programs were either linked through curriculum to higher levels of upgrading or their teachers were sufficiently knowledgeable about the demands of the subsequent levels to ensure that they were prepared to make the transition. Although, at two of the sites, entrance tests were required for Adult Basic Education graduates to access higher levels of upgrading (just as if they were applying from outside the institution), their teachers were preparing them for writing these tests. In fact, the social policy research would seem to indicate that, with the exception of the Site D students, the student participants in this study had a considerably *better than average* chance of succeeding in achieving the educational credentials to which they aspired.

The general research findings point to serious shortcomings in the quality of educational service provided to adults in need of basic educational upgrading in virtually all jurisdictions. In terms of the opportunity actually provided students who desire to upgrade their educational credentials, perhaps the most serious issue in the current period is the trend towards a 'fast-tracking' approach to upgrading and the subjection of a large proportion of adult upgrading programs to the priorities of social welfare reform.[17] In most jurisdictions, there is a stream of educational upgrading developing which is focused not on providing the opportunity for participants to achieve either personal development goals or transferable educational credentials but on preparing them directly for particular job-related training or for immediate employment in entry-level jobs. As Adult Basic Education is increasingly linked to social welfare reforms, this approach is becoming more widespread.

Virtually all the students in the local research classes indicated that their ultimate goal was to improve their standard of living through employment; they all realized, however, that only recognized educational credentials would significantly improve their prospects for reasonably well paid employment. A significant

[17] It should be noted that open-ended access to Adult Basic Education is very rare in any jurisdiction in this country. Virtually everywhere, access to formal programs has some form of time limitation; this may be imposed by the sponsoring agent or the program deliverer. In many cases, as at Site D where the program duration was dictated by HRDC regulations on sponsorship for students, the limitations (and the consequent pressures) are nothing short of punishing. The introduction of a 'fast-track' version of Adult Basic Education must be understood for what it is: further limiting an already seriously limited program.

minority had participated in numerous short-term training programs in the past and all but a tiny fraction of the total student sample had had extensive experience in a variety of low paying jobs. Training of the kind which is currently being promoted as an alternative to general educational upgrading would not have allowed most of these students to pursue their objectives or achieve their aspirations. Indeed, the research in one jurisdiction reported a certain amount of stigma attached to attending programs specifically tailored to social welfare reform objectives. Both post-secondary institutions and employers in that jurisdiction were giving graduates from regular Adult Basic Education programs priority over graduates from the Adult Basic Education programs known to be associated with the welfare reform program.

Ironically, one outcome of the shift towards a directly job-related focus for adult Literacy programs, as documented by the general research in one of the largest jurisdictions in the country, is that it may serve to narrow those programs which remain primarily educational. Literacy programs in this province are tending to become much more strictly academic and to lose their social and employment-related components; they are also receiving a declining share of the total Literacy budget as more and more of this budget is allocated to short-term programs focusing exclusively on social and employment-related objectives.

With respect to the quality of facilities, every jurisdiction in this country permits some part of the delivery of Literacy and Adult Basic Education to take place in entirely unregulated facilities—a practice which is increasing in the current period. Though basic education is a public service—and in virtually all cases supported either in principle or in fact by government—adults are frequently obliged to study in facilities which do not even meet public health and safety standards, much less educational requirements. As was documented in the first section of this chapter, in many jurisdictions the only 'regulation' on Literacy and Adult Basic Education facilities operated outside the public education system is that they be rent-free; such a regulation is, of course, not a regulation at all but a serious constraint—and one which is almost certain to give rise to the use of sub-standard facilities in at least some instances. Where programs are operated directly by public educational institutions, it was found that—though they were often not located in the most desirable facilities—they were governed by the same health and safety regulations as other public buildings. When public institutions (both colleges and school boards) contract out the delivery of Literacy programs or pass responsibility for provision over to a 'community partner', however, these standards do not generally apply; programs indirectly provided by public educational institutions may be (and evidently frequently are) located in sub-standard facilities.

On the question of curricula and learning resources, a wide variety of arrangements was found to exist across the country. Several jurisdictions have developed curriculum guidelines to the general learning objectives level for all Adult Basic Education levels; a minority have developed more detailed curricula and supported them with specially developed learning resources. In these cases, there tends to be a relatively transparent system of credentialing and transfer routes which works to the advantage of Adult Basic Education students at all levels. In a minority of jurisdictions, there has been virtually no involvement of government in systematizing the curricula of Literacy and pre-high school Adult Basic Education programs until quite recently; in these cases, student transition from one program to another may be seriously impeded, even where there are ample programs available. A recent study in one such jurisdiction—one of the most populous areas of the country—reported that the barriers to students making the transition from one program to another (or from one deliverer to another) are frequently insurmountable; a significant proportion of students who enrol in Adult Basic Education programs in this jurisdiction never achieve their educational goals because of this.

Where both colleges and school boards are engaged in the provision of Adult Basic Education, there is frequently no commonality in either their program content or their credentials and no provision for transfer of credits from one to the other. Credentials awarded by public educational institutions for work in Adult Basic Education or other upgrading programs may or may not be recognized outside the awarding institution. In some jurisdictions, government has taken the lead in developing curricula and assessment tools and in having institutions come together to develop a credentialing system which is truly equivalent to a high school diploma. In a number of jurisdictions, for example, Adult Basic Education diplomas from either community colleges or school boards are accepted by all post-secondary institutions in the jurisdiction and generally recognized by employers. In others, however, credentials are only recognized within the granting institution—as a prerequisite for other training programs in that institution. Where adults have access to the secondary school program (either in secondary schools, adult high schools or other program options offered by school boards), they generally acquire qualifications which have the same currency as a regular high school diploma.

Whether or not a jurisdiction has developed content or curriculum guidelines and established clear credentialing 'paths', in most cases there is a considerable portion of Adult Basic Education provision which takes place outside of the official program guidelines. This may include, for example, voluntary Literacy agencies, private for-profit trainers, community organizations, labour organizations and ad hoc Literacy organizations using their

own curriculum or a variety of off-the-shelf products. In such cases, there is typically no public involvement in regulating programming or in ensuring transition routes for students.

Funding for the purchase of learning resources to support Literacy and Adult Basic Education programs is frequently extremely inadequate, even where officially sanctioned curriculum objectives require the use of a wide variety and range of resources. Most Literacy and Adult Basic Education programs do not have the use of audio-visual resources and, except where they form the core curriculum, computers are rarely provided for the use of Adult Basic Education students. In the starkest example of a casual attitude towards resourcing Adult Basic Education classrooms, the general research found one jurisdiction which provided absolutely no funding for the purchase of resource materials in its 'community Literacy programs', the principal avenue for Adult Basic Education in the jurisdiction. A government document providing guidelines on setting up the programs advised the organizing committees and teachers that they would have to "beg, borrow or steal" resources from the local library, book stores, or wherever else they could find them.

With respect to the qualifications of Literacy and Adult Basic Education teaching staff, including specialized instructional staff for students in need, the general research again found a wide range of provisions across the country. For the most part, jurisdictions leave the setting of teacher qualifications to program deliverers. Where programs are delivered by public educational institutions, these qualifications are fairly standard across the country; most require that teachers possess valid teacher certification and, at the higher levels of upgrading, subject specialization is normally required. Others require university level education, though not specifically teacher education/certification. A few require specialized qualification in Adult Education, although there is insufficient access to such training in this country to permit institutions to make this an across-the-board requirement. Most educational institutions do not provide access to professional diagnosis and specialized instruction for learning disabled Adult Basic Education students as a matter of course, although in perhaps the majority of school boards and colleges it can be arranged exceptionally. Literacy and Adult Basic Education teachers are rarely required to possess Special Education qualifications and very few possess more than a 'workshop' level of training specific to adult Literacy teaching. Yet, though they may not have specialized training in adult Literacy—which, it should be noted, is not available in most regions of the country—many public institutions have developed a considerable pool of knowledge and expertise in Literacy and Adult Basic Education over the past ten to fifteen years. Significant development of learning materials, assessment tools and program guidelines has taken place in both colleges and school boards

across the country in this period. Unfortunately, as institutions lose funding and Literacy and Adult Basic Education programs are cut, the accumulated knowledge and expertise (and in many cases the tools and materials as well) are being lost.[18]

Outside programs directly delivered by public educational institutions, there is little regulation of Adult Basic Education teachers and/or tutors. Some community organizations which have had long-standing Literacy programs have established their own standards and developed teacher training protocols and workshops. Volunteer Literacy organizations typically develop and deliver their own tutor training programs. In several jurisdictions, provincial education authorities take some responsibility for providing initial training to both coordinators and teacher/tutors, particularly when a 'community Literacy program' is a core part of the government's involvement in Literacy and Adult Basic Education provision.[19] This is necessary because, even when 'community programs' are established by governments—as they have been by several jurisdictions in recent years as a cost-cutting measure—instructional staff do not usually have to have teacher certification or even university level education. In one such provincial 'community Literacy program', for example, teachers are required to possess no more than a high school diploma—though they may be responsible for teaching Adult Basic Education to the level of Grade 9. There is no jurisdiction in this country which has established either qualifications criteria or a screening process for volunteer Literacy tutors, even though in many cases volunteer tutoring is an essential component of the jurisdiction's official Literacy strategy and, in some cases, it is the only option available to those whose educational attainment or literacy skill is below the junior high or high school levels.

The research in general pointed to an overall decline in the conditions under which Literacy and Adult Basic Education programs are provided in the current period. Though there has been increased funding to the volunteer and 'community' Literacy sector in some jurisdictions in the recent past,[20] in most cases the funding to this sector has been so seriously inadequate that the funding increases are unlikely to result in an increase in capacity or a

[18] This had been a factor at Sites B and C which have, over the past few years, lost a significant proportion of their teaching and coordinating/administrative staff through cuts. At Site D, though the teacher had been singled out by the provincial education authorities during the period of the research for his expertise in a particular aspect of Adult Basic Education delivery, he was at the same time being advised by his employer to prepare himself for work in another area as there would be few future opportunities in Adult Basic Education.

[19] There are several jurisdictions where grants to ad hoc committees or groups for the provision of Literacy in their communities is the principal element of the provincial Literacy strategy.

[20] In one of the country's largest jurisdictions, for example, funding for community groups doubled in the early 1990s, even as Literacy and Adult Basic Education in general declined considerably. In other jurisdictions, as public educational institutions are removed from Literacy and Adult Basic Education, some portion of the funds which used to be allocated to them is shifted to the community sector.

significant improvement in service. In many other jurisdictions, an increasing share of responsibility for Literacy provision is being shifted to the volunteer and 'community' sector with little or no increase in funding; in yet other jurisdictions, both volunteer and community organizations and Literacy agencies which have operated outside the public delivery system have actually had funding levels cut even as they have been put forward by governments as a viable alternative to public provision. The funding cuts which have had the most serious impact on both the level and quality of Adult Basic Education services in this country, however, have been those to public sector deliverers. In virtually every jurisdiction, the public educational institution(s) which have provided the majority of Literacy and Adult Basic Education programming have been subject to substantial funding cuts. Where jurisdictions have had targeted funding for Literacy and Adult Basic Education, these have come in for direct hits; where the funding for these programs has been discretionary spending from the base funding of institutions, cuts to general operating grants have been passed on to Adult Basic Education in the earliest phases of funding cuts. Subsequent cuts are also passed on and the cumulative impact of a number of years of funding cuts has been the virtual elimination of public Literacy and Adult Basic Education programs in a number of jurisdictions.[21]

Where programs have not been eliminated, they have generally been subject to a diminishment in conditions. Most institutions, for example, have responded to reduced Adult Basic Education budgets by attempting to stretch what remains of the funding. This has resulted in larger class numbers and increased student:teacher ratios—effecting savings on both facility allocations and salaries. Several jurisdictions reported a student:teacher ratio of 14:1 or more for the Literacy level and significantly higher ratios for the upper levels of upgrading. Considering that Literacy classes are generally multi-level and that, as the volume of programs diminishes, the spread of levels in any class is likely to have to increase, such a ratio is far from the ideal. The problem is likely to become even more serious as a greater proportion of Literacy classes is made up of referrals from social welfare reform initiatives. This clientele may reasonably be assumed to have a greater range of needs than the Adult Basic Education population in general. Additionally, if individuals are in a program through compulsion or obligation rather than personal choice, it is likely that issues of motivation will arise, thus making the teacher's job all the more

[21] The Site C province provides perhaps the best example of the impact of funding cuts on access to the service. For a number of years,that province had the most progressive funding policy for adult Literacy education—essentially providing an 'open envelope' of funds which permitted school boards to extend Literacy programming to meet the demand.When unlimited funding was available, large numbers of adults prevailed of the service and these numbers increased annually over a number of years.Since the fund was capped—and,in recent years,significantly reduced—the number of students in Literacy programs has declined dramatically, clearly demonstrating the relationship between funding and access to the service. It also suggests the existence of a substantial unmet need for adult Literacy services in this jurisdiction in the current period.

difficult. Importantly, also, as colleges and school boards have lost base funding, they have tended to decrease their levels of resources and support services. The general research reported that counseling services (educational, personal and employment) have declined in educational institutions in most jurisdictions in recent years.

Recent funding trends in Adult Basic Education threaten to exacerbate the situation further. Several jurisdictions, for example, have moved to a 'pay per student' or 'pay per contact hour' funding formula. The research in the Site C province pointed clearly to the potential impacts of such funding formulas on both the availability and the quality of service. A new regulation in that province requires deliverers to record attendance hourly; funding is awarded on the basis of the total number of hours a student is actually present in class. This has created enormous pressure on the deliverers[22] (both the school boards and the community agencies they contract) to maintain student numbers, as the costs of delivering a program (salaries, facilities, resources) are not less on days when there are fewer students in a class. The result has been that classes are generally only established when there is an actual surplus of students—in many cases, only when the number is double the minimum required. Although this may go some way towards ensuring that the class will not close mid-way through, the practice has inevitably increased the student:teacher ratios by far more than the officially mandated increase would indicate.[23] In this province and others, enrolment-based funding also poses a continual threat of programs losing funding and being closed at any point. The negative impact of such a policy on the quality of the educational opportunity provided must inevitably be enormous. When it is considered that students and their families are required to make extraordinary sacrifices to attend programs which may simply abandon them, it must be acknowledged that the ramifications of this policy are nothing less than tragic.

[22] It has also, of course, created a great deal of pressure on teachers and significantly increased their administrative workload as they are required to record attendance on an hourly basis.

[23] The student:teacher ratio for Literacy in this province, for example, had recently increased. In the region in which the Site C program was located, the ratio had increased from 12:1 to 14:1. In more remote areas, the ratio is somewhat lower (from 11:1 to 13:1, for example), but since population density in rural and remote areas is so much lower and transportation so much for difficult, the lower ratio does not necessarily translate into greater access. Indeed, it would likely be far more difficult to recruit the 11 students necessary to start a class in a sparsely populated area than to recruit 14 in a more densely populated area. It should also be noted that these ratios are set by the province as the basis of its funding formula only; school boards in this province have the discretion to set their own ratios in Adult Basic Education—though not in primary, elementary or secondary schooling.

Conclusion

This chapter has analyzed the general research data from the perspective of the social policy environment documented at the four local research sites and the trends and issues which emerged at these sites during the research period. The evidence of the general research component of the study indicates that the conditions (of both policy and practice) at the local research sites are largely representative of public Adult Basic Education provision in this country in the current period—where public provision exists. In many parts of this country, there is simply no public provision of this service. The picture overall is rather grim—though a poorly supported and still largely undeveloped public service, Adult Basic Education is in decline in virtually every jurisdiction in this country. In some jurisdictions it has been all but eliminated.

Importantly also, this study has demonstrated that documenting the state of Adult Basic Education provision is far more difficult than the documentation of any area of public service provision—or public taxation expenditures—ought to be. The difficulty of ascertaining levels of funding and numbers enrolled in programs, for example, has serious implications for public accountability for the meeting of this very real social need. It also suggests that most jurisdictions would have difficulty planning for a more comprehensive and higher quality service without first undertaking a radical revision of existing accountability mechanisms at the provincial/territorial government level. In the current period, public Literacy and Adult Basic Education programs are expected to provide services and produce "results" as if they were funded to an extent comparable to other levels and types of public education. In fact, they are rarely funded at comparable levels and, in far too many cases, their funding levels are totally unrelated to the costs of providing educational services in this country. Literacy and Adult Basic Education programs may, consequently, be unfairly judged to be a poor "investment" when attrition rates and graduation rates are compared with other, better supported areas of education.

There are two other general points which came out of both the social policy and the local research which particularly warrant reiteration. The first of these speaks to the issue of *equitable access* to quality basic education in this country. It is clear that every jurisdiction has a long way to go before universal access to basic education services is a reality and virtually every jurisdiction is moving farther and farther away from achieving this goal in the current period. Within this generally pessimistic scenario, however, there is considerable variation. In the best served jurisdictions, it has been estimated that as many as one-quarter of all those who do not finish school eventually achieve a high school diploma (or its equivalent) through educational upgrading. In many other

jurisdictions, however, it has always been virtually impossible for an individual who has not completed his or her initial schooling to ever do so; in the majority of these jurisdictions, this already seriously inadequate provision has dramatically declined in the recent past. Even in better-served jurisdictions, the level of opportunity depends very much on where a person lives and whether or not they are in a position to be sponsored by an agency. There is perhaps no other public service in Canada where such disparity would be allowed to exist.

The second general point which bears reiteration is that adult educational upgrading opportunities in this country are not only diminishing but are becoming increasingly narrow. The social policy research investigated, in particular, the question of direct linkages between Literacy and Adult Basic Education provision and social policy initiatives subsumed under either 'community economic development' or social security reform. What was found was that both of these social policy initiatives, and related programs, are tending to either ignore or downplay the importance of providing adults with educational upgrading opportunities; where they do recognize any value for educational upgrading, it is generally viewed from a purely instrumental perspective—as no more than the means of filling entry-level jobs in a community, for example, or of getting people off social assistance via the shortest possible route. Invariably, this view also supports a system of 'triage', whereby access to educational upgrading programs is restricted to those deemed most likely to move through the programs and into training or employment in the shortest time. Ironically, the folly of such short-sighted social policy was officially recognized in this country as long ago as 1984 when, as Chapter 1 noted, the National Advisory Panel on Skill Development Leave, in a report to the Minister of Employment and Immigration, criticized National Training Act programs for being too focused on "job-specific skills, [thus] preventing many Canadians from obtaining vitally needed upgrading" (1984:7).

What is ignored in the current approach (quite apart from the question of its efficacy in achieving even its own narrow objectives) is the individual's own aspirations. What is lost, however, is not only the potential of individuals to improve the quality of their own and their family's lives, but also the ability of the community and the broader society to achieve its collective potential. As noted in the Introduction to this report, the *Hamburg Declaration on Adult Education* (Unesco, 1997) commits participating states to "linking literacy to the *social, cultural and economic development aspirations* of learners" through, among other actions, *emphasizing the importance of literacy for human rights, participatory citizenship, social, political and economic equity, and cultural identity and replacing the narrow vision of literacy by learning that meets*

social, economic and political needs and gives expression to new forms of citizenship. **If Canada is to seriously pursue its commitment to this United Nations undertaking, then current directions will need to be reversed and a new commitment made to genuine basic education opportunities for the millions of Canadian adults who may need or desire them.**

Chapter 8

8 Imagining How Things Could Be Different

Teacher Recommendations for Change

Chapter Summary

All five teacher researchers were asked to include in their final research report an analysis of the issues which had emerged during the course of the research; they were also asked to consider what would be necessary to address the issues and/or resolve the problems which they, their students, or their programs had faced. This chapter presents the teachers' principal analyses of issues and recommendations for change. Though their recommendations reflect the particular issues and concerns which emerged at their own sites during the research period—or which are ongoing issues at their sites or in their jurisdictions—there is a shared understanding and a unity of vision which runs through all the recommendations. Taken together, the teacher recommendations constitute a fitting conclusion to this report.

Introduction

Perhaps more than any other participants in the research process, the teachers at the four local research sites were in a position to observe and document the state of Literacy and Adult Basic Education provision from a number of perspectives. They were daily witnesses to the issues and problems experienced by their students and all of them became involved during the course of the research in students' efforts to resolve issues and find solutions to problems. They were also subject themselves—just as their students were—to the policy changes and funding instability of their institutions/agencies and the larger political jurisdiction. One of the five teachers summarized both the general understanding of the challenge facing Literacy and Adult Basic Education and the commitment to change which characterized the teachers as a group:

> *The situation briefly attracts public and media attention, with the interest lasting only a short time. Literacy workers alone continue to live daily with this state of affairs and to fight—often uselessly—for the higher powers to end their cuts. Even hope of simply maintaining the status quo [seems] itself [to have] become out of the question. … The present research and analysis of its results have confirmed what I've known after six years of hard work in adult education.… I sincerely wish to thank all who have been involved in this research for their support throughout the semester, and I hope with all my heart that the results will bring the federal and provincial governments to*

improve the living conditions for adult students and to facilitate their access to Literacy and Adult Basic Education, this being the objective of the research.

From the start of their involvement in the research, all of the teachers took the responsibility of making recommendations for change very seriously. During the course of the research, they each undertook to consult with other Literacy and Adult Basic Education teachers in their institution or area as well as with each other; several of the teacher tele-conference meetings were substantially devoted to discussing the issues and the formulation of recommendations. The teachers at the four sites had been selected for the teacher researcher role, in part, for their experience and knowledge not only of Adult Basic Education but of the system(s) in which it operated. Importantly, this enabled them to place the local conditions within the larger social policy framework and to envision possible solutions at that level as well as at the local level.

They all clearly understood, however, that one important objective of the research was to provide analyses of issues and problems specific to each site and that their recommendations for actions or policies would be the more valuable for reflecting a considered analysis of local conditions.

This chapter presents the majority of recommendations made by the local research teachers, either as a part of their analysis of local issues or as explicit recommendations for change.

Reading the Teacher Recommendations

Each teacher approached the task of developing recommendations for change somewhat differently, and this is reflected in the differing formats of the recommendations. One teacher, for example, framed the recommendations by describing in detail the current situation at her site followed by specific recommendations for improving the situation; another presented her recommendations as formal resolutions, incorporating a description of the local or provincial situation in the preamble to the resolution; yet another chose an essay format to present a comprehensive set of recommendations for the organization and delivery of Literacy and Adult Basic Education at the provincial level. Where the recommendations speak for themselves, preliminary explanatory material and preambles have been either edited or omitted. Recommendations which speak only to very local or specifically provincial/territorial issues—and which have no clear relevance to the broader context—have not been included; and where two or more teachers have made virtually identical recommendations in respect of a particular issue, in the interests of brevity, only one has been selected.

While generally in accord, the teacher recommendations presented in this chapter also contain some potentially contradictory elements. This reflects the fact that, although they discussed this aspect of their role extensively, the teachers were, as noted, charged with formulating their own recommendations on the basis of their local or provincial/territorial situation. While they all speak from the point of view of public delivery of Literacy and Adult Basic Education, the actual delivery agencies and organization of provision varied considerably from site to site. Inevitably, as their experiences vary, so do their perspectives on the range of possible or desirable solutions. The teacher recommendations presented in this chapter need to be read with this in mind. Any contradictions (implicit or explicit) should be seen as a function of the local basis of the recommendations; they do not reflect a substantial divergence of opinion arising out of debate or discussion. Similarly, where there is convergence of opinion, this does not represent any attempt to reach consensus.

It is critically important that the reader of this chapter understand that the teacher recommendations are not definitive; many more recommendations could be made in respect of Literacy and Adult Basic Education—as, indeed, they have been implicitly (by students and teachers as well as the author) throughout this document. Nor, as indicated above, do the teachers' recommendations represent a consensus of either the teachers as a group or the project research team. Rather, they should be read as the other chapters which report on local research findings have been read—for their value as thoughtful responses to lived experiences and both real and immediate issues.

Teacher Recommendations

This section presents, first, the contributions of the four teachers who formulated each recommendation as a separate entity. The recommendations are organized under ten headings as follows: *global policy recommendations; funding; facilities and resources; scheduling; student:teacher ratio/stability of classes; services and supports; links to other programs/student transitions; time allowed to complete the programs; materials and resources; and teacher qualifications and professional development.* There are a number of recommendations under some of these headings and as few as one under others; however, this should not be read as either a relative lack of interest in any of the issues described by the headings or as an indication of their importance. The teachers were free to submit as many recommendations as they wished and their interpretation of the scope of this section of their report varied. All of the issues described by these headings surfaced, in some way, at all four sites and the recommendations are relevant, in some measure, at all sites.

The presentation of organized (and separate) recommendations is followed by an essay from the fifth teacher which, in its comprehensiveness, sums up much of the general tenor of the other teachers' recommendations and—in general if not in every detail—serves to conclude the teacher recommendations.

Global Policy Recommendations

As a society, we have to start taking the issue of undereducation seriously. Being undereducated can often lead to a life of low employment or unemployment, poverty, and low self-esteem. Poor health, depression, and substance abuse can also result as people strive to survive in a wealthy society. ***We need much more than a few poorly funded sporadic programs to solve the problem.***

Given the lack of collaboration between the [various provincial government departments] concerning services offered to the adult population in need of Literacy and/or Second Language services [and] given that [social workers] lack information on the Literacy services provided and the [potential] benefits for the population they serve [and] given that new government policies discourage social workers from referring their clientele to Adult Education services, especially Literacy services [and] given the devastating effects these new policies are having on the province's most disadvantaged population ***… It is recommended that all departments concerned agree on the creation of a provincial committee with equal representation from each department, as well as school boards. The main objective of this committee would be to sustain a concerted approach to decision making with regard to the future of Literacy.*** *The second objective would be to ensure that information be available within each department, and that this information be consistent for all departments. The third objective would be to establish common policies that allow Literacy students to further their education up to a high school diploma, skills training diploma, or beyond. The ultimate objective of this committee would be to soften Adult Basic Education policies in general, thus allowing adult students to achieve their goal, namely finding employment and no longer relying on the state for their own and their family's subsistence. This would also give students the opportunity to become citizens who can fully participate in [our] society.*

We must take a look at the issue of undereducated adults in Canada from more than an educational perspective. *We can begin this by looking at the reasons why people are undereducated. What happened in their lives that stopped the learning process? How has society let them down? What kind of supports were in place when they were falling through the educational cracks?* ***[and] We must dare to examine the issue of undereducated adults from an educational perspective.*** *What happened in their educational history which led to their being undereducated? Where did the system "fail" them?*

Funding

Funding for Adult Basic Education programs must be stable. *The instability in the funding causes worry and frustration for those who need more than 20 weeks to upgrade their skills. Going back to school involves a great deal of change for people. They are not going to be willing to take those risks for something that is probably not going to last.*

Facilities and Resources

In terms of facilities for Adult Basic Education programs, ***I believe these programs should be housed in a variety of locations.*** *In some cases, community- based or workplace programs are best suited to the needs of the students; in other cases, school-based programs are most appropriate.* ***It is important that adult students be given a range of choices in terms of type of program, scheduling, and location.*** *As much as possible,* ***facilities should be clean, well-equipped, well-lit, safe, and conducive to learning.*** *Adequate lighting, room temperature, and air quality are particularly important, and should not be compromised just because a class is located in a community centre or workplace rather than a school. School-based* ***programs should be easy to access by public transportation, and adequate parking should be made available to those students who travel by car.*** *It is also preferable that amenities such as a kettle, refrigerator and microwave be available to students so that they can take responsibility for their own snacks and lunches, rather than relying on costly vending machines or restaurants. This is particularly important for students who attend full-day classes.*

Scheduling

This program offers students ***a range of scheduling choices.*** *Full-day (5 hour) classes, morning classes, afternoon classes, or evening classes are available. This flexibility in scheduling allows students to select a program that conforms to other responsibilities, such as employment and family, and is essential to the success of adult Literacy programs.*

Student:Teacher Ratio/Stability of Classes

Given that the Education Department's [newly imposed] student:teacher ratio of 1:14 for Literacy classes does not give proper consideration to the real needs of the student population; [and] given the diversity of needs in adult Literacy classes; [and] given the emphasis placed on individualized teaching and student-centred learning; [and] given the student drop-out rate during the first month of a class opening; [and] given the effects associated with a continuous intake policy for Literacy classes and the period of adjustment needed for new students as well as the group in general; [and] given the difficulty of recruiting an adult clientele that is not really accessible via printed advertising, ***It is recommended that a student:teacher ratio of 1:12 constitute the base standard for Literacy classes [and that] a reduction in student numbers during a semester … not constitute a sufficient reason for closing a class.***

Services and Supports

At the very minimum, ***Adult Basic Education programs must have good quality, affordable day care facilities, parking, easily accessible transit, and personal counselors on site.*** *Many adult learners have multi-barriers. We must make every effort to ensure that their educational experience is as simple and straightforward as possible. Once they start upgrading, they will have enough struggles. They [shouldn't] have to worry about the quality of day care, getting home in time to meet their kids, and dealing with their stresses on their own.*

It is recommended that substantial aid be granted to students in Literacy classes who are living below the poverty level; [and that] such ***financial aid be used to pay transportation costs, child care costs, school materials, extracurricular activities and extra expenses incurred in the purchase of clothing.***

Students in the research project class were greatly helped by the provision of ***a transportation subsidy*** *from September - December, and at the very least,* ***this type of subsidy could greatly relieve the financial pressures*** *that are a reality for students receiving social assistance.*

Adult Basic Education students could greatly benefit from a counsellor who could assist them with personal problems, as well as educational and career counseling. Personal problems frequently interfere with an adult learner's ability to attend and/or remain in school, and formal career counseling could greatly assist students and teachers in the formation of realistic training plans. By lending support to the students and relieving teachers of some of the pressure to counsel students, ***the services of a full-time counsellor trained in these areas would benefit the program as a whole.***

Given that the daily problems facing students touch on many aspects of life; [and] given that the problems faced by Literacy students are [often] complex, serious, wide-ranging and urgent [and cannot be solved by teachers], ***It is recommended that students have access to social service workers from whom they can obtain support in their search for adequate solutions to their problems.***

Support services [should] include ***parenting classes, employment counseling, job bank and goal setting.***

[There should be] ***full-time Teacher Aides for classes for adults with developmental disabilities.***

Full access to assessment services geared to address the needs of the learning disabled adult would be beneficial. *These*

services could be offered through a centralized service-provider, for example, a region-wide intake assessment and referral service. Individual Literacy programs could contract with this service-provider to provide assessments of special learning needs, and work with teachers to develop effective teaching strategies for learning disabled students. In urban centres, there is ***an increasing need for pronunciation remediation with New Canadian Adult Basic Education students.*** *Poor … pronunciation patterns that have been reinforced over time lead to difficulties with reading and writing.This is a difficult problem to address in classroom settings where the groups are comprised of both New Canadian and Canadian-born students, and pronunciation problems may be limited to one or two students in each group.Again,* ***a centralized Educational Support Service could provide pronunciation remediation services to individual Literacy programs, working with individual students or small groups of students withdrawn from their regular classes.***

Given that Literacy teachers work with a multi-level clientele ranging from 0 to 9 years in education; [and] given that teachers must work with student sub-groups in order to meet the different learning needs; [and] given that teachers must prepare various daily lessons for each class in order to meet the varied student learning needs;[and] given that teachers need external resources to re-energize, ***It is recommended that teachers would benefit from greater pedagogical support, be it a resource person or an educational counselor; [and] that this support should be provided in concrete ways, such as weekly or bi-monthly educational support in class; [and] that this support should include special pedagogical projects that would aim to stimulate both teachers and learners.***

Links to Other Programs/Student Transitions

The validity of a program such as this depends on its ability to connect students with further educational opportunities.At present, the Adult Basic Education program, while an excellent program in and of itself,operates within a vacuum.Students who wish to move from this program to another educational program are not able to do so with ease because work completed in this program is not recognized by any other educational program in the community, including the program with which we share a facility! Students leaving this program cannot simply transfer into another educational program as part of a natural progression, but rather, must be assessed and placed according to that program's standards and requirements. ***Education and training services to adults must be coordinated and connected so that a natural and purposeful progression occurs from Adult Basic Education into a secondary school program and/or a post-secondary or job skills training program.*** *Otherwise, the establishment of long- term 'training plans' at the Adult Basic*

Education level is strictly conjectural, and cannot be considered an authentic document for long-range planning.

As has been indicated, students attending this Adult Basic Education program are receiving an excellent education which is not recognized beyond the confines of the program itself. A mechanism which links all adult education and training programs must be developed and implemented. ***Adult learners must be able to enter the system at whatever level is appropriate to their current skill level (Adult Basic Education/secondary school/job skills training/post-secondary education) and progress through the system until they have achieved their long-range training goals.***

The barriers need to be broken down between agencies involved with adults with developmental disabilities. *We need to communicate what we are doing and, with the student, plan to fulfill the student's goals.*

Time Allowed to Complete the Program

At present, there is no time limit imposed on students in this Adult Basic Education program. The majority of students are motivated and capable, and collaborate with their teachers in determining the pace of their progress. Students who require more time are able to learn at a slower pace, without being pressured to achieve set goals within a certain time frame. This arrangement allows the program to serve students with a range of needs and capabilities. ***Hopefully, time limits will not become an issue in the future.***

Given that the percentage of Literacy students who are able to complete their education in the allotted time [in this province at present] is somewhere between 10% and 20%; [and] given that access to higher education is refused to this category of students since they are not able to pass high school entrance tests and, thus, cannot gain entry to skills training programs that lead to jobs. ***It is recommended that Literacy students no longer be constrained to completing their education within a limited period ….***

Materials and Resources

Based on my own experiences, ***I would recommend that teachers have access to a wide assortment of learning materials that span different learning levels and cover a wide range of learning needs,*** *such as vocabulary development, grammar operations, reading comprehension, writing, current events, and numeracy skills. It is* ***crucial that these resources be geared to adult learners*** *and not be overly American in content. In urban areas,* ***resources should also be selected to meet the needs of New Canadians,*** *whose knowledge of idioms and colloquialisms may be limited.* ***The emphasis on student-centred***

learning requires that teachers prepare original resources that reflect the needs and preferences of students. Teachers should be given paid time to prepare these materials. Students should also have access to a library, where they can select their own reading materials and begin to practice research skills. Regular access to computers is crucial, and a computer in the classroom is ideal!

Teacher Qualifications and Professional Development

The majority of teachers in this program are licensed teachers who were originally trained to teach primary/junior, intermediate, or senior levels. This type of background is helpful in terms of providing a strong foundation in educational theory and method; however, ***it is important for teachers of adults to supplement their teacher training with further instruction specific to the needs of adult learners and an andragogical approach to teaching and learning.*** *As certified teachers teaching in the Adult Basic Education program are not recognized as such, are not remunerated as such,and are not eligible for representation in the [provincial teacher's federation],* ***it does not seem necessary to make teacher certification a requirement of the job, provided that all instructors in this program can demonstrate qualifications as effective teachers of Adult Basic Education. Ideally, Adult Basic Education teachers should be granted formal recognition and certification as professionals in the field of Adult Education.***

Greater access to professional development activities, such as conferences and workshops, could be facilitated by the allocation of funds specific to this purpose. *Also,teachers would likely be more motivated to invest in their professional development* ***if they were to be recognized as professionals, and had a greater sense of stability in their jobs.***

Instructors of Adult Basic Education do not necessarily have to be certified teachers, but they must ascribe to and follow well established standards of good practice. *In the many places where I have worked, at the School District level, at the community level and at the college level, whether an instructor is officially certified has not been an adequate assurance of a good Literacy instructor. I have worked with certified teachers and uncertified instructors who simply couldn't handle Literacy issues, who couldn't handle change in the student population; I have worked with certified teachers and uncertified instructors who valued professional development and had a keen appreciation of the learning process and individual learning styles. In fact, during my own process of certification I did not receive any Literacy instruction or any information or encouragement about becoming an Adult Educator. Furthermore, several of my mentors over the years are not certified instructors. But for them,*

teaching is a calling and part of the lifelong learning that they are engaged in. Finally, if we as educators recognize the life experience that adults have as being an integral part of their development and give them formal credits for that life experience, then ***we also have to recognize that instructors have life experience that counts towards the development of their profession. This is not to say that it is a 'free-for-all' and that anyone can teach Literacy. Absolutely not. There must be the development of a set of standards that are applied to Literacy practice; standards which will apply to anyone teaching Literacy.***

Literacy instructors must have support for professional development as issues arise. *Literacy instruction often involves helping the students identify the barriers to their learning. Often this is a painful process for the student, and in the long term, it can be toxic for the instructor as they hear these painful stories over and over again.* ***They must have counselors on staff which are available for the instructors as well as the students. Furthermore, there must be in-service training for Literacy instructors as issues arise in their student population.***

Professional development [should include] ***the development of teaching strategies geared to special needs students and Adult Education in general.***

A Teacher's Essay on the Need for An Adult Basic Education System

United we stand, divided we fall! These words ring so true today when we look at the state of adult upgrading and its decline. It is falling apart because of a lack of unity. There needs to be congruency, spearheaded by a main governing body. This could and should be the government, in much the same way as it provides mainstream direction for primary and secondary education. After all, if you accept the premise that it is the government's responsibility to oversee education to the Grade Twelve level and that all students, regardless of age, should have access to this educational unencumbered by tuition fees and [other] costs, then it only makes sense that the funding for these programs should be [allocated] from the education budget.

That is not to say that they should try to incorporate adult upgrading into the school system. Because of the advanced age of upgrading students and the fact that, in the eyes of many, the school system is seen as the source of their failure, this would not be a good solution. This responsibility [could] go to the community college system, since they are already in the business of adult education.

This would require the community college to develop a more flexible type of upgrading delivery due to the demographics of our province with its rural population and a reliance on seasonally based industry. The main change would be to a continuous intake format. There are community colleges in place throughout [this province] and most offer upgrading programs (lock-step) and most, if not all, have [outreach service] departments which have been responsible for putting on continuous intake programs on a piecemeal basis.

The next major factor which must be redesigned is the way in which students are funded. Providing the adult with adequate funding is necessary, so they will be able to attend without having to be continually worried about finances. If the adult cannot be put at ease and made to feel comfortable in their learning environment, then their chances of rising through the levels of upgrading are greatly diminished. They must receive some type of funding (i.e. training allowance or social assistance) if needed and be able to attend uninterrupted for as long as is necessary to achieve a Grade 12 equivalency. If a student has a learning disability or a physical disability [which interferes with learning] this may inhibit their progress, and may require alternative approaches. …

The programs should be full-time, but there should be opportunity for those who must juggle their lives and can only attend on a part-time basis. The teachers should be accredited, with experience in the field of adult education [and] hired for full-time, dedicated upgrading positions. Only in this way can the teachers be [expected] to shoulder the responsibility of making these programs operate successfully. They must be allowed to participate in the assessment of students… and they should be responsible for the placement of students. They should also be allowed to exercise their judgement about a student's continuing attendance in the program. In this way the teacher will be able to [contribute to] the quality and credibility of the program by ensuring that … those students who are dedicated and responsible continue. The actual job of administration, discipline, and termination of students should be handled by someone other than the teacher.

Ideally, the program would be government funded, diminishing the need for tuition and book costs. If the funding was dedicated, it would also put an end to the desperate search for operating funds which goes on presently. There must be a built-in budget for books and supplies. If the students are meant to feel comfortable and develop self esteem from these courses, then they should not be subjected to a sub-standard environment and forced to use sub-standard materials. One area in particular which is [terribly] ignored, and should not be, is science lab facilities. If upgrading students are to receive a suitable basic science foundation, they must have access to a lab environment and equipment.

There are pros and cons to having an upgrading program on a college campus. I have had many students, predominantly older ones, praise our off-campus program for allowing them to make the leap back to academics without having to deal with the hectic and often scary mainstream environment. It tends to develop a more family-like, nurturing bond among the students. It also allows them to feel a little more detached from the often negative memories of past institutions. As well, it allows the teacher to tailor the setting to suit the specific needs of the students, not always possible in the more sterile college setting.

On the other hand,there are many advantages to a campus location. The obvious closeness to resources such as libraries, computers, cafeterias, child care and counseling can be of great benefit to both the students and teachers. Also, for the students who plan to continue on to other areas of training, this environment can be very encouraging.Usually, a campus location would offer more ease of access to other programs. For students who desire a more academic experience, being on campus can really lend credence to their return to education.

Having worked in both environments, I do not really have a preference [but] I cannot overemphasize the need for clean and comfortable surroundings which are easily accessible.

Another real advantage of having a more dedicated system would be the scheduling of in-services and training programs. Adult Education instructors, like other teachers, need to be able to network with each other for both personal and professional reasons. Because a large part of being an upgrading teacher is being a part-time social worker, teachers need to be able to communicate with their peers and attend resource and personal development programs.There are many resources which are highly beneficial, especially in the area of curriculum, but are only discovered through networking. In disjointed or sub-standard programs, the teachers are quite often left in the dark with no real sense of purpose.

There needs to be a [common] curriculum in place so all programs may operate on the same basis. As well,there should be resource centres in all regions which can supply teachers with consistent materials.There are many great books and teaching aids designed for adults, but there are also many poor ones; one of the worst things that can happen is to erode what,in many cases, is an already flimsy sense of self esteem with poor quality or denigrating materials.

Finally, the program that is put into place must be well publicized and sold to both the public and the private sector as the definitive standard in adult education to the Grade 12 equivalency level. It should be accepted

throughout the province—and beyond—as a totally accredited option, so there is no discrepancy in terms of what the students are getting upon graduation. It is an unfortunate circumstance at this time that the GED test is getting wider acceptance than many upgrading program certificates. But this must be seen as a symptom of the [unorganized] upgrading system in place, a symptom which would surely be alleviated by a more unified adult education system.

Conclusion

This chapter has presented the recommendations of the five local research teachers for changes to existing provisions for the delivery of Literacy and Adult Basic Education programs. As noted in the introductory sections of this chapter, the teachers speak from the perspective of the particular conditions at their sites and in their provinces, though they all exhibit a broad grasp of the general social policy framework in which their programs are organized. Their recommendations are not exhaustive; many more recommendations could be made and, as has been noted, many more do appear throughout this report—from the students, the teachers and the author.

The teachers' recommendations come directly out of the experience of trying to deliver a public service which is chronically underfunded, largely unorganized and under considerable threat of diminishment or elimination in the current period. Theirs is a plea for a renewed commitment to this service and its improvement and extension through adequate funding and improved organization. Their recommendations have much in common with a number of Canadian (and international) attempts to define standards for the provision of Literacy and Adult Basic Education programs, perhaps the most comprehensive of which is a 'good practice' document produced by the Movement for Canadian Literacy in 1991. Entitled *Organizing Adult Literacy and Basic Education in Canada*, the document addresses all aspects of the planning and delivery of quality Literacy and Adult Basic Education services and sets achievable funding and enrolment targets which would significantly increase access to the service in all regions of the country in an equitable fashion (White and Hoddinott, undated).

Both the teachers' recommendations, and the other recommendations which flow (implicitly or explicitly) from this report are also substantially reflected in Unesco's *Hamburg Declaration on Adult Education* (Unesco, 1997). The goals which form the core of this document—including, in particular, the goal of extending and supporting quality programs for women, refugees and minorities, the disabled, older people, and rural populations—all take on a particular resonance in the light of the evidence presented in this report. Similarly, the necessity of properly funding adult education;

of opening school and colleges to adult learners and adapting programmes, services and learning conditions to meet their needs; of providing appropriate and well supported learning environments; of selecting qualified teachers and paying proper attention to their working conditions and their professional status, are all objectives defined by the Hamburg declaration and powerfully justified by the evidence of this study. Finally, the Hamburg declaration's assertion that Literacy and Adult Basic Education must be broadly rather than narrowly and instrumentally focused supports the vision of each of the teachers and the aspirations of virtually every student in this study.

Something to Think About

Please Think About This

A Final Word ...

The final word of this report goes to a student whose words also give the report its title. While students at the local research sites were given the opportunity at many points in their survey journal to express their ideas and opinions about ways in which conditions could be improved for Literacy and Adult Basic Education students, they were not asked to provide recommendations in a systematic format as the teachers were. One student, however, submitted an unsolicited composition which reveals a deep understanding of the nature of the need for Literacy and Adult Basic Education programs in this society.

She composed this poem/essay during a period in which it looked as if her program would lose its funding and be forced to close its doors to her and all Adult Basic Education students at the end of the term. As she so astutely observes, the reasons for people leaving school without completing are as varied and complex as our society; neither those reasons (nor the need for adult upgrading opportunities) are likely to go away unless (and until) the nature of our society radically changes. She presents a powerful argument for not only continuing to provide Literacy and Adult Basic Education programs, but also ensuring that these programs are able to respond to a wide variety of needs. Her words offer a poignant counter to those who blithely assert that Adult Basic Education teachers should be "working themselves out of a job". It is just this assumption which frequently justifies the low level of commitment to providing universal access to properly supported Adult Basic Education. The idea that adult undereducation is a phenomenon which will disappear with this generation has served, for several generations, as a rationalization for not adequately responding to the basic education needs of adults.

Her words also offer a powerful challenge to those who would only support adult upgrading opportunities which are directly focused on getting people into jobs in the shortest time possible. For, though most adults may attend upgrading programs to improve their employment prospects, the direct subjection of this area of education to job preparation and job placement objectives is not in the interests of the many adults whose

educational aspirations are linked to the greater aspiration of participating in our society as fully equal citizens; nor is it in the long-term interests of our society, which is enriched only to the extent that all its members are enabled to participate to their full potential.

Why I think it's important for programs like this to exist

Something to think about - Please think about this

For whatever reason
(be it poverty or ignorance)
people were held back from going to, continuing in,
or finishing school.
Here are a few examples and/or reasons:
A parent dies or becomes very sick;
the child has to go to work or stay home to look after
or support the family.
It's not their fault; it still happens.
Negative messages from mother or father or anyone -
thinks work is better for the child,
don't need an education, won't get far anyway.
Still happens.
Get and/or got married young.
Husband and/or family keeps wife/girlfriend down,
out of school, stuck.
Still happens.
Drugs, alcohol, bad decisions.
Still happens.
Violence in the home,
isolation, being denied information about people, places, things.
Still happens.
My point is, sometimes there are circumstances beyond our control,
and opportunities haven't always been there,
and being an adolescent and having a generational history like any or all of the above,
it only makes sense that bad decisions are made.
Even today many teenagers leave home, get kicked out,
or have to go to work, leaving schooling behind.
And sometimes they just think they don't need to finish school to get a job
only to find out that that's not true.

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