

**Adult Learning in Canada and Sweden:**

**A Comparative Study of Four Sites**

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By

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## ABSTRACT

This study sought to understand policy factors underlying the differences between the literacy levels of Canadian and Swedish adults as reported in the International Adult Literacy Survey. The New Literacy Studies provided a critical perspective for comparing adult literacy as contextual rather than as a technical, pedagogical skill. Adult learning in rural and urban sites in Canada and Sweden was compared through a qualitative case study.

The conceptual framework based on situated literacy and comprising *policy-in-intent*, *policy-in-practice* and *policy-in-experience* guided a multi-method approach. Source materials included public documents and reports, the media, group discussions, interviews and participant observation. There were substantive differences between the two countries in the provision of and access to adult education at the macro-level but at the micro-level, individuals shared similar goals and issues. Swedes with the least education were accorded priority in access to formal education. In contrast, Canadians with the least education often had to rely on the volunteer sector. Other social policies in Sweden, particularly universal childcare and school lunches, facilitated individual participation in adult education.

The terminology used in the two countries implied different public perceptions of adult education and literacy. In Sweden, adult education had been a universal compensatory entitlement since 1967 and the term literacy was rarely used. Public policy initiatives in the 1990s focused on increasing the supply and diversity through additional funding for an already well-resourced adult education system. In Canada, literacy was considered a prescriptive, individual responsibility and resources went into public

awareness campaigns and an extensive policy network rather than increased learning opportunities. Priority in access seemed to be given to adults most likely to succeed in further education or the job market.

Adult education policy discussions in both countries focused on formal learning with little reference to the significance of the century-old informal sector in Sweden. The costs and relative benefits of universal versus targeted social programs deserve further study. The reluctance of older, less educated workers to participate in formal adult education programs in both countries underscores the need for public policy that encourages bridging between informal and formal learning to effectively engage those who read, but not well enough, according to the International Adult Literacy Survey.

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## **DEDICATION**

This dissertation is dedicated to the memory of my mother, Jennie Satherlie Layson, who taught me to learn from everyone I met. Her respect for others, love of learning, and selfless commitment to community made her an exceptional teacher in the one room schools of northern Alberta and rural Saskatchewan.

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# Adult Learning in Canada and Sweden: A comparative study

## *List of Acronyms*

ESL	English as a Second Language
GED	General Equivalency Diploma
HRDC	Human Resources Development Canada
IALS	International Adult Literacy Survey
MCL	Movement for Canadian Literacy
NLS	National Literacy Secretariat
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
PTA	Provincial Training Allowance
SES	socio-economic status
SIAST	Saskatchewan Institute for Applied Science and Technology
SLN	Saskatchewan Literacy Network
SSHRC	Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

## **Glossary of Swedish Terms and Acronyms**

ABF	Arbetarnas bildningsförbund (Workers' Educational Association)
AEI	The Adult Education Initiative ( <i>kunskapslyftet</i> )
CSN	Centrala Studiestödsnämnden (National Board for Student Aid)
<i>grundskolan</i>	adult basic education
<i>KOMVUX</i>	<i>Kommunal vuxenutbildning</i> (municipal adult education)
<i>kunskapslyftet</i>	The Adult Education Initiative (1997-2002)
<i>rektor</i>	Principal of educational institution
<i>Sfi</i>	<i>Swedish for immigrants</i> ( <i>Svenska för invandrare</i> )
SV	Studieförbundet vuxenskolan (Adult Educational Association of Swedish Farmers' Union and the Centre and Liberal Parties)
<i>validation</i>	Swedish equivalent term for Prior Learning Assessment

## **Chapter One**

### **LITERACY: A PUBLIC POLICY ISSUE**

The International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) (1995) reported that adult literacy levels in Sweden were consistently higher than those in Canada. In this study, I sought to understand these differences. I was particularly interested in the observation that literacy levels in Sweden were less related to socioeconomic status and level of schooling than they were in Canada. I compared adult learning in the two countries from a social policy perspective to see the extent to which public policy might account for the reported differences in literacy levels.

Of particular concern to Canadian literacy advocates has been the finding that adult literacy levels in Sweden were significantly higher than those of Canada and other participating countries. When informed of the IALS findings, members of the public had frequently asked me for an explanation of these differences. There has also been considerable academic interest in the question; the Nordic countries themselves sought understanding of the Nordic model of adult education through a comparison of Scandinavian countries (Tuijnman & Hellström, 2001).

#### **The Global Context**

Adult education touches the lives of millions of individuals around the world but only now is the literature in the West catching up to the rest of the world “where adult education has always been seen as a political enterprise” (Cervero & Wilson, 2001, p. 7).

As recently as the 1980s, adult literacy was a concern primarily for developing countries, where it was considered a determinant of health, economic development, and civic participation. By the 1990s, workplace innovation in industrialised and developing countries resulted in a premium being placed on literacy skills and workers who could retrain quickly and easily. Computerisation had become an integral part not only of high technology fields but also of agricultural, resource, and service sectors, the very sectors that had traditionally employed workers with less education. This technological change placed continually increasing literacy demands on individuals and societies (Verhoeven, 1994).

There has been a growing realization that workers must learn new skills throughout their working lives because of continuous change in technology. As a result the ability and willingness of individuals to continue learning new skills are now considered almost as important as entry-level qualifications. Discussions about adult education are moving beyond the acquisition of literacy skills to how best to encourage continual learning throughout life. Lifelong learning was the theme of three major international symposia held during 2001 (Grace, 2002), an indication of how seriously the topic is being taken by policymakers around the world.

In the context of globalization, and based on a general understanding that literacy skills are key to competitiveness, it is not surprising that governments are interested in comparing adult literacy levels among countries. The International Adult Literacy Survey (1995) provided a benchmark of skills in seven industrialised countries: Canada, Germany, the Netherlands, Poland, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United States. This survey was the first cross-cultural, multi-language documentation of literacy skills in industrialised societies. An additional fourteen countries participated in a subsequent

survey (Statistics Canada, 1997). Results of the most recent iteration of the survey, the Adult Literacy and Skills Survey, were released in 2003 (see <http://www.ets.org/all/>). According to the IALS, a high percentage of adults in industrialised countries lacked the literacy skills needed for full and effective participation in modern society and the global economy.

Sloat and Willms (2000) expressed alarm over the finding that Canada's "results are markedly worse than those of nearly all European countries and stand in sharp contrast to the results of Sweden" (p. 217). A recent study used the IALS dataset to compare literacy-related activities of adults in Canada and Sweden (Kapsalis, 2001). In addition to the overall difference in adult literacy levels between the two countries, two other findings are significant. First, the literacy levels of Swedish adults were less dependent on the level of schooling completed than were those of Canadian adults. Secondly, literacy levels in Sweden were less closely related to socio-economic status (SES) than they were in Canada (Milner, 2002; Tuijnman & Boudard, 2001). Are differences in lifelong learning opportunities influenced by public policy in the two countries, and to what extent might public policy account for these reported differences in adult literacy levels?

### **The Question**

Adult literacy levels are the result of a complex interplay of schooling, cultural, and historical factors. Government policy is one of the few contributing factors amenable to intervention. While a comparative study of public policy at the macro-level can reveal differences in the intent of policy, the individual experience of policy at the micro-level better explains policy outcomes. Within countries, the impact of central policy may differ regionally because of differences in resources and opportunities. How

does public policy accommodate internal regional and sectoral differences within each country?

As a result of many years of personal work experience in the field of adult education, I questioned the congruence between government intent and individual interests. After promoting literacy extensively throughout Saskatchewan, I had begun to question the relevance of the literacy message to the general public and, indeed, the effectiveness of public awareness campaigns in general. Three experiences in particular stand out with clarity in my memory and cause me to ask who owns the literacy problem and also to question who is actually reached by the literacy message. The following sketches underline the need for public policy to understand and take into account the reality of the individuals intended to benefit from adult education.

February 1994: I was in Tanzania as a consultant to the Sustaining Adult Literacy project, a project managed by the International Office of the Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology (SIAST). The adult education centres throughout the country were under-utilized and government officials were concerned that the gains made in adult literacy during Nyerere's literacy campaign (see Chapter Two) were being lost. One day I was traveling some twenty kilometres north of the capital, Dar es Salaam, on the east coast of Africa. The roadside scene of a traditional village caught my attention. A group of women were grinding maize in large wooden pestles outside the brown mud huts that were their homes. Their beautiful black skin contrasted against the brilliant reds and yellows of the African cloths they wore. Bright green palms swayed overhead in the mid-afternoon sun. The huts had low thatched roofs and were windowless and dark inside. There was no electricity, no school, no library, no newspapers, no television, in short, no print material anywhere in evidence. Twelve

hours of darkness would begin at 6 PM that evening as it would 365 days throughout the year. What chance did these women, who likely had to walk for hours each day gathering wood and or water, have for reading once their work was done? What would they have to read? How could these women sustain reading skills, assuming they had gone to school? Had there been an adult education centre nearby, would these women have had the time or energy to attend? Would they have had the motivation to read and study?

March 1997: I was eating by myself in a small town restaurant, on a bus trip home from another day of talking about the need to increase adult literacy levels in Canada. Two middle-aged men seated at a nearby table caught my attention. They were engaged in animated conversation about some farm issue. I could not imagine them going to a literacy class; they very likely read, possibly not well, as documented by IALS Level Two. What relevance did my literacy message have for them? What amount of public awareness would entice these men to become learners in the formal system or to seek out a volunteer tutor? They would more likely seek the knowledge they needed from their neighbours and friends on a “just-in-time” basis.

April 1988-June 1989: Through working with immigrant women in a pre-employment program, I began to understand problems associated with English language acquisition and the need for literacy in even the most basic entry-level jobs in Canadian society. For example, casual work in a health institution meant that the worker had to read a different set of instructions each time she was called in. While working on a hospital kitchen or serving line, individuals had to read the tray menus that passed quickly by on a belt. In one class of fifteen women, one mother of five had only one year of schooling in Iraq before coming to Canada. She spoke English quite well after fifteen

years in Canada but struggled with the spelling of simple words. In the same class there was a Polish woman who had a master's degree in library science and was fluent in three languages (other than English). There was no way that a time-limited course in English as a Second Language would have had an equitable outcome for these two women. In later years, I learned about the many immigrants who, having completed the weeks of language training they were allowed, were unable to pass the pretest for entry into adult upgrading classes.

As a result of these experiences I wondered if there might be more effective ways of addressing the literacy and learning needs of adults. I adhere to the communitarian view that individuals are naturally social beings, although they have the responsibility to make choices. They are the product of social practices and learn what they live because they are 'embedded' in particular social roles and relationships (Kymlicka, 2002, p. 337). The lives of all in society are diminished if "some people [are] cheated of the chance others have had to make something valuable of their lives" (Dworkin as cited in Kymlicka, 2002, p. 200). As I sought to find better ways of addressing issues in adult literacy, the results of the International Adult Literacy Survey presented the possibility of critical reflection (Brookfield, 1995) on Canadian policy and practice through a comparison with Sweden.

### **Stating the Problem**

Why are adult literacy levels in Sweden reportedly higher than those in Canada? The purpose of this study was to understand how public policy might account for differences in adult literacy in the two countries. The research compared adult learning in the two countries from the macro perspective of policymakers and the micro perspective of individuals who experienced the policy. This study, based on two sites in each country,

sought to answer the following question: what are the similarities and/or differences in Canadian and Swedish adult education policy?

At the macro level, the types of questions explored included:

- What were the policy goals?
- Who or what was considered the primary beneficiary of the policy?
- How was the policy developed and by whom?
- What policy tools were included in implementation?
- How was policy evaluated?

Questions posed at the micro level included:

- Who participated in formal and nonformal education and why?
- Where and how were adults learning?
- How did policy implementation differ between rural and urban regions?
- How did policy accommodate adults with special needs?
- Did the supply of learning opportunities meet demand for them?
- What support did adult learners receive?

These questions provided both a starting point for descriptive and comparative data collection and guidance for a purposeful analysis of public policy.

### **Significance of the Study**

Adult literacy educators and policymakers in Canada are anxious to better understand factors accounting for the differences between literacy levels of Canadian and Swedish adults in order to improve the effectiveness of Canadian programs. Specifically, literacy practitioners want to learn about Swedish adult literacy policy, its development, and about programs and the motivation of participants in Sweden

(Movement for Canadian Literacy [MCL] Board of Directors, personal communication, March 26, 2001).

The IALS findings (1995) positioned adult literacy skills as an important issue in industrialised countries. Because of rapid changes in industry and research reports such as the IALS, governments have come to consider literacy skills as foundational to the development of “human capital” (Agnello, 2001) and the improvement of literacy skills is seen as an investment in “human capital”. Highly skilled workers are considered the foundation of a competitive workforce, despite conflicting evidence that economic growth and high literacy levels are not mutually interdependent (Blunt, 2000; Graff, 1991; Livingstone, 1998).

The Canadian government responded to the IALS findings with the establishment of policy discussions that culminated in a recently released paper *Knowledge Matters* (Human Resources Development Canada [HRDC], 2002). A strategic funding initiative, *Valuing Literacy in Canada*, was jointly established by Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council and the National Literacy Secretariat in 1998 to encourage applied research in the field of adult literacy (see [http://www.sshrc.ca/web/apply/program\\_descriptions/valuing\\_literacy\\_e.asp](http://www.sshrc.ca/web/apply/program_descriptions/valuing_literacy_e.asp)). The establishment of a Canadian ministerial committee on literacy in 2003 demonstrated the continuing currency of the issue at the national level. Six of the thirteen provincial and territorial governments in Canada either had developed or were in the process of developing literacy strategies.

Rubenson (1994b) observed that there had been a lack of policy research in Canada and the focus of adult education research had been on the individual rather than on social theory as it was in Europe. In Canada, government ministries had “been the

major players” in literacy research (pp. 160-161). Various research monographs and reports in Canada have provided detailed information on specific aspects of the IALS dataset (Bélanger & Tuijnman, 1997; Doray & Arrowsmith, 1997; Kapsalis, 2001; Krahn & Lowe, 1998, Roberts & Fawcett, 1998) but as yet there has not been a qualitative study linked to the survey results. Although there are numerous related ethnographic studies, these critical literacy studies have focused primarily on marginalized populations in industrialised or non-industrialised countries. I used this perspective to study one overarching question arising from the IALS findings, the difference between adult literacy levels in Canada and Sweden.

The individual country reports of the most recent international survey, Adult Literacy Survey (Statistics Canada, 2003b) are scheduled for release in 2005 (L.Vardy, personal communication, October 24, 2003). Both the public and policymakers will expect that literacy levels have improved since the 1995 survey because of public investment in adult literacy. Literacy advocates, policymakers, and the public need to make sense of the IALS findings to correctly interpret the forthcoming results-and especially to explain any changes, or lack thereof, from the previous results. Without this, the “rhetoric [surrounding literacy] is likely to be damaging to the field, both in the ways in which it demeans those adults who do have literacy difficulties and also because it raises false expectations of what they and their society can expect once they do improve literacy skills” (Street, 1995, p. 14).

To date most research into the IALS results has been of a quantitative nature. Therefore a qualitative study of how policy is experienced at the community level can provide new insights to inform the policy process. A better understanding of the relationship between public policy and the personal experience of it can enhance the

effectiveness of the role that literacy advocates can play in the adult literacy policy network and the larger education policy community.

The findings of this study reveal the importance of understanding literacy and learning from the micro perspective, whether in Canada or Sweden, as a basis for long term effectiveness in public policy. It is hoped that discussion of the results will play an important role in adult literacy policy development and implementation.

### **Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework under which this study was conducted was informed by the New Literacy Studies and Guba's typology for policy analysis. The proponents of the New Literacy Studies (Gee, 1990; Street, 1995) argue for the importance of understanding individual interests and motivations with respect to literacy and learning. This perspective encompasses multiple literacies and recognizes that the sociocultural context helps to determine and support what literacy is valued. Freire and Macedo (1987) defined literacy as "reading the word and the world" by which they meant that different contexts require different skills. For example, the skills required in mainstream urban society are not necessarily those needed to survive in an isolated rural community.

While educationalists and psychologists hold to a technical model of literacy, New Literacy Studies scholars see literacy as embedded in social practices and conceptions of reading and writing (Street, 1993 p. 1). From this perspective, comparisons between countries would examine the relative percentages of people in the mainstream and how countries facilitate access to the dominant literacy. The concept of discourse (Gee, 1990) extends beyond literacy to include social and cultural knowledge that is acquired in the home and the school.

In contrast, large-scale quantitative studies such as the IALS (1995) provide a wide-angle snapshot of literacy levels based on positivist assumptions which suggest that literacy is an autonomous, stand alone, technical skill that can be learnt regardless of relevance to the learner's context. Such aggregate quantitative studies can not provide a close-up understanding of literacy from the perspective of the individuals behind the statistics, particularly in the context of diversity. Moreover they can not inform about why individuals might decide to improve their mainstream literacy skills. Qualitative studies can help in understanding literacy as situated in the lives of individuals and communities.

Just as literacy is a multi-faceted concept so public policy is complex. Guba's (1984) typology for policy analysis, discussed more fully in Chapter Two, included three broad perspectives. Policymakers are concerned with overall goals and strategies to achieve those goals. Those who implement policy, in this case adult educators, see policy in terms of the guidelines and directives that govern their work. Finally, those who experience policy, for example adult learners, have yet another perspective on policy. I compared policy primarily from the macro perspective of policymakers and the micro perspective of adults who experience policy.

I sought to understand the relationship between multiple literacies and the various policy perspectives. How congruent was policy with the aspirations of those it was intended to serve? I wanted to make sense of conflicting data such as non-participation of those deemed in need of improving their literacy skills "not primarily [to find] a solution and/or answer to a specific issue but rather to [help] develop a broader understanding of the underlying problem" (Rubenson, 1994b, p. 154).

A critical perspective “asserts that all knowledge is socially and historically determined” and “its central focus is on conducting research and building structures that enhance empowerment and democracy” (Tierney, 1993, p. 50). This international comparative study afforded me the opportunity to approach policy research from such a critical perspective.

I stepped out of the parameters I had known both on a personal and policy level. According to Rubenson (1994b), this conceptual function of policy research “involves widening the debate, reformulating the problem, clarifying goals, and analyzing eventual conflicts between multiple goals” (p. 154). In using a critical perspective informed by the New Literacy Studies and based on Guba’s typology, I sought to see how public policy might more effectively meet the needs and interests of adult learners.

### **Scope of the Study**

This study focused on a comparison of the relationship between adult learning and literacy policy at the micro level and at the macro level in Canada and Sweden using two selected geographic locations in each country. Notwithstanding the critical importance of social history and culture in providing a context for policy development, this study concentrated on the years between 1994, the year the International Adult Literacy Survey was conducted, and 2003. A few relevant reports and documents from earlier periods were included.

I used “ethnographically-informed” methodology to study policy at the community level. The research comprised parallel comparative case studies in urban and rural settings in both Canada and Sweden. The urban settings I chose were racially diverse; both had large universities and active business communities. The rural sites were regional distribution centres with significant agricultural or resource-based sectors.

The key informants in all cases were policymakers, community leaders, educators and adult learners.

The Canadian macro perspective was derived from an aggregate of the strategies of several provinces and the federal government's recent position paper and ministerial hearings conducted in 2003. In 2002, I reviewed a variety of government publications including the Canadian government's *Knowledge Matters* discussion paper (HRDC, 2002) and reports provided by those provincial and territorial governments in Canada that either have established or are establishing literacy strategies. I also analyzed related reports in the media.

With respect to Sweden, I studied a variety of reports and ethnographic studies on adult education in Sweden, including evaluations of the Adult Education Initiative (AEI). Following the completion of the AEI in 2002, a year long policy planning process was conducted in each municipality to develop a new adult education strategy. Adult educators were keen to talk about their experiences and this provided an ideal opportunity to discuss the policymaking process and its impact. It also raised new questions about the outcomes of decentralization in various Swedish municipalities.

I did not focus on the pedagogy that is part of policy implementation other than insofar as it provides a context for policy as it is experienced (Ball, 1994). I did not compare the K-12 school system in the two countries despite the expected and documented relationship between schooling and adult literacy (IALS, 1995, p. 23-29) since my focus was on adult learning and literacy. I also did not analyze the demographics of the IALS dataset although such analysis has provided valuable insights (Sussman, 2001). Strategies specific to language acquisition of immigrants were not a separate focus apart from adult education in general.

While "the ultimate determinants of social policy in any field...are the state of the economy, the role of the state, and the political process itself" (Griffin, 1987, p. 11), my research focus was a comparison of adult education outcomes rather than on the underlying public philosophy itself. The prevailing political philosophy influences how problems are defined and how solutions are sought. The worldview of those who influence decisions is of primary importance at the macro level, setting parameters for the solutions sought and how they are sought. In this study, the findings are a reflection of the public philosophy underlying the policy in the two countries. Just as public philosophy shapes problem definition and the solutions undertaken, so personal assumptions such as those below influence research questions and approaches.

### **Assumptions**

1. Individual motivation is a key factor in successful learning and learning is both lifelong and lifewide.
2. Literacy is a socially situated skill and individuals define their literacy needs in terms of the context and culture in which they live.
3. A focus on literacy at the micro level is key to understanding policy outcomes.
4. Literacy is acquired and maintained through formal, nonformal and informal learning.
5. Literacy skills, as defined and measured by the IALS, provide access to information and entry into further education in modern societies. Individuals who lack these skills may face significant social and economic inequities and their participation in complex modern democracies may be compromised.
6. Adult literacy is an integral part of adult education.

7. Policy outcomes are a result of the interaction between the policies and individual response to them.
8. Observations from comparative case studies both between and within countries can provide insights into the relationship between policy as it is planned and policy as it is realized which in turn enables inferences about effective policy.
9. Content analysis of documents provided by government officials sheds light on the policy development process.
10. Policies that predate the IALS results can be studied during this research time frame.

### **Context for the Study**

The significant differences between Canada and Sweden in terms of demographics, history, geography, and government structure are outside of the scope of this study. Literacy policy was in various stages of development within Canada. For example in New Brunswick, a strategy was first developed over ten years ago under the aegis of the former premier. In such cases, it was difficult to locate individuals that were instrumental in policy development. On the other hand, the development of a provincial literacy strategy in Saskatchewan was undertaken in 2002. The fact that policy development was at different stages in each jurisdiction in Canada complicated the comparison.

Another factor was the difficulty of comparing the Canadian federal system of government in which jurisdiction over education is a provincial responsibility to that of the more centralized government structure in Sweden. This necessitated comparing aggregated data in Canada with Swedish national data. The national government in Sweden had, until 2002, defined adult education policy and funded delivery on a nationwide basis through *komvux*, the municipal adult education system.

A further complicating factor is that Swedish adult education policy and delivery has been undergoing significant decentralization since the IALS data collection in 1994 (Lundahl, 2002). Major changes continued to take place in the wake of *kunskapslyftet*, the Adult Education Initiative (AEI), one of which was decentralization to municipal control. This devolution of control is scheduled for completion by 2006 and the impact of these changes on adult learning and literacy levels in Sweden will not be known for some time.

There is an extensive body of academic literature dealing with adult education in Sweden. In addition, there is considerable international interest in adult education and social policy in Sweden so much relevant documentation and many research reports about that country were available in English. Since most Swedes that I met with, whether students or instructors, spoke and understood English, my own lack of fluency in Swedish did not seriously limit the fieldwork. However, cost and time factors limited the amount of time that I could spend on-site in Sweden. Therefore my knowledge of adult education in Sweden was necessarily limited in comparison to my knowledge of the Canadian system, which is based on over twenty years of work experience in adult education.

Finally, one of the challenges in adult education that has been recognized for over twenty years is the problem of non-participation. Those already educated are the ones most likely to participate in further education and to benefit from educational reform (Olafsson, 1980, p. 60; Rubenson, 2001, p. 84). Identifying and contacting non-participants is a definite problem in any study of adult education but even more so in a time-limited, cross-cultural study.

This study provides a snapshot of adult learning in two Swedish and two Canadian communities at a point in time. Through analysis and interpretation of my observations, I compared adult education as social policy in the two countries.

In the following section, I provide definitions of terms frequently used in this dissertation. A summary of acronyms and glossary of Swedish terms is provided on page xiv following the Table of Contents.

### **Definitions**

- Aboriginal – individuals of First Nations, Métis and Inuit heritage
- Adult basic education - instruction for individuals over the age of 18 at the level of lower compulsory education
- Compulsory education – formal schooling required for children between the ages of 6 and 16 in Canada and 7 and 16 in Sweden
- First Nations – those Indians for whose use and benefits are designated common lands, the legal right to which is vested in Her Majesty (Indian Act, Sec. 2 (1))
- Formal learning – hierarchical, graded and certified by a recognized civil authority
- *Kommun* – Swedish term for municipality
- *Komvux* – abbreviation for kommunal vuxenutbildning, municipal adult education
- *Kunskapslyftet* – the Swedish Adult Education Initiative (AEI) (1997 – 2002)
- Learner –in Canada, adults who receive literacy tutoring or attend adult basic education programs
- Literacy – a set of situated skills that enables individuals to understand and function in their own social context. A more comprehensive discussion of the many ways literacy has been defined is provided in Chapter Two.

- Nonformal learning – scheduled courses in workplace or community settings, typically not graded or certified
- Informal learning – takes place through family, friends, reading groups, study circles, internet, newspapers, media, etc.
- Practitioner – in Canada, individual, paid or unpaid, who teaches adults on an individual or group basis either in an institutional or community-based setting
- Strategy or initiative - a comprehensive government plan that outlines goals and objectives, including action plan, timelines, and resources for addressing a particular problem, in this case improvement of adult literacy skills
- Upper secondary school – in Sweden, university entrance requirement includes Swedish, English and mathematics for youth aged 16-19 and for adults

### **Organization of the Thesis**

The thesis is divided into six chapters. The first chapter describes the basis for the research question, the conceptual framework, and the assumptions and context under which the research was conducted. I begin the second chapter with a discussion of the terms adult education and literacy, the concepts of lifelong and lifewide learning, the measurement of literacy, and the literature related to IALS and adult education. An historic overview of the relationship between governments and literacy lays the groundwork for a discussion about issues in educational policy research. The chapter ends with a description of the context and delivery of adult education in Canada and Sweden and a description of the conceptual framework for the research.

In Chapter Three, I describe the conceptual framework, my rationale for using a case study approach, the research sites, data collection and analysis and the case for the trustworthiness of the data. In Chapter Four, I compare personal perspectives on policy

initiatives in the two countries: Who is studying and why? Where and how did they access learning opportunities? Findings from the pilot study that preceded the fieldwork are reported in Chapter Five along with a comparison of policy goals, process and policy tools as found through the subsequent review of research reports, government documentation and the case studies. In Chapter Six, I analyze and interpret the findings using the metaphor of public policy as the vehicle by which adults move from where they are to where they want to be. I end the chapter by suggesting topics for future investigation. The ethical guidelines, approval and certificate of audit are included as appendices.

## **Chapter Two**

### **ADULT LITERACY PAST AND PRESENT**

Literacy as an economic imperative dominates public discourse on education and adult literacy and “knowledge has replaced other factors of production as the most significant commodity” (Stein, 2001, p. 51). Today’s society is characterized by an economic order in which knowledge, not labour or raw material or capital, is considered the key resource and a social order in which inequality based on knowledge is a major challenge. “The majority of new jobs require qualifications the industrial worker does not possess and is poorly equipped to acquire” (Drucker, 1994, p. 4). Others contradict this viewpoint, stating the problem in today’s economy is underemployment rather than undereducation (Livingstone, 2003). Growing divisions in the society and the economy pose challenges to individuals, the business sector, and to society at large.

Governments throughout the world have a growing interest in adult literacy. At a time when universal primary education remains a dream rather than a reality in many parts of the world (Mandela & Machel, 2002), the debate is often about how to best allocate scarce resources to ensure both quality education of children and lifelong learning for all. With public commentators and politicians increasingly positioning adult education and literacy in an economic discourse, it is instructive to apply the supply and demand paradigm of the marketplace to a consideration of policy development and outcomes. How well does the supply of learning opportunities meet the demand for them?

The International Adult Literacy Survey (1995) quantified significant differences in adult literacy levels both between and within industrialised countries. The goal of this research was to better understand the influence of public policy on the reported difference between adult literacy levels in Canada and Sweden. This study compared the congruence between policy as developed at the macro level and policy as experienced at the micro level. The observation that socio-economic status and level of education had less impact on adult literacy levels in Sweden than in Canada was of particular interest. This suggested that significant opportunities for learning in the community, above and beyond that offered by the school system, existed in Sweden.

This chapter begins with a brief discussion of terms that are increasingly used in international discussions about adult literacy and the economy. I then introduce various definitions of literacy under the broad headings of autonomous and ideological literacy and resulting ways it has been measured. An overview of past literacy campaigns shows that while past policy-in-intent had a variety of goals, including morality, nation building, and the economy, it was understanding between government and the people that was key to campaign outcomes (Arnové & Graff, 1987). The influence of ideology on public policy, the New Literacy Studies, and the supply-demand paradigm shed light on factors that lead to successful, or not, outcomes of past literacy campaigns. The chapter concludes with an introduction to the adult education contexts for this research in Canada and Sweden and the guiding conceptual framework.

### **Lifelong and Lifewide Learning**

The terms *lifelong* and *lifewide* learning enjoy growing acceptance in international discussions about education and they invite discussion of informal as well as formal education (Boström, Boudard, & Siminou, 2001, Tuijnman & Schuller, 1999).

Rapid changes in technology and communications encourage us to continue learning new skills throughout life. Learning also occurs across our lifetime outside the walls of formal education provided in schools, as we learn through community activities and the workplace.

Formal education refers to hierarchically organized, age-graded and school-based learning with certification. Compulsory education for youth is part of this formal system. Informal learning occurs outside of classrooms in an unstructured way through community activities. Nonformal learning occurs through short courses or in-service training and falls in between these two ends of the learning spectrum in that it is usually scheduled but without leading to broadly recognized accreditation. Adult basic education policy is explicitly concerned with formal education however public policy also has important effects on nonformal and informal learning opportunities. I next turn attention to the complex issue of defining literacy.

### **What is Literacy?**

*“Literacy: Reading the Word and the World”* (Freire & Macedo, 1987)

Literacy has been understood in a variety of ways over the course of time. In Stein’s (2001) words “the language we use to frame our arguments shapes the terms of the argument” (p. 37). The definition of literacy determines how it is measured or assessed and how it is promoted and encouraged. Whether literacy is considered as an autonomous skill or as culturally embedded has major implications for adult literacy policy and programming. Autonomous literacy encompasses several definitions of literacy as a technical skill, stand alone skill. Ideological literacy, to use Street’s term (1995), positions literacy within a sociopolitical context.

### *Autonomous Literacy*

This broad definition of literacy “refers to mainly Western theories defining literacy in terms of universal cognitive or technical skills that can be learned independently of specific contexts or cultural frameworks” (Verhoeven, 1994, p. 7). The underlying assumption in this definition is that literacy is a stand alone, technical skill that can be learnt regardless of relevance to the learner’s context.

The “autonomous” model is dominant in UNESCO and other agencies concerned with literacy. It tends to be based on the “essay-text” form of literacy...and to generalize broadly from this narrow, culture-specific practice...It isolates literacy as an independent variable and then claims to be able to study its consequences. These consequences are classically represented in terms of economic “take-off” or in terms of cognitive skills. (Street, 1995, p. 29)

Autonomous literacy can be considered a generic term that encompasses basic and functional literacy. It may well be argued that it describes the public’s belief about literacy as a skill that is taught to all children in schools.

***Historical definitions.*** Literacy as an instrument of governance has a long history although it “was almost totally ignored in traditional historical writing” (Graff, 1991, p. 11). Manguel (1996) provided an entertaining history of reading that reveals its long association with clerics and aristocrats throughout the world. In the Western world prior to the Protestant Reformation, literacy was a skill restricted largely to the clergy who used it as a tool for spreading Christianity (Graff, 1991).

Following the Reformation and with the invention of the printing press, literacy was promoted in the home, as parents, particularly fathers, were encouraged to read the Bible to their families. "The early church Campaign [in Sweden] around 1700, [predated the school system in that country and] was built upon informal instruction for everyone to read, sing, and pray the holy ‘Word’ of God’ (Johansson, 1987, p. 65). Religion was

also important in the promotion of literacy in Germany and Scotland in the eighteenth century, although in these countries there was also a state or economic basis for early literacy campaigns (Gawthrop, 1987; Houston, 1987). In the past, as now, “literacy (was viewed) as a means to other ends--whether a more moral society or a more stable political order” (Arnove & Graff, 1987, p. 2).

**Basic literacy.** According to this commonly accepted definition, literacy is the ability to read and write, but with this definition comes the perplexing question of defining what level of literacy ability is adequate (Beder, 1991). Clearly, the literacy skills required in a preindustrial society differ from those required in the knowledge economy. Survival based on hunting and trapping or subsistence agriculture, in other words literacy or reading that world, is a skill set that most urban dwellers do not have. Furthermore, literacy skills that sufficed fifty years ago are no longer adequate for working with technical innovations in the agriculture and resource-based industries of today. Defining literacy as the ability to read and write does not reflect the different skill levels needed in these various circumstances. A further implication of promotion of literacy based on this definition is that acquisition of literacy skills will result in personal gain for individuals or development for countries.

**Functional literacy.** This term was introduced as a way to link literacy skills more closely to a particular situation or environment (Beder, 1991). It is the definition used in the Experimental World Literacy Program (EWLP), a UNESCO initiative which was intended to help develop Third World countries through functional literacy. The focus of the EWLP was on the technical aspect of literacy and based on the “developmentalist...approach to economic growth and social change [that] prevailed in international circles” (Gillette, 1987, p. 205). The limited success of the initiative was

attributed to inadequate planning and inadequate know-how. When governments develop literacy programs that have "no basis in the people's culture" the efforts often fail (Langer, 1987, pp. 4-5). The evaluation of the EWLP based on a technical skill model does not take into account how unlikely it would be that the international authorities who planned the EWLP would understand the needs of the peasants and workers living in the eleven participating countries.

***Human capital literacy.*** Autonomous literacy is a foundational concept in the human capital theory (Agnello, 2001, pp. 33-36). Human capital literacy refers to skill development of workers as an important economic resource. Rapid advances in technology, electronic communication, and globalization have resulted in significant changes in the workplace. Just as in the industrial revolution there was a shift from agricultural to factory work, now there is a shift from resource based and industrial work to the knowledge sector including jobs in computer and electronic technology. Whereas agricultural workers had the manual skills that allowed them to adapt readily to the factory floor, today's displaced workers do not have the skills or education to move into technical and electronic jobs (Drucker, 1994). In the mid-eighties, shifts from an industrial to high-tech economy rendered well-paid industrial workers unemployable because they typically could not retrain for jobs in the new (Smith, 1992).

### ***Ideological Literacy***

Street's (1995) term ideological literacy focuses on the "specific social practices of reading and writing" as distinct from the technical skill understood by autonomous literacy (p. 29). Barton & Hamilton (2000) used the term *situated literacy* to indicate that literacy consists of social practices that take place in a given context. This implies that there are multiple literacies, each dependent on and situated in a particular context.

Personal experience of trying to communicate with people from other social sectors or geographical locations supports the idea of multiple literacies with their own specific nuances of vocabulary and signification. From this perspective, people with limited literacy skills in the dominant discourse typically barter their own skills for literacy skills as “reciprocal parts of an exchange process” (Fingeret as cited in Street, 1995, p. 111). The term ideological literacy goes beyond situated literacy to include the understanding that some literacies are valued more highly in society than others.

*Critical or emancipatory literacy.* Critical literacy draws upon the writings of Paulo Freire who believed that “reading the world” was the essential basis of learning to read the word. By this he meant that learners must have a critical understanding of the reality of the world they live in and that meaning is socially constructed. He drew his pedagogy from his experience in northeastern Brazil where landless peasants learned to read through dialogue about the key constructs in their lives (Freire, 1970). In the process of naming and discussing things of importance in their lives, individuals learned to read the words that represented those things in a remarkably short time.

Freire (1970) contrasted this emancipatory approach to literacy instruction to the banking approach of traditional, school-based education in which knowledge was poured into empty vessels. For him, literacy meant not only decoding of text but also a critical understanding of the world related to that text. Freire’s teachings have been endorsed by numerous critical theorists who see literacy as a means of encouraging a critical understanding of existing power relationships (Collins, 1991; Giroux, 1991; Mitchell & Weiler, 1991). In the critical literacy perspective, “reading and writing become enhanced methods for exploring the democratic self and its formation through ideological exposure to knowledge and power relations” (Agnello, 2001, p. 24). In a recent

evaluation of the Adult Education Initiative (AEI) in Umeå, Segerholm (2001) questioned whether students were learning to think critically.

Freire provided a philosophy for literacy education but did not provide specific methodology. There is a growing body of literature about ways of adopting Freirian pedagogy to the classroom and adult literacy programs (Coggins, 1973; Creighton, 1997). However issues of accountability and measurement present obstacles to its more general acceptance especially at a time when the “cult of efficiency” pervades public discourse (Stein, 2001). How, for example, could program effectiveness be evaluated or outcomes measured if learners were free to direct their own learning?

As shown above, literacy has been defined in a variety of ways and clearly the demands for literacy have changed over time and place. The way in which literacy is understood determines how it will be measured.

### **Measuring Literacy**

Given the definitional issues raised above, it is not surprising that the question of how to measure or assess literacy skills has bedeviled researchers and commentators. Grade level completion has frequently been used as a proxy for literacy levels. For example, a study of literacy provision in Saskatchewan used the Grade 9 completion rates in census data to profile literacy needs in the province (Hindle, 1990). In Canada, a Grade 8 education sufficed when the economy was largely an agricultural and resource-based economy; whereas today a Grade 12 education is currently considered as a minimal credential for employment in Canada. In Sweden, there are nine years of compulsory schooling, *grundskolan* (see <http://www.skolverket.se/english/system/swedish.shtml>).

The use of grade level to assess literacy skills, whether of children or adults, is based on the assumptions that schooling provided the necessary literacy skills and that these skills, once obtained, are retained. “It is clear that such distinctions [based on grade level] are not accurate and...provide little insight into the actual abilities and the educational needs of adults” (Verhoeven, 1994, p. 5).

Basic literacy (however “basic” is understood) and functional literacy are examples of autonomous definitions of literacy that have been measured by quantitative means. It is not surprising that business and government leaders were interested in comparing adult literacy levels between countries as a result of increased globalization and competition in the marketplace. The limitations of census data and school-based tests led to the development of a more sophisticated measure of adult literacy skill levels, a measure that first provided by the International Adult Literacy Survey (1995).

### ***The International Adult Literacy Survey***

In 1994, Statistics Canada and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development undertook the IALS (1995), a major quantitative study that was the first international comparison of adult literacy skills. The IALS provided a quantitative benchmark of adult literacy skills in seven industrialised countries: Canada, Germany, the Netherlands, Poland, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United States. An additional fourteen countries have since participated in the survey (*Literacy Skills for the Knowledge Society*, 1997). This multi-country survey of adult literacy was the first cross-cultural, multi-language documentation of adult literacy skills in industrialized countries. The IALS defined literacy as “the ability to use printed and written information to function in society, to achieve one’s goals, and to develop one’s knowledge and potential” (p. 14).

The IALS (1995) used test items drawn from everyday life such as maps, printed articles, schedules, and documents a variety of literacy tasks. Test items were divided into five skill levels based on degree of complexity. At Level 1, respondents had to locate information based on a literal match; Level 2 required respondents to find one or more pieces of information that contained distractors; at Level 3 tasks had to make low level inferences based on information contained in more lengthy or complex text. According to the survey results, over 40% of adult Canadians functioned at Levels 1 although Level 3 was considered minimal adequacy for contemporary society. Levels 4 and 5 required more lengthy and dense text and more complex inferences (pp. 27-29).

One of the important achievements of the IALS (1995) was establishment of an understanding of literacy as a spectrum of skill rather than a dichotomous set of skills. The question is no longer whether individuals can or can not read but rather how well they can read. According to the survey, a large percentage of adults in the participating countries lacked adequate literacy skills for living in a modern society and the global economy. The survey showed that within industrialized countries where an increasing premium is placed on literacy skills, a large number of people are disadvantaged by their limited literacy skills.

*A critical understanding of IALS.* The National Center for Education Statistics in the United States recently raised doubts about the statistical parameters used in analyzing that country's National Adult Literacy Survey, the survey upon which the statistical analysis used in the IALS (1995) was modeled. The NCES stated that the Response Probability of 80% used to determine literacy levels in IALS was too high (Sticht, 1999). A Response Probability of 50% "produces the least errors in predicting whether adults can or cannot perform literacy tasks across the full range of tasks" and

would give a more reliable result in terms of fewer lucky guesses and less underestimation of skill levels. This would reduce significantly the percentage of Canadians in the lowest two literacy levels (p. 22). Uncertainty about interpretation of the published results makes it all the more important to analyze and understand the significance of the results from a phenomenological perspective.

A demographic analysis of the results also can reveal significant information. In Ontario in 1999, less than 4% of the population deemed in need of literacy upgrading was attending literacy programs. This was an obvious problem for literacy programs as their funding was dependent on number of participants. A demographic analysis of IALS statistics found that the majority of Ontario residents at the lowest literacy skill level were either over 55 years of age or were English-as-Second-Language (ESL) learners (Sussman, 2001). Since ESL learners were ineligible for literacy programs in Ontario and individuals over age 55 were unlikely to be seeking employment, literacy programs with an employment focus would be unlikely to attract or meet the needs of a large number of the individuals who functioned at the Level 1. Sussman's findings provide another argument for a contextual understanding of literacy skills and needs from the viewpoint of prospective learners.

Policymakers believe that people should improve their literacy levels. Adult educators have a vested interest in filling their programs but what about the potential learners? Why or why not do adults choose to participate in adult upgrading programs?

### **Adults - Learners or Not?**

The IALS (1995) found that adults with lower literacy skills were less likely to participate in adult education activities than were adults with higher literacy skills. Of those with the highest literacy levels, 65% of Swedes and 59% of Canadians participated

in adult education; of those with the lowest literacy levels, 29% of Swedes compared with 19% of Canadians participated (p. 69). There is an extensive literature dealing with why adults do or do not choose to improve their literacy skills, but it has generally been based on the premise that individuals would want to improve their skills if they had the chance. Public awareness campaigns are designed to inform adults of the importance of improving their skills. Situational barriers, such as lack of time due to family responsibilities or work, institutional barriers such as fees or scheduling or programs, and dispositional barriers such as attitudes toward learning (Cross as cited in Rubenson & Xu, 1997, p. 84) serve as a typology for the barriers to participation in formal adult basic education. According to Rubenson and Xu, studies such as IALS focus almost entirely on situational and institutional barriers.

### ***Barriers to Formal Learning***

A national study on access to adult basic education in Canada focused on situational and institutional barriers experienced by adult learners and instructors (Hoddinott, 1998). The researchers found a great deal of variety across the country.

“The first (and foremost) factor influencing [access to adult basic education was] whether there were actually programs available in a given community.” Situational barriers included “affordable transportation...availability of (and financial support for) childcare...whether programs required...tuition and other fees” (p. 167).

Childcare, transportation, and income support were cited as major factors in determining access to programs. This study also documented the uncertain working conditions of the adult educators. A second Canadian study found that many women in literacy programs “were too scared to learn” because they had experienced or were experiencing violence in their lives (Horsman, 2000). Horsman argued for the importance of understanding and coming to terms with this reality if educators hoped to

make a difference in the lives of their students. Qualitative studies such as these help to understand literacy as situated in the lives of individuals and communities and thus enable different interpretations of the chronic recruitment and retention issues in adult literacy programs. One challenge for researchers is how to find those who are not participating in a program.

### ***Deconstructing Non-participation***

Rubenson and Xu (1997) observed that the IALS only investigated responses from those who had expressed interest in participating in adult education.

“The implicit assumption seems to be that there are no dispositional barriers, because the respondent has indicated an interest in participating. Barriers become of interest only when there is an expressed wish to participate.” (p. 84)

This focuses attention on the institutional or situational barriers faced by individuals who sought out programs, ignoring the fact that a large proportion of the Level 1 and Level 2 individuals in Canada show no interest whatsoever in adult education programs. For individuals, “the presence of lack of skills is the result of a real or perceived life context that makes their acquisition either worth or not worth the effort” (Smith, 1992, p. 270). Rubenson and Xu stated that even in Sweden with “its high levels of literacy and practice of adult education...there still exists a large group of middle-aged persons living in a low literacy context...with no interest in adult education and training” (p. 96). This was substantiated by Paldanius’ (2003) recent ethnographic study in which he found that men who were not participating in the Adult Education Initiative, despite the financial support available, simply had no rationale for improving their skills and no interest in studying.

A number of authors have cast doubt on the interpretation of skill shortages as a central problem in the economy. Livingstone (1998) argued that it is a lack of good jobs

in the economy rather than a serious shortage of skilled workers that is the problem. Employers increasingly use academic credentials as a screening tool or to infer job performance whether or not these academic skills are needed for the job. Hull (1997) described the case of workers who, despite retraining and a good work ethic, were let go because of transportation problems or lack of accommodation in the workplace. Hull (as cited in Toll, 2001, p. 4) stated that “economic growth has taken place in many times and places without high levels of literacy, and high levels of literacy have not always led to economic development.” Krahn and Lowe (1998) discovered a “literacy surplus” in many workplaces, finding that many workers felt they were not asked to use their literacy skills in the workplace, and refer to research findings that “higher order learned skills may atrophy when not used regularly” (p. 17).

Those newly unemployed often do not have the literacy skills for new job or training opportunities and yet workers resist workplace literacy programs (Smith, 1992). A report in late 2003 stated that “millions of Canadians [were earning low wages] often working in bad conditions and getting few benefits” (Galt, 2003). Do workers intuitively recognize that they will face a ‘glass ceiling’ even if they upgrade their skills? In Canada, do workers feel at risk of losing their jobs if singled out for training?

Clearly many individuals do not see themselves as having a literacy problem despite being defined by the IALS (1995) as having less than adequate skills. One of the anomalies in the survey results was the disparity between the self-assessment of individuals and the way their skills were characterized in the results. A majority of those in Level 2 judged their own literacy skills as ‘good’ or ‘very good’ despite being considered below the minimum required level (pp. 171-183). “The new ethnographies of literacy tell us that people can lead full lives without the kinds of literacy assumed in

educational and other circles” (Street, 1995, p. 124). This can be interpreted to mean that within their work and social context, many people have the literacy or decoding skills that meet their needs, whether or not they themselves meet the minimum level set by statisticians. This suggests a significant dissonance between individual beliefs and the common good as understood by policymakers. It is therefore incumbent on governments to have an understanding of how literacy is contextualized in the lives of the people.

Recruitment and retention in adult basic education programs are other recurrent topics of discussion in the adult education literature. Based on the IALS (1995) finding that many individuals with Level 2 skills rate their literacy skills as good or excellent (pp. 170-175), they would be unlikely to think they needed a literacy program. Those with the lower literacy skills, individuals at Level 1, are more likely to seek out literacy programs. These may well be individuals with greater skill deficiencies to overcome if they are to benefit from literacy as the publicity promises. Those who were marginalized in the school system may experience the same dissonance as adults as they did when they were children in school. Moreover they may have the negative self-image of failure associated with school experience.

Adult literacy programs themselves, based on a deficit model, can marginalize participants in the way that Reading Recovery marginalizes children in schools (Dudley-Marling & Murphy, 1997). In aggregated learning (Schuetze, 2003), academic skills are developed through work. Functional context literacy (Sticht, 1997) ties curriculum more closely to topics relevant to students. These are effective strategies that adapt the regular curriculum and help to engage “reluctant” individuals in the learning process.

### *Situated Learning - Informal Learning*

The concept of situated learning where individuals gain skills through the context in which they live and work is the basis of informal learning. “Learning is process through which learners become fully participating members of a community of practice” (Lave & Wenger as cited in Belfiore, Defoe, Folinsbee, Hunter & Jackson, 2004, p. 256). This is informal learning on a just-in-time, as-needed basis. Two recent Canadian studies support this academic construct and its importance in everyday lives of adults (Belfiore et al., 2004; Livingstone, 2000). Another example of situated learning approach has been used by ActionAid projects in a number of developing countries. This model adapts Freirian pedagogy to problem-solving at the community level and, through the process, participants learn literacy and numeracy while deconstructing the reality that they live in. The Reflect Mother Manual is a practical how-to manual for implementing this participatory action research model (Archer & Cottingham, 1996).

Livingstone (2000) found that over 95% of Canadian adults had participated in informal learning during the year when the survey was conducted. This entailed getting information from family, friends and neighbours on an as-needed basis. It entailed gleaning information from the media whether newspapers, radio or television. This learning is self-directed, unscheduled and typically not recognized officially. Workers with limited education were able to deal with complex situations by observing and learning as they worked, demonstrating the significance of situated learning in the workplace (Belfiore et al., 2004).

Given the public discourse around lifelong and lifewide learning, the sociocultural perspective on literacy and the extent of informal learning, the topic merits consideration in an evaluation of public policy. Non-participation needs to be

understood not as unwillingness to learn but rather as non-participation in the formal education system.

### **Governments and Literacy in the Past**

*The past is not past; it is the context of the present.* (John Ralston Saul, 2000)

As governments today seek to develop successful strategies or campaigns to address this challenge, it is useful to review past literacy campaigns and their outcomes. A comparison of the goals and contexts of past literacy campaigns helps in the identification of factors that influenced the outcomes. Of particular interest is the relationships that existed between central authorities and the people governed, that is the extent to which they shared commonly understood goals. To use the marketplace metaphor, this may otherwise be viewed as the balance between the supply of learning opportunities provided by governments and the individual demand for them. This understanding is important for policymakers and advocates as they plan future literacy initiatives.

In their review of national literacy campaigns over the past five hundred years, Arnove and Graff (1987) observed that:

the idea of a campaign to promote massive and rapid increases in rates of literacy is not unique to the twentieth century....Major and largely successful campaigns to raise levels of literacy have taken place...from the time of the Protestant Reformations....[These] efforts...have not been tied to the level of wealth, industrialization, urbanization, or democratization of a society, nor to a particular type of political regime....They have been more closely related to efforts of centralizing authorities to establish a moral or political consensus, and over the past two hundred years, to nation-state building. (pp. 1-2)

The major goals of past literacy campaigns comprise morality, nation-building and economic development. A key factor in the success of these campaigns was when “those in power...and the illiterate population both saw the acquisition of literacy as supporting

their own goals” (Smith, 1992, p. 272). What is of interest is the how the context of these campaigns influenced the immediate outcomes and also whether or not the literacy skills were sustained.

### *Literacy and Morality*

Early literacy campaigns were closely tied to religion rather than strictly to the government. The Protestant Reformation marked an important benchmark in the extension of adult literacy beyond the ranks of the clergy in Europe. In Germany, the growth of the market economy and the related administrative and judicial services in the sixteenth century had created a “demand for reading skills in German cities” (Gawthrop, 1987, p. 31). This provided the basis for a widespread school system but one that was financed locally, a remarkable accomplishment for the time period. The school system provided the base for the eighteenth century campaigns that followed campaigns that were more closely tied to promotion of the Lutheran church.

The main factor in establishing widespread literacy even in the sixteenth century was the recognition by church leaders that teaching of Lutheran catechism would be greatly aided if “young people were also taught to read” (Gawthrop, 1987, p. 32). Initial local enthusiasm for education waned when the cost of sending their children to school outweighed the benefits received by German peasant and poorer families who could learn how to make their living without schooling (p. 35). For the ruling class schooling was important for commercial interests, an economic imperative.

In seventeenth century Scotland, “church and state sought to create a national, universal and religiously oriented educational system centered on a school in every parish...This was the first ‘truly national campaign’ and is of particular interest because Scotland was both economically backward and socially primitive. [The purpose of the

campaign] was to create a unified national religious, moral, and political community” (Houston, 1987, pp. 49 -52). In addition to learning at school, the church also promoted learning at home with the head of the household assuming responsibility for religious instruction. Scotland’s early entry into the industrial revolution and the close ties between religion and schools may explain the value people placed on education, which agreed with the value of education from the perspective of central civic and clerical authorities. In this case, economics, nationalism and morality in tandem supported the commitment to schooling by both individuals and the state.

While home learning in Scotland was supplementary to school learning, in Sweden, home learning preceded and supplemented school learning.

The early church Campaign around 1700 [in Sweden], was built upon informal instruction for everyone to read, sing, and pray the holy ‘Word of God’ ...The late school Campaign around and after 1850, was based upon formal schooling, so that everyone might read, write, and reckon the ‘world’ from new books and texts...This was true for rural life and for the large majority of the population...For a small minority of [males] there always was a need for ‘functional’ literacy. (Johansson, 1987, p. 65)

Clearly, in Sweden, the religious convictions of people played an important role in their willingness to learn to read at the direction of the clergy. “The campaign was based not just on compulsion, but on a felt religious need on the part of the individual a need internalized in village reading and family prayers” (Gee, 1990, p. 37). The Swedish campaign of the eighteenth century had a leveling effect, “helping to remove distinctions based on class, gender, and geography” but this was not true of the Scottish campaign (Houston, 1987, p. 61). Perhaps the primacy of the home in education in Sweden served to minimize the importance of disparity of educational resources between regions.

Arnove and Graff (1987) provided an informative overview of literacy campaigns since the Protestant Reformation. The primary goal of these literacy

campaigns that took place in Europe was to promote a common moral code. The instruction of literacy through religion meant that the common good as defined by the central authorities conformed to the beliefs of people; learning to read was a moral imperative given the position of the church prior to the Age of Reason. Economic factors were a secondary cause and effect of literacy campaigns in Germany and Scotland. A third outcome of the early literacy campaigns in Europe was nation building.

### ***Literacy and Nation Building***

With the rise in liberal individualism that followed in the wake of the French and American Revolutions, there was a change in the public understanding of individual rights along with greater religious freedom. At this time, scientific rationalism developed as an approach to problem solving. At the same time as governments began approaching literacy and other social issues as problems with technical solutions, individuals were increasingly recognizing their own rights to self-determination. Individuals were more willing and able to challenge and resist the directives of central authorities whether church or state (Arnove & Graff, 1987).

In the twentieth century nation building was the primary initial goal of literacy campaigns in Nicaragua, Cuba, and Tanzania (Arnove, 1987; Leiner, 1987; Unsicker, 1987). These countries were all poor, with diverse populations that spoke many different languages. The literacy campaigns followed major societal changes, independence following decolonization achieved either by negotiated settlement or revolution. The populations supported the revolutionary process and strong central leadership promoted literacy as a cornerstone to nationhood.

In Tanzania, President Nyerere oversaw an ambitious literacy campaign following independence. Adult learning centres were established throughout the country

and Swahili was adopted as the national, written language. Nyerere's goal was to enable all Tanzanians to participate in the democratic process. This initial phase of the campaign attracted a great deal of international support that, in the long term, undermined literacy efforts as government programs became dependent on a level of foreign support that was unsustainable (Unsicker, 1987).

In the excitement of independence, support for the literacy campaign was widespread but the top-down approach to adult education and other central political decisions generated resistance. "Education programs...came to be seen not as a way of giving the ordinary villagers more power but as exercising power over them" (von Frehold as cited in Unsicker, p. 242). By the early 1990s, there was concern about sustaining adult literacy particularly in rural areas. Attendance at adult learning centres was sporadic (Director of Adult Education, Government of Tanzania, personal communication, February 17, 1994). Tanzanian peasants were more interested in reading romance stories than the books about how to plant a cash crop that were the main holdings in the learning centres (J. Holder, Canadian Organization for Development Through Education, Dar es Salaam, personal communication, February 24, 1994).

In 1959, Cuba was a country with little educational infrastructure and a high illiteracy rate. The revolutionary government of Fidel Castro initiated a National Literacy Campaign that exhorted all Cubans to participate, either as learners or teachers. Young people from the cities went to rural areas to teach literacy thereby strengthening urban-rural connections. Gillette (1987) described the Cuban Literacy Campaign as

anything but innovative in technical terms, massive rather than selective, politically rather than vocationally functional, used a single curriculum and manual rather than a diversified adapted approach, and ...was definitive rather than experimental [but] was nevertheless a resounding success. The Cuban effort

demonstrated forcefully that pedagogically *uninnovative* literacy action could succeed. (p. 205)

The Cuban people had accepted the Castro's vision as their own and saw a role for themselves in nation building through participation in the literacy campaign.

In Nicaragua, during the 1980s there was a similar congruence between the government's plans and the role that the people understood they could play. Urban youth taught rural peasants and the literacy crusade was framed as a cornerstone of nation building (Arnove, 1987, pp. 262-292). This campaign did not enjoy the lasting success of the Cuban Campaign because of the war that ultimately resulted in the overthrow of the revolutionary government that had initiated the campaign.

In Cuba, Nicaragua, and Tanzania, nation building was the primary goal of the literacy campaign. It was promoted by the leadership that had achieved independence with the support of and on behalf of the people. Literacy was part of the common good of the nation-building process that the people endorsed through the revolutionary or post-colonial efforts. The demand for literacy was met to the extent possible by the governments' efforts to supply it. When literacy became an economic imperative in a centralizing World Bank or the Food and Agriculture Organization agenda, as it was in Tanzania, the government and the people no longer shared common goals and the people resisted as witnessed by the disuse of the adult education centres in Tanzania. The relationship between literacy and the economy was a common theme in other literacy campaigns in the twentieth century.

### ***Literacy and the Economy***

In 1965 at the Tehran Congress the role of literacy was defined:

as a way of preparing man for a social, civic and economic role...reading and writing should lead not only to elementary general knowledge but to training for

work, increased productivity, a greater participation in civil life and a better understanding of the surrounding world and should...open the way to basic human culture. (Gillette, 1987, p. 203)

The limited success of the campaign was due to the lack of “clarity, solidity, flexibility, and adaptability” (pp. 205- 207). Apart from the issues of program delivery, the very possibility of developing consensus between the international authorities who planned the EWLP and the peasants and workers living in the eleven participating countries seems remote indeed.

Other important examples of twentieth century literacy campaigns designed by governments to promote economic growth and development took place in China, Russia, and India. All are large countries with diverse populations and language groups. “In the twentieth century, the Soviet Union...[is] the first case of [a] country adopting a war-siege mentality to combat illiteracy” (Arnove & Graff, 1987, p.11). In Russia, the education and learning that had flourished at the village level after emancipation of the serfs in 1861 was effectively crushed by the imposition of a harsh educational system designed to build the economy and modernize Russia. The imposition of state-run schools with rigid curricula destroyed local learning initiatives and the intended beneficiaries saw the literacy drives of central authorities as a threat to their language and identity (Eklof, 1987; Stevens, 1987). Strong central leadership directed the literacy campaigns in China and Russia within the revolutionary context that provided the opportunity for change.

The central political elite in China designed the Cultural Revolution and its coercive implementation caused much hardship and bitterness. Ironically a generation of students missed their own education, as villagers resisted being ‘educated’ by those same students. There was little consideration for regional variation or individual

interests as literacy was seen as part of nation-building and economic development (Hayford, 1987).

In India, politicians also saw adult literacy as the key to economic development. A much decentralized government and lack of central leadership meant that there was little adult education at the local level. Bhola (1987) commented that “technical solutions...are much easier to develop than creating and sustaining political commitment (p.245). The Indian example illustrates again a lack of consensus between central authorities and the intended participants in literacy and adult education programs. As well, the political debate in India over whether to give priority to the education of children or the education of adults is a debate that goes on today in many parts of the world.

In these three cases, two with strong central leadership and one without, the absence of any consultation or dialogue with intended learners or even effort to understand their realities resulted in resistance or apathy at the local level that undermined central initiatives. The literacy agenda of central authorities bore little if any relationship to the values of the people following the initial revolutionary period.

### ***The Impact of Literacy Campaigns***

The above review shows that unless governments provided adequate supply of learning opportunities and a rationale that the public embraced, the resulting demand for literacy by the people fell short and literacy campaigns themselves had little lasting impact. Arnove and Graff (1987) observed that literacy campaigns have had several structural and cultural outcomes including institutionalization of schooling and standardization of languages (pp. 21-27). The impact of these two outcomes figure

largely in consideration of literacy issues in the information age, particularly in countries with multilingual or culturally diverse populations.

Limage (1987) argued that the accepted relationship between literacy and schooling also be called into question. She stated that

[Numerous authors] have shown that the history of literacy acquisition does not coincide with the history of formal schooling (and that) schools in industrialized countries have never had as their fundamental mission the transmission of literacy and numeracy skills...Historically schools have had a social-control function that forms the framework in which they transmit any knowledge, including reading and writing...The nineteenth century reformers (in the United States), who...inspired the creation of public schools, envisaged a tool to manage social changes by instilling certain values in a culturally and economically diverse population of immigrants and natives. (pp. 295 - 297)

One effect of institutionalized schooling was a devaluing of other types of learning. At the beginning of the nineteenth century in the United States, "illiteracy was stratified by occupation, wealth, race, ethnicity, nativity, gender, age and population density" (Stevens, 1987, p. 102). Education was offered through family, church, private schooling, and public schools. According to Stevens, the establishment of the common school as "the major institution for transmitting basic literacy [meant that] by 1870 the problem of literacy had become a school problem" (p. 122). Schools became associated with the centralized authority and those who did not or could not attend them were marginalized.

This overview shows that governments have promoted literacy for a variety of purposes over throughout recent history. Following the Protestant Reformation, literacy was seen as a vehicle for promoting religion and morality. When the church played a central role in society it could instill a demand for learning. Over the next two hundred years, literacy was, at various times and locations, a vehicle for nation building. In the decolonization period, governments and the people shared a common interest in

learning. In the twentieth century, in addition to nation-building, literacy became linked to development after it was observed that the modern nations enjoyed a literate population. As we enter the 21<sup>st</sup> century, adult literacy and human capital in the form of a skilled workforce are being linked increasingly to the knowledge economy.

### **Current Themes: Lifelong Learning and Social Inclusion**

Governments have begun talking about learning cultures and lifelong learning in addition to literacy. The reality is that human beings do learn throughout their lives both for survival and social purposes. In Livingstone's (1998) words "to live is to learn [and] continual social learning is the most distinctive feature of human beings" (p. 12). Rubenson (2002) postulated that governments might start to absolve themselves of responsibility for adult education by shifting the discourse to lifelong learning.

Another theme, social inclusion, figures on the agenda of the OECD (*Overcoming Exclusion*, 1999). These reports discussed the inherent risks to social cohesion when significant sectors of the population of any country are marginalised. "Widening income inequalities, worrying levels of unemployment and inactivity and growing poverty, often amid a general increase in affluence" represent potentially destabilizing influences on the larger society (p. 18). The sociocultural perspective of the New Literacy Studies argues for the need to consider literacy from the micro perspective of prospective learners.

If learning is a natural part of human life based on individual motivation, the question then becomes what individuals are learning. Learning can be undertaken to meet basic needs, to get a job, or to participate in the community. As shown by past literacy campaigns, the motivation for learning must derive from individuals and cannot successfully be imposed by governments. These observations support Langer's (1987)

statement that “literacy learning begins and continues when people understand its advantages and know it will benefit them” (p. 13). While effective learning depends on individual motivation this does not mean that social equity can be realized unless special provisions are made for disadvantaged groups.

### **Who Owns the Literacy Problem?**

According to Smith (1992) ‘the problem of illiteracy’ as popularly conceived, is in itself a problem that must be addressed before any significant success can be attained in overcoming [it]” (p. 266). The New Literacy Studies (Gee, 1990; Street, 1995) provide a critical perspective on literacy in postmodern times. They extend understanding of literacy beyond the technical aspects of reading and writing that are the focus of educationalists and psychologists. These studies position literacy in its social context and meaning based on the traditions of sociolinguistics and anthropology. From this perspective, literacy is a part of social discourse and comprises cultural capital related to a particular social group.

Tierney (1993) argued that critical theory without a postmodernist perspective ignores differences while postmodernism without critical theory “leads to inaction and nihilism” (p. 22). He therefore argued for a critical postmodernist processual approach, which both recognizes differences and allows for concerted action. The new qualitative research methodologies in education “challenge the notion that single brand of ‘rationality’ or logic drives the search for knowledge and understanding. Justification for such strategies now rests upon assumptions identified as central to hermeneutics, critical theory, and neopragmatism” (Maxcy, 1991, p. 21). A sociocultural understanding of literacy as comprising more than the technical skills of decoding and writing is explained through the construct of discourse.

### *Discourse*

Literacy skill acquisition itself is often not enough to secure employment. This is akin to the person who may recognize a large vocabulary of words but reveals a lack of education by mispronouncing words. Gee (1990) extended the term literacy with his concept of *discourse* which he defined as:

a socially accepted association among ways of using language, of thinking, feeling, believing, valuing and of acting that can be used to identify oneself as a member of a coaxially meaningful group or 'social network' or to signal a socially meaningful 'role'. (p. 143)

He distinguished between primary discourses that “are mastered through *acquisition*” (p. 146) in the home and secondary discourses that are learned through school. Primary discourses are learned subconsciously by exposure to models, a process of trial and error, and practice within social groups, without formal teaching. “Literacy is mastery of, or fluent control over, a secondary Discourse” (p. 153). A child whose home culture most closely conforms to that of the school will be more comfortable in school than a child who has no previous experience with books or a literate home environment. The same discourse dissonance is likely to remain true for adults who decided to enter upgrading programs. Hull (1997) stated that literacy is often used as a discriminatory factor in hiring, whether or not workers have other useful skills and abilities. She described a worker who lost a job, not because of her newly minted credentials, but because the workplace would not accommodate her left-handedness; another workplace literacy trainee lost her job because of public transportation problems.

In society “some literacies are more dominant, visible and influential than others” (Barton, 2000 p. 12 ). Heath’s classic ethnographic study of three communities showed that children from homes in which literacy practices were most congruent with

the school literacy succeeded whereas children from homes with different literacy practices struggled. “The failure of schools to make up for [these] home-based differences has been a paramount feature of both US and British [and Canadian?] educational systems throughout their histories” (Gee, 1990 p. 28). Whereas in Canada and the US there is a strong correlation between the educational level of adults and the school success of children, this is not the case in Sweden (Tuijnman, 2000). Street says that “the degree of congruence between home and school...may be a result not so much of school influencing home as of general middle class values affecting both contexts” (Gee, 1990 p. 104).

### ***Cultural Capital***

Bourdieu’s concept of cultural capital extends beyond the idea of discourse to include not only patterns of behaviours but also knowledge, cultural artifacts and academic qualifications. “The school is one of the critical sites where forms of cultural capital are produced, transmitted, and accumulated, and where dominant systems of classification and evaluation are inculcated” (as cited in Olneck, 2000, p. 321). Schools “respond more effectively to middle- and upper-income groups...largely [because] these groups possess the cultural capital that schools endorse as natural” (Foster, 1986, p. 98). Although the primary focus of this research proposal is adult literacy, the role of the school needs to figure in the discussion. “It is too easy to simply “blame the victim” [unless consideration is given to the] “socializing and selection functions of schools” (Limage, 1987, p. 297).

Foucault saw knowledge and power as closely linked (Gordon, 1980). Certainly higher literacy skills generally convey power in terms of more remunerative job options and countries with higher literacy levels are more industrialized and more ‘developed’.

But is literacy the cause or the effect? The New Literacy Studies suggest that those who 'have' are more likely to 'know', rather than the other way around. In other words, a good education resulting in higher literacy skills will more likely be the result of higher socio-economic status rather than higher socio-economic status necessarily following a good education. Mastery of the schooled or dominant/mainstream literacy provides the tools of power in the society but that mastery itself is facilitated by the inherent power of one's position in the society.

Literacy is both a barrier and an invitation; it is a way of allocating the society's resources (Stuckey, 1991). The IALS (1995) documented the correlation between literacy skills and income. Other reports have described the relationship between low literacy skills and poverty (National Anti-Poverty Organization, see <http://www.nap-onap.ca/1993>), literacy and health (Sarginson, 1997), and literacy and the justice system (McDougall-Gagnon-Gingras, 1993). These various reports show that literacy levels demarcate a "have/have not" fault line in Canadian society. At the same time, public awareness campaigns such as the Learn Page that is found in the yellow pages of all Canadian phone directories imply that benefits will ensue once an individual's literacy skills are improved (ABC CANADA, 2003). Gee's (1990) concept of discourse includes the attitudes, behaviour, and ways of using language, that surround literacy. To what extent is 'learner resistance' (Freire & Macedo, 1987) a reflection of discourse dissonance between learners and the mainstream upgrading system? The findings described in Chapters Four and Five suggest some alternative understandings of the problem.

As the New Literacy Studies increase understanding of the complexity of literacy and education and governments increasingly see literacy skills as critical to

competitiveness in the global economy, how is the issue addressed in public policymaking?

### **Studying Adult Education Policy Today**

Public policy may be analyzed in a variety of ways. Pal (1992) defined policy analysis as “the disciplined application of intellect to public problems” (p. 16). He observed, however, that academic and applied policy research differed significantly in terms of focus, timelines, and purpose. He described this difference in reference to the elements of the policy process and observed that academic policy research is frequently of little interest to policymakers. Academic policy research focuses on understanding factors that determine policy, the relationship between “policy determinants and policy content” with a goal of finding “explanations” (p. 22) and developing general theories. He stated that applied policy analysis is almost the complete opposite.

Applied policy analysis [focuses on] the relationship between policy content and policy impact...with the aim of evaluating policy impact rather than explaining policy content. The approach is contextual, dealing with specific policies in specific circumstances....The aim of evaluation is improvement and change, thus it is engaged politically in a way that academic policy analysis is not.” (p. 23)

Applied policy analysis may be thought of as policy evaluation. Policy analysis is situated in the context of current debates about adult education and current realities.

### ***The Contested Terrain of Adult Education Policy***

Globalization, technological change, and international competitiveness have encouraged public interest in education in industrialized countries as discussed earlier.

In this context, literacy and adult education may be seen as

“essential to social development, the maintenance of democratic institutions and the achievement of social equity and justice. [Alternately] it may be seen as a component of human capital...an essential skill required of the labour force, upon which production and service effectiveness and efficiency are dependent.” (Blunt, 2000, pp. 89-90)

The impact of globalization has resulted in a sense of urgency about education and adult education policy. Pal (1997) observed that governments are now urged to “do less with less” and finance ministries are more “powerful” in both setting the agenda and defining solutions (p. 97). At the same time there are also growing concerns about “highly polarized societies”(p. 128). MacKinnon (2003), a former Saskatchewan finance minister, supported this viewpoint in her personal account of “driv[ing] initiatives through the complicated labyrinth of government”(p. 72). The temper of the times encourages the human capital perspective on literacy.

Ozga (200) argued that policy research about education is contested terrain since it can either be relevant and useful to policy makers or it can be critical of educational policy itself (p. 4). Teachers (and adult educators) are at the centre of the tension between an instrumental view of education as building human capital and education that builds social capital “enabl[ing] pupils to deal with power” (p. 9). She further stated that “governments may seek to use education for...improving economic productivity, as workforce training, or as a sorting and selection mechanism for distributing opportunities” (p. 10). In this vein, adult education would be instrumental in developing human capital and the emphasis would be on effective policies. Applied policy research can focus on facts and “‘top-down’ interventions” in order to solve problems through improved practice. On the other hand, a social science perspective of the New Literacy Studies argues for “meet[ing] client’s needs, to define and clarify their problem [thereby providing] a “better understanding of how things work” (Dale as cited in Ozga, p. 40).

### ***Policy and Ideology***

Political ideology defines the way that social issues are analyzed and how policy is developed and implemented. Policy analysis can not ignore the values that are embedded in any aspect of policy or the power relationships that define the processes through which policies are developed (Cibulka, 1995). Political perspectives often define and delimit the role that is played by the state in adult education policy. In liberal democracies, “utilitarian and rights-based theories” lead to a focus on human capital development as a goal of education while “democratic communitarian and humanistic” theories would focus on “the good life and the good society” (Kahne, p. 3). Rubenson (2001b) argued that “the realization of lifelong learning for all depends...on differences in underlying, often implicit, theories of the state” (p. 85). Ideology also defines boundaries for responsibility between individual, community and state.

Pluralists reject “uncontrolled state power” in favour of civil society and “see the influence of interest groups on policymaking as essential” (Rubenson, 2001b, p. 86). How responsibility for adult education and learning is divided between the individual and the state is determined by political ideology. Adult education in a pluralist system “takes for granted that the adult is a conscious, self-directed individual [with] the likelihood that a system based on recruitment by self-selection widens, rather than narrows, the education and cultural gaps in society” (p. 88). Pluralists focus on “creating demand among groups on the periphery of the learning society” (Rubenson, 2001b, p. 88) as a way of dealing with inequalities, such as the public awareness campaigns referred to above.

Neo-liberals and communitarians define differently the relationship between individuals and community. For neo-liberals, individual free choice is of paramount

value and individuals are responsible for improving their own literacy levels. While literacy is seen as an economic imperative, the role of the state in this ideology is to ensure, insofar as possible, equity of access; the outcomes are the primarily the responsibility of individuals. For communitarians, on the other hand, individuals are embedded in society and are affected by the status of others; responsibility for the overall good of the community is shared by individuals and the society at large.

The New Right “sees no role for the state in promoting adult education as a public good [and] leaves participation to market forces and accountability to market norms” (p. 90). Social democrats, on the other, hand emphasize the equality of outcomes and recognize that providing equal opportunity does not ensure equity. Adult education is seen as a second, third or even fourth chance for individuals with a role to play in building social cohesion (OECD, 1999). From this perspective adult education is a social entitlement and the goal of adult education would be to “contribute to greater equality and social justice” (Hoghielm & Rubenson, 1980, p. 59).

### ***Framing the Literacy Problem***

Whether or not there is a literacy problem and the nature of the problem depends on whether policymakers or the undereducated frame the question (Smith, 1992). The rationalism that arose following the Enlightenment continues to have a major influence on public dialogue and policymaking. Positivism assumes one reality and that, through correct analysis, solutions can be developed to solve problems in a predictable, linear, ‘cause-effect’ way. “Critical theorists reject the positivist notion of knowledge and science” and focus on research and building structures that enhance empowerment and democracy. Postmodernism, on the other hand, focuses on the differences between individuals and believes that, because of power inequalities inherent in these differences,

agreement is impossible (Tierney, 1993, pp. 4-7). Tierney argued that postmodernism encourages recognition of different voices but it is critical theory that seeks to build a way forward despite those diverse voices.

Meacham (2001) made the following case for a critical postmodernist understanding of literacy in a multicultural society.

Historically, and into the present, dominant political interests within discussion of literacy policy have had a narrowing impact on what constitutes legitimate literacy practice. Dominant political interests that affirm prevailing relations of power promote...literacy as a singular, exclusively written language practice....Cultural and linguistic diversity are taken up as threats to conceptual coherence....Mainstream literacy policy discussions rarely acknowledge cultural diversity [but] concerns involving cultural diversity often underlie...mainstream efforts to codify literacy instruction and literacy study. (p. 181)

Interestingly, several prominent Canadians embraced the concept of cultural diversity when they were reported as wishing they had learned more about other cultures and languages before beginning their careers (Gallop, 2002).

The IALS (1995) measurement of literacy as a technical skill implied that, literacy levels will improve through implementation of the 'right' methods and policies. It focused attention on pedagogical considerations. According to this paradigm, inadequate literacy skills represent a deficit and recruitment and retention are problems in program delivery to be solved through the right programs and strategies. "The OECD's prevailing point of view remains economic; it is motivated by the corporate free market conviction that what is globally beneficial to transnational corporations is automatically good for all" (Hyslop-Margison, 1998, p. 5). An extensive body of literature shows that those who have not succeeded in the school system often achieve "considerable intellectual accomplishments" (Hull & Schultz, 2001, p. 575). These

findings suggest the need to recognize and validate learning that happens outside of the formal education system. Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR known as 'validation' in Sweden) refers to strategies for recognizing learning that happens outside of credentialed contexts (see <http://fcis.oise.utoronto.ca/~plar/>).

The IALS (1995) provided an important wide-angle picture of disparity in industrial countries. Governments have seen the findings as a problem to be solved and literacy advocates have used the results to argue for more funding for literacy programs. The problem-solving approach to policy analysis positions adult education as a factor in "manpower planning, addressing social priorities, controlling people's expectations, [or] solving social problems" (Griffin, 1987, pp. 224-225). Efficiency in the allocation of resources is valued with an emphasis on convincing individuals about the need to learn and on teaching strategies to improve literacy as a technical skill. However, only a close-up picture such as that provided by ethnography can help explain the gap between the promise and the outcomes of adult education. Critical literacy studies use qualitative approaches to seek meaning and understanding for social phenomena. These studies question the meaning of the large-scale quantitative surveys and argue for more learner-centred approaches to learning.

Governments may see increased literacy skills as important but do those deemed in need of improving their literacy skills see the benefit of doing so? Would they retain their skills once having completed adult upgrading programs? Literacy is a "use it or lose it" skill" and literacy skill retention is a well-known issue in international education (Wagner, 1999, pp. 9-10). Greater skill retention should be anticipated in a print rich environment like Canada, but nevertheless, maintenance of skills at the level required for post-secondary education is not guaranteed by adults who complete upgrading

programs. What strategy can be used to study a complex issue such as public policy related to adult literacy?

### ***A Framework for Applied Policy Research***

Rist (2000) observed that one of the best ways of understanding policy is in terms of a policy cycle comprised of three phases: formulation, implementation and accountability. “Each of these three phases has its own order and logic, its own information requirements, and its own policy actors” (p. 1004). This “concept has been addressed for more than a decade” and it serves as a useful way to deconstruct a complex topic. Each phase has its own data sources and can yield different data.

In Guba’s (1984) typology these phases are: *policy-in-intent*, *policy-in-practice* and *policy-in-experience*. Policy-in-intent includes goals, guides to action, accumulated laws, strategies, and instruments. Guba delineated policy questions, data and data sources, methodology and policy products for each of these three levels using examples drawn from community corrections, education for handicapped students, and accreditation of colleges and universities (pp. 64-69), thereby showing the versatility of the model for a wide range of policy field and different levels of policy questions.

Rist (2000) emphasized the importance of policy tools (instruments) stating that grants, subsidies, loans, new regulations, etc. are factors that “each can be more or less effective in achieving policy objectives” (p. 1011). The macro phase of policy is usually distant from the point of action and the actors or “determiners” at this level include “high level agents” such as politicians and civil servants (Guba, 1984, p. 63). Government documents, public reports and interviews with policymakers are possible sources of data about this phase. Policy at this level looks like ends (p. 65).

Policy-in-practice is the phase where policy is implemented and, as Ball (1997) pointed out, there is no guarantee about how centrally defined policy will be interpreted and implemented at the periphery. “Policies are always incomplete insofar as they relate to or map on to the ‘wild profusion’ of local practice” (p. 3). He argued for the importance of examining the factors influencing policy implementation and highlighted the importance of a grounded approach to policy analysis. This could include program guidelines, regulations, and accountability requirements. In a qualitative study, the experience and opinions of those implementing policy are important sources of data.

The policy-in-experience phase is the micro level where the impact of policy is actually felt. Individuals understand policy by its effects on them and how well it meets their needs (Guba, 1984, p. 65). How would they define their experience with the policy? The choice of emphasis in a policy study reflects the researcher’s values.

### ***Policy Communities and Policy Networks***

Atkinson and Coleman (1992) state that knowing “who participates and who wields power” (p. 158) are key questions in policy analysis. The concepts of policy communities and policy networks help in the analysis. “The community refers to the actors; the network refers to the relationships among actors” (p. 158). This terminology allows for identification of who the process includes and who it excludes (p. 159).

“Network and communities [not only] affect...policy outcomes at the macro level [but they are themselves] conditioned by “national political institutions” (p. 163).

Lindquist (1992) postulated four different configurations of policy networks (Figure 2.1) with respect to any given topic dependent on the relative organization of government and interest groups. Within each network configuration, the different power relationships determine which problems are addressed and what policies are formulated.

In State Direction, the government is highly organized but the interests groups are not, with the result that the public may have little influence on policy. In the opposite case, Clientele Pluralism, interest groups are highly organized and government does not have a strong position, so that the interest groups may have a strong influence on policy direction. In Pressure Pluralism, neither state nor interest groups are highly organized so that policymaking tends to be reactive. In concertation and corporatist networks, business interests and government sectors are both well organized (pp. 134-140). Figure 2.1 is a graphic representation of the relationships between government and interest groups given different levels of organization.

		Government Organization	
		<i>Low</i>	<i>High</i>
Organization of Interests	<i>Low</i>	Pressure Pluralism	State Direction
	<i>High</i>	Clientele Pluralism	<table border="1" style="margin-left: auto; margin-right: auto;"> <tr> <td>Corporatism</td> </tr> </table> Concertation
Corporatism			

Figure 2.1. *Different Configurations of Policy Networks* (source: Lindquist, 1992, p.135)

I discuss the role of policy communities and the function of policy networks in the two countries in Chapter Five as revealed by the process of policymaking in Canada and Sweden. In the following section, I provide an overview of the Canadian and Swedish contexts for this study; I describe the sites selected for the study in Chapter Three.

## **The Swedish Context**

### ***Geography, Population, Education, and Governance***

Sweden is a small Nordic country with a land mass of just over 410,934 square kilometres, two-thirds the size of the province of Saskatchewan. With a population of 8.9 million people the population density of 22 persons per square kilometre (www.scb.se, 2003) is over seven times greater than that of Canada. A well established road, rail and telecommunications systems joins all parts of the country. All telephone calls within Sweden were charged at the same rate; there was no long distance rate for calls within the country. Until the 1970s the population was essentially homogenous Caucasian, with the exception of Sami people who lived a nomadic life in the far north of Sweden (estimated population of 25,000, Statistics Sweden, 2002). Since the 1970s, significant refugee and immigrant populations from all parts of the world have settled in Sweden. In 2003, approximately 20% of the population was recorded as having at least one parent born outside of Sweden (Statistics Sweden).

Sweden is governed by a unitary national government system. There are 21 counties and 288 municipalities. Policy and funding are provided by the national state government but policy implementation for education and social services is a municipal responsibility. The intermediate level of government, the counties, have responsibility for health care but are not comparable to Canada's provincial governments in terms of their jurisdictional responsibilities and powers. (Heidenheimer, Hecló & Adams, 1983, p. 23).

According to the Swedish Education Act (1985) each municipality was responsible for providing preschool, youth and adult education. This includes preschool for 4-6 year olds, nine years of compulsory education for youth seven to sixteen and

three years of upper secondary education for youth up to twenty years of age and municipal adult education. The current goal is for all adults to complete upper secondary education (M. Berglund, May 14, 2003).

### ***Adult Learning***

In Sweden, adult education is delivered in three major ways: popular education, tripartite labour training and municipal adult education (Sohlman, 1998). Most forms of adult education are free of charge and participants are often entitled to some form of financial assistance (Houtkop as cited Bélanger & Tuijnman, 1997, p. 18), notably in the formal and nonformal systems. Nevertheless, “there still exists in Sweden a large group of middle-aged persons living in a low literacy context and with no interest in adult education and training” (Rubenson & Xu, 1997, p. 96).

There is a long history of national support for popular adult education and delivery is through a variety of formal and non-formal means. As described earlier in this chapter, morality was the key to the early literacy drives and the functionality of literacy was determined by use for religious purposes (Johansson, 1987). In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the study circle method was developed by national popular movements to address inequities in the society (Bystrom, 1976, p. 305). Oliver (1997) observed that study circles remained Sweden’s primary mechanism for adult civic education and adult education. “The starting point for a Study Circle must be the problems adults face” (p. xvii). Their ongoing success can be attributed to their popular base of support from national popular organizations (see Appendix C), participant-centred small group format, national government subsidies for group leaders and materials, flexibility and adaptability in content, and continuing relationship with public issue discussion and public life (pp. 74-79). In Chapter Five I describe Study circle activities I observed in

Kungsör and Umeå. Folk high schools based on Grundtvig's Danish model of free education for those with limited education are a second nonformal education system supported by government grants (Swedish National Federation of Education, 1994).

The tri-partite labour market training established in 1938 is a joint initiative of government, unions and employers. Since 1974, all workers have had the right to educational leave with some government funding provided. Since 1968, municipalities have had the legal responsibility to provide adult education at the primary, secondary and tertiary level. Policies, guidelines and funding are provided by the national government and no fees are charged to students (Sohlman, 1998, p. 171). Municipal Adult Education (*komvux*) introduced in 1968 offers adult education leading to credits at the compulsory and secondary levels. The national government established guidelines and provides funding but all municipalities are legally responsible for implementation of the education.

Following the publication of the IALS results (1995), the Swedish media focused on "the shocking fact that 25% of the adult population was below Level Three which corresponds to the level that students are supposed to have acquired by the end of compulsory education" (Sohlman, 1998, p. 173). In 1997, the Swedish government introduced the Adult Education Initiative (AEI), *kunskapslyftet*, (Sohlman, 1999). The AEI was administered through the municipal education system. One purpose of the AEI was to raise public awareness about the importance of education in the face of rising unemployment in the early nineties (S. Larsson, personal communication, May 31, 2002). The AEI differed from the established Labour Market Training (LMT) in that while both were intended for the unemployed, the AEI was a comprehensive education while the LMT is vocationally oriented (Stenberg, 2002).

The nineties was a decade of major change in Swedish education. The country moved from a highly centralized system to greater local control over education. The Adult Education Initiative served to shake up adult education and opened the door to similar decentralization. The debate about Swedish education (and adult education) is how to ensure equity and standards across the country at the same time allowing for greater local direction and input (Lundahl, 2002).

### **The Canadian Context**

#### ***Geography, Population, Education, and Governance***

Canada is the second largest country in the world with a land mass of just under 10 million square kilometres and a population density of 3.3 persons per square kilometre in 2002 (Statistics Canada, 2003). It is a country of great diversity both in terms of geography and population. The aboriginal peoples, indigenous to Canada prior to European settlement, made up approximately 2% of the total population (Statistics Canada, 2001). With the exception of this group, Canada can be considered a country of immigrants. Immigration in the late 1800s and middle half of the 1900s was largely from Europe (Hindle, 1990, pp. 38-42). In the latter half of the 1900s, immigration has been increasingly from Latin American, Asia, Africa and the Middle East. Since the 1980s, Canadian immigration policy has given priority to those who have a good knowledge of French or English and this is reflected in a bimodal distribution of literacy skills among new Canadians (*Reading the future*, 1996, p.36), with immigrants demonstrating high literacy levels and family class refugees and family class immigrants having low literacy levels.

Canadian schooling consists of eight years of primary school starting at age six followed by four years of secondary school for thirteen to seventeen-year olds. In

Saskatchewan, schools must accept individuals up to age twenty-one years of age. Increasingly kindergarten is offered for five-year-olds and, preschools are publicly funded for some targeted groups.

Canada has a federal, parliamentary system of government with a national government elected every four years on a constituency basis. There is a potential change in government every four years. The national parliament is located in Ottawa with many government services decentralized on a provincial or regional basis. According to the Canadian constitution of 1867, immigration is the responsibility of the federal government and education the responsibility of the ten provincial and three territorial governments. While immigration levels are set and controlled by the federal government, it is the provincial educational systems that must provide for the education of immigrant children and the adults.

### ***Adult Learning***

In the past, the federal government provided funding for retraining as part of its labour market role. When it was recognized that a percentage of the unemployed lacked the necessary academic skills for retraining, the government was drawn into assuming responsibility for adult basic education. During the 1990s, responsibility for labour market development was transferred to the provinces and territories through labour market agreements. Doray and Rubenson (1997) stated that in Canada there is no “formal basic framework for human resources development and adult education policies” (p. 23). This situation is even truer today under the recent labour market agreements. The federal government now has a more limited influence on provincial policy and programming as it no longer provides direct program funding for adult education.

Adult education in Canada is provided through four main paths: provincial education 'night' schools, voluntary or community association, training for the unemployed offered both privately and through public institutions and workplace education. It is fair to say that education of adults at the basic literacy level has been left largely to volunteer sector. Community based organizations recruited, trained and matched tutors with adults who want to improve their reading skills. Funding for these organizations was uncertain as it was usually project based or from charitable donations. The tutors were unpaid volunteers who usually had received a few hours of nonformal training.

Bélanger and Tuijnman (1997) observed that because adult education is primarily a responsibility of the provinces there are large differences in policy "and in the ensuing participation patterns in the different provinces" (p. 18). These authors observed that

Adult education is provided by a bewildering array of sponsors, including colleges and universities, community colleges, libraries, labour organizations, religious organizations, commercial organizations, business and industrial and the media. Most of them depend heavily on user fees for support. Adult education has been and continues to be essentially self-supporting with a few national priority programmes funded by government...It is a familiar pattern: most adult education is taken up for job or career-related purposes, and participation tends to widen rather than narrow the gap between the most and the least educated. (pp. 18-19)

The education of aboriginal people bears note as it falls between federal and provincial jurisdictions. The treaties, between the British monarch and aboriginal leaders, signed when European settlement first occurred, promised education and health care for aboriginal people and provided reserve lands for them. When Canada became independent from Britain, these responsibilities were assumed by the federal government. In reality, education for aboriginal people was not universally available

until the fifties. It was first provided by missionaries through local day schools. In the late 1880s, the federal government initiated a system of residential schools in which children were forcibly seized from their homes to study in for the school year. This resulted in the closure of day schools. In 1972, the Native Indian Board assumed control of education for Indian people on reserve lands with funding provided by the federal government and residential schools have gradually been phased out. The education of Aboriginal people living off reserve is the responsibility of the province in which they live. In recent years, residential schools have been widely criticized for the negative impact that they had on family life due to the acculturation that occurred in them (Miller, 2001).

### **Roles and Responsibilities in Adult Education/Literacy**

The differences in government structure and jurisdiction between Canada and Sweden, as discussed in Chapter Two, have a profound impact on process of policy development and implementation in the two countries. Sweden has a national unitary system of government with education policy determined at the national level and implemented at the municipal level. A process of decentralization began in the nineties and the implications for adult education are currently being debated (Lundahl, 2002). In Canada's decentralized system of government, the federal government has no responsibility for education, including adult education. Each of the ten provinces and three territories determine their own education policy and it is implemented at the municipal level by locally elected school boards. A more detailed description of government roles in adult education follows.

### *Sweden*

Adult education in Sweden has been delivered through the formal education system since 1967. By law, the 288 municipalities in Sweden are responsible for the school system including adult education (Umeå, 2003). There are separate funding allocations for the education of dyslexics, handicapped and *Swedish for immigrants* (for immigrants and refugees). In addition, Sweden has a long history of nonformal and informal education for adults. Informal learning is also supported by public funds in several significant ways that are discussed later in this chapter.

Nonformal adult education is provided through labour market training, by the eleven national voluntary organizations, the voluntary sector, that organizes study circles, and through folk high schools (see Appendix C). The voluntary organizations range from the largest, Workers' Education Association (ABF), to the smallest the YWCA and YMCA. The Adult Schools Association is supported by a large farmers organization, and two political parties (liberal and centre parties) (Studieförbundet Vuxenskolan (SV), personal communication, April 25, 2003). I describe some activities of the ABF, SV, a folk high school, and the Folk University in the informal education section of Chapter Four. This voluntary sector is voluntary only in the sense that individuals participate as a matter of individual choice. Study circle leaders are usually paid an honorarium and these days, participants usually pay a small fee to attend and to buy materials. It does not include volunteer tutoring such as understood in Canada.

### *Canada*

Canada has no nation-wide formal system of adult education at the basic literacy level and consequently no government structure for interprovincial communication about formal adult education and literacy. The Council of Ministers comprises the

education ministers from across the country but traditionally, their focus has been on youth education (Council of Ministers of Education, Canada, 2003). Adult education at a basic literacy level is provided informally mainly by the volunteer sector. Community-based organizations train volunteer tutors and match them with adults who want to improve their literacy skills. The funding of such organizations is typically uncertain as it based on annual project grants. Intra- and interprovincial communication for this sector is facilitated through The Movement for Canadian Literacy and its member coalitions from the provinces and territories. The federal government therefore now has little influence on the planning and delivery of adult education and training beyond time-limited English or French Language Instruction for New Canadians (LINC) (Selman, Cooke, Selman & Dampier, 1998, pp. 235-246).

In 1988, the federal government established the National Literacy Secretariat (NLS). The mission of the NLS is:

- to ensure that Canadians have opportunities to develop and improve the ever-expanding literacy skills needed to function at work, at home and in the community
- to support the development and dissemination of information on literacy issues
- to increase awareness and understanding (National Literacy Secretariat, 2002).

The NLS funds six national literacy organizations (see Table 2.1) and a literacy coalition in each province and territory.

Table 2.1.

*National Literacy Organizations in Canada*

- ABC Canada (1990) – Business/labour organization, public awareness and workplace consultation
- Fédération canadienne pour l’alphabétisation en français (1989)
- Frontier College (1899) – oldest tutoring program in Canada, branches in each province
- Laubach Literacy (1981) – “one-on-one” tutoring, regional branches
- Movement for Canadian Literacy – MCL (1978) – a coalition of provincial coalitions
- National Adult Literacy Database – NALD (1990) – directory of programs and resources

To the extent that these organizations derive their funding from the NLS, their activities conform to the NLS spending guidelines. Of the national literacy organizations, only Frontier College and Laubach Literacy have regional and local branches that offer literacy instruction. The National Adult Literacy Database provides information about national and provincial literacy organizations and their activities. The Movement for Canadian Literacy provides a forum for discussion of literacy issues and serves as an advocate for adult learners (National Adult Literacy Database, 2003).

The NLS has supported the development and continuing activities of a literacy coalition in each of Canada’s ten provinces and three territories. The first coalition was formed in 1988 and by the mid-1990s, there was one in each province (see National Adult Literacy Database, 2003). Because the coalitions are largely funded by the National Literacy Secretariat, their activities fall largely into the priority areas of the NLS, namely public awareness, coordination and sharing of information, access and outreach, development of learning materials and research.

Following is a brief overview of roles and responsibilities for adult education in Canada and Sweden. This information was compiled from interviews and a review of primary and secondary sources in Canada and Sweden (see Appendix D). Sources

comprised the National Board of Adult Education in Sweden, Canadian provinces of New Brunswick, Newfoundland, Prince Edward Island, Quebec, and Saskatchewan and the North West Territories and the Yukon Territory. A list of government sources is included in Appendix E.

Roles and responsibilities for adult education and literacy programming in Canada and Sweden are summarized in Table 2.2.

Table 2.2.

*Roles and Responsibilities for Adult Education in Canada and Sweden*

	CANADA	SWEDEN
Research (funding)	National government	National government
Public Awareness	National government, national organizations, coalitions	No public awareness campaigns, local advertising & recruitment
<i>Policy-in-intent</i> Goals and Guidelines	Provinces/territories	National government (until 2006)
Policy tools	Training allowances for targeted groups; based on provincial policy	National grants and loans, universal access study leave, individualized study, counselling
<i>Policy-in-practice</i> Delivery	Colleges/Universities Community colleges Libraries Labour/business Volunteer based delivery for literacy level e.g. Laubach Literacy; Frontier College	Trade Unions Municipal governments Folk High Schools study circles/national popular organizations* Private Institutions (no volunteer tutoring)
<i>Policy-in-experience</i> Evaluation	National Literacy Secretariat (project evaluation, research focus on pedagogy)	National Board of Adult Education

There is a considerable difference in the roles of government with respect to adult education. Sweden has funded a national infrastructure for delivery of adult education both formal and informal which has resulted in greater access and equity

throughout the country both geographically and socio-economically. Rubenson's (1994b) observations about differences in approaches to adult education research in North America and Sweden are discussed in Chapter Six.

### **Adult Literacy Levels in Canada and Sweden**

In *Catching up with the Swedes*, Kapsalis (2001) reported on his statistical analysis of the Canadian and Swedish IALS data. In his study, Kapsalis revealed but did not explain significant differences in activities that relate to literacy skills. These activities included a relatively high participation in adult learning, a highly developed volunteer sector, and the widespread use of public libraries in Sweden.

There were several unexplained differences between adult literacy levels as documented in the Canadian and Swedish IALS results. There was the expected positive relationship between level of education and literacy level in both countries but, in addition, over 50% of Swedish adults with not more than lower secondary education achieved higher literacy levels whereas only 22% of Canadians with equivalent education did so. A follow-up study also showed that the education level of Swedish parents had less impact on school attainment of children than did that of the Canadian parents (Sloat & Willms, 2000).

There are many possible approaches to a comparative study of public policy as it relates to adult learning and literacy levels. The conceptual framework described served as a map for navigating through this complex terrain.

### **Conceptual Framework**

The research was based on an understanding of literacy as situated in a sociocultural context as defined by the New Literacy Studies scholars (Gee, 1990;

Street, 1995), and analysis of public policy using Guba's (1984) typology. The New Literacy Studies seek to understand the meaning of literacy for individuals as embedded in social practices and conceptions of reading and writing (Street, 1993 p. 1). This critical position argues against meta-narratives and for the importance of context in understanding multiple literacy practices (Heath, 1983).

Policy may also be understood and studied in a variety of ways; the way it is understood helps to shape and determine the outcomes of analysis. For this applied policy study, Guba's (1984) typology of phases in the policy cycle was a useful way of comparing policies at the macro and micro levels. He suggested data sources, methodologies, and 'actors' relevant to research at each phase of the policy cycle. *Policy-in-intent* includes the goals, strategies, and instruments developed to address a particular problem as well as regulations or guides that delimit action included in the policy. Rist (2000) uses the term 'tools' rather than instruments.

The micro perspective on policy is that of the individuals who experience the policy, *policy-in-experience*, and a consideration of how policy enables and limits learning opportunities. *Policy-in-action* is the bridge between policy-in-intent and policy-in-experience and includes the way policy is implemented. This framework was useful in organizing sources of information and delineating methodology, particularly when supplemented by explicit analysis and interpretation of the values involved in policymaking. It accommodated the New Literacies perspective because it recognized that the opinions and experiences of practitioners and learners were important and distinct from those of policymakers.

A comparative case study included rural and urban communities within and between countries. The international comparison allowed me to step outside of the

institutions and social and power relation parameters I was familiar with and to view them from a critical perspective.

### **Summary**

In this chapter, I gave an overview of the ways literacy has been defined and measured by policymakers and the literature about adult learning and literacy. A review of historical literacy campaigns underlined the importance of the relationship between the micro and the macro in defining outcomes. Evidence from the New Literacy Studies and Sussman's findings (2001) showed the importance of understanding the survey results from the perspectives of individuals at the community level to develop effective strategies. I reviewed policy issues in adult education and strategies for policy analysis. Although the long term impact of specific policy might be measured through quantitative studies, the ultimate evaluation of centrally planned policy should be how individuals personally experience it at the local level. I described briefly the contexts in which this research was conducted and ended the chapter with a discussion of the conceptual framework used in this comparison of adult learning in Canada and Sweden.

## Chapter Three

### THE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The ultimate purpose of any knowledge arrived at in educational research is to provide a basis for action, be it policy action or methods of teaching....The former type of knowledge must by definition be of a more general nature and apply to many local and individual situations, such as reforming the structure of the system...[but each] teaching-learning situation [is unique] and is not very much helped by relying on generalized knowledge. (Husén, 1999, p. 37)

In this study, I compared adult literacy policy in Canada and Sweden to understand how social policy might account for the differences in adult literacy levels between these two countries (IALS, 1995). Specifically, I studied policy-in-experience (the personal or micro level) and policy-in-intent (the public or macro) level. The findings are intended to inform adult literacy policymaking and practice in Canada by providing a “basis for action,” as called for by Husén (1999) above.

In general, the questions addressed in this study included the following:

- What were policy goals as defined by policymakers?
- Were policies intended to benefit primarily the individual or the economy?
- How was policy developed and who was involved in the process?
- What policy tools were included in implementation?
- How was policy evaluated?
- How did policy implementation differ between rural and urban regions?
- What learning opportunities did adults have and how did they access them?

As the research proceeded, I added further and more specific questions as opportunities occurred. Also as adult educators in Canada and Sweden learned about the study, they invited me to meetings and discussions in locations and programs beyond the original case studies. An understanding of the significance of adult literacy for individuals and the society at large is appropriately sought through an interpretive, qualitative study that reveals the context of literacy at the community level.

I used a variety of qualitative methods to gain an understanding of how individuals in their communities experienced policy and the intent of policy and how it was developed. I met with people in their everyday lives to observe their access to and participation in learning opportunities and reviewed documents and interviewed those who had been involved in policy development and implementation. Through interviews, discussion and observation, I gained an understanding of individual beliefs, motivations and behaviour (Tedlock, 2000). I also drew on my own personal experience of adult literacy both in Canada and elsewhere. This provided a rich source of data for interpretation. In addition to the critical perspective of literacy-as-situated rather than as an autonomous technical skill, I used Guba's policy typology (1984) as a basis for the conceptual framework to facilitate the comparison of policy which itself, like literacy, is a complex topic. The data were documented, analyzed and interpreted with reference to the context of collection.

This chapter begins with a discussion of the conceptual framework that formed the basis of the study, and a description of the analytical framework used for data collection and interpretation. I then discuss the rationale for using a case study approach, the criteria used for selecting and establishing the research sites, and provide a brief description of the sites themselves. Next, I describe my methods of data collection and analysis and discuss the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings. Because of the interpretive nature of the

data analysis, I also describe how my own perspective on literacy has evolved over time. The chapter concludes with an evaluation of the methodology and a summary of the ethical guidelines that were adhered to in the research.

### **Conceptual Framework**

A conceptual framework provides a systematic approach to gathering and comparing data about the complex relationships inherent in a qualitative and particularistic study. It facilitates planning and analysis throughout the phases of the research. In qualitative research, the framework is a starting point for the investigation but, according to Denzin and Lincoln (2000), it should allow for “built-in flexibility to allow for discoveries of new and unexpected [findings]” (p. 368). Flexibility was important in this study, as reflection on data from one site often suggested questions or concepts that required exploration in another site. For example, early on in the data collection, the frame of reference was extended beyond literacy to include adult basic education and adult learning generally since the term literacy was not used in relevant Swedish documentation and discussions.

#### ***Situated literacy***

I based this study on the New Literacy Studies perspective that individuals define their literacy and learning needs in terms of their own context and culture. Learning is a process that is both lifelong and life-wide and literacy skills are acquired and sustained through formal, nonformal, and informal learning. As such it “is an object of social policy” (Griffin, 1987, p. 3). I describe below the methodological framework and analytical strategy used to consider policy as related to formal, nonformal and informal learning.

### *Phases of the Policy Cycle*

Guba's (1984) policy framework provided the starting point for data collection and the development of a matrix of analysis. According to Guba, the way in which policy is defined determines how it is analyzed and evaluated. He identified three phases of the policy cycle and the issues, data sources, and methodologies that could be used to study each phase. Policy at the macro level, *policy-in-intent* includes the goals, strategies, and guidelines that are developed by governments or those in authority. I included *policy tools* (which Guba refers to as instruments) because much of the policy-in-intent information that I gathered fit within this descriptor. Policy at the micro level, *policy-in-experience*, in the lives of individuals, is a construct based on personal experience. *Policy-in-practice* is the link between political and personal ends of the policy spectrum (Quigley, 1997) as literacy practitioners and administrators implement the policy.

The relationship between the different phases of the policy cycle that served as the framework for this multi-level, multi-site study are shown in Figure 3.1; notes to the figure indicate the type of questions specific to each component.

POLICY	in-INTENT <sup>1</sup>	in-PRACTICE <sup>2</sup>	in-EXPERIENCE <sup>3</sup>
CANADA	a		
	b		
SWEDEN	a		
	b		

*Figure 3.1. Methodological Framework*

NOTE: The dark line indicates that policy analysis took place in both countries in two phases.

- |   |                                      |
|---|--------------------------------------|
| 1. Definitions, goals, timelines, responsibility, tools | a. Thin description in each country  |
| 2. Regional and local implementation (rural/urban)      | b. Thick description in each country |
| 3. Meaning for individuals                              |                                      |

The literacy policy under consideration in this study extended from the micro to macro level. Data sources and methodology related to each component are outlined later in this chapter. While the above figure denotes two distinct sequential phases in the research, in fact, the field research was conducted in a more spiral fashion. Research in the preliminary phase in both countries, Level ‘a’, gave a ‘thin’ description of policy focused primarily on *policy-in-intent* and provided for identification of key informants. During the second phase of the research, Level ‘b’, a ‘thick’ description of policy was developed through a more intensive and strategic investigation. The focus here was on *policy-in-experience* at the community level to “make sense out of...local situation[s]” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 15). This phase also allowed for clarification of questions that had arisen about *policy-in-intent* during phase one. Frequently, observations in one site led to additional questions that needed to be revisited in another site. Information about policy tools was gained from the literature review, and throughout both phases of the research. I applied the methodological framework to the three types of learning as shown in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1.

*Analytical Strategy*

	FORMAL LEARNING	NONFORMAL LEARNING	INFORMAL LEARNING
Policy-in-intent - Goals, guidelines - Policy Tools (funding, public awareness, research)			
Policy-in-practice -Delivery			
Policy-in-experience - Evaluation - Access			

### *Comparative Case Studies*

The use of case studies has a long history in research methodology. A case study is a choice of object to be studied rather than a methodology (Berg, 2001, pp. 225-237; Stake, 2000, p. 435). Case studies offer the opportunity for in-depth study of a phenomenon in a particular context thereby providing insights on the issue under investigation. Instrumental case studies are those in which a particular exemplar of a phenomenon is chosen from which generalization can then be made to the larger population. Adult literacy is a complex and multi-faceted topic; the use of case studies enabled the completion of this study within a reasonable time frame and within the limits of available funding. “The utility of case research to practitioners and policy makers is in its extension of experience” (Stake, 2000, p. 449). According to Stake, the use of patterns of data and generalization from the particular are ways in which the researcher can help increase the usefulness of the findings.

The nature of this research provided a unique opportunity for critical reflection based on the comparison of policy-in-intent and policy-in-experience in Canada and Sweden. The findings do not provide a model for policies or practices, but rather they provide for critical reflection on the literacy policies and practices in both countries and shed insight on new ways of encouraging literacy at both the macro and micro level. A comparison between Canada and Sweden was of natural interest since Canada had played a major role in the design and implementation of the IALS and Sweden had demonstrated the “best” results in the survey.

## **Research Design**

The research design was based on the methodological framework. In this following section, I describe the outline in general terms the questions asked at each level and the data sources.

### ***Policy-in-intent***

At this level, I considered goals, strategies, tools, and guidelines that were established at the macro level. The type of questions included:

- What were the explicit and implicit goals of policy?
- Who made and influenced policy decisions?
- Was the primary beneficiary the economy, the society, or the individual?
- What criteria were used to allocate funding on a regional and sectoral basis?
- What policy tools were included (e.g., admission, grants, study leave, etc.)?

Government documents, reports and websites were important sources of information for this part of the study. I also interviewed key informants including government officials, administrators and practitioners who worked with adult learners, and other researchers who have studied the topic. Gathering information from of a variety of sources and through various methods served as triangulation, both broadening my understanding and “enhance[ing] the validity” of the findings (Garrison & Shale, 1994, p.31).

During 2002, as a pilot study, I reviewed literacy strategies from Canada and six Canadian provinces/territories using documents gathered from those Canadian provinces that had developed or were developing an adult literacy strategy. The findings of this pilot study are described in Chapter Five and sources are listed in Appendix G. Questions about the role of policy communities and policy networks in policy development were

investigated. For example, what efforts were made to ensure broad and effective participation? Who participated in the consultations and with what influence? Did the consultation process differ in remote communities from that in more urban settings? To what extent did the personal interest of literacy advocates affect their participation? What was the nature of public consultation in Sweden? What role did the national voluntary organizations in that country play, if any?

### ***Policy-in-practice***

This is the level at which literacy programs are offered. Key informants at this level were the literacy practitioners and program administrators who implement policy. The realization of centrally developed policies happens at a regional or local level and is mediated through a variety of individuals in diverse contexts. How does policy move from goals to implementation and ultimately experience at the community level? Policy as formulated at a central level may be implemented in different ways in different locations dependent on the local context, resources and personal predilections of those implementing the policy. Was policy implemented differently in rural and urban areas? The impact of policy on practice, specifically on those who implement policy, was not a focus of this study. Rather the objective here was to gain insights into how policy affected adults who wanted to study at a basic education level from the viewpoint of those who implemented policy.

In Canada, key informants were counsellors and program coordinators. Questions at this level concerned admission criteria, wait lists, and program outcomes, to understand how policy affected adults who sought access to learning opportunities. I returned to key informants to ensure that my information and understanding of procedures was accurate. Interviews with practitioners and researchers helped me to interpret the intentions of

policymakers and also the experience of individuals. Information gathered at this level increased my understanding of the general goals of policymakers and how policy was implemented at the local level. I also gained a better understanding of policy regulations and public philosophy about adult education.

In Sweden, I asked about the implementation and impact of the Adult Education Initiative at a local level and what strategy had been developed to follow it. The inclusion of one urban centre and one small rural centre enabled a comparison of differences within the country. In addition, I was invited to visit Göteborg, Sweden's second largest city, and a small coastal resort city to talk with adult educators about the impact of recent policy changes. These serendipitous discussions occurred near the end of my time in Sweden and I could not spend more than a day in each municipality. While seeking to compare adult education policy as it was implemented in various locations, I also sought to understand the experience of adults who were engaged in learning in each location.

### ***Policy-in-experience***

Policy-in-experience focuses on how policy affects individuals. It is at this micro level that the effectiveness of public policy can ultimately be evaluated. In the case of literacy policy, the long-term impact of effective policy would be to improve adult literacy levels whether measured by a quantitative scale or qualitatively by some index of social inclusion. Key informants at this level were adults who were participating in learning opportunities. The study of policy-in-experience comprised:

1. Interviews with a wide variety of individuals ranging from adult learners and educators to policy makers and community leaders (one urban and one rural location in each country).

2. Site visits to community centres, adult education classrooms, libraries and study circles.

The types of questions included in these interviews were as follows:

1. Why had adults decided to enter a program? What were their goals? How had they chosen what to study? What program choices did they have and did they have to wait to get into their program of choice?
2. Did they take part in informal learning opportunities?
3. What factors facilitate individual participation in learning?
4. What learning opportunities were there for people with disabilities or those learning second languages?
5. How did their family and friends feel about their studying?

I adapted these questions according to the three levels of the data collection.

Scheduled interviews were generally taped. When taping was not possible, I made extensive notes. I transcribed most interview recordings and notes myself, soon after the interviews. This helped me to review the information gathered, identify any gaps that needed clarification and revise the interview guide for further interviews. This was of particular importance in Sweden, where my time in the field was necessarily limited because of resource restrictions.

I compiled the data and began writing up the findings before completing the data collection. This process encouraged synthesis of the information, strategic planning of the remaining data collection and identification of further questions for exploration. During the analysis, I used the analytical strategy to interpret these views and their interrelationships (Gubrium & Holstein, 2000) in an effort to understand the impact of policy-in-intent on policy-in-experience, the learning opportunities available to adults.

Throughout the study, I frequently went back to key informants to elaborate or confirm understandings and interpretations. A sample of a discussion guideline is included in Appendix F.

In the next section, I explain the rationale for the use of a case study approach and describe the locations where I conducted the research. As indicated in Chapters One and Two, the scope of this research is very large for a naturalistic study and the necessity of delimitation through the use of case studies was clear from the outset.

### **The Case Studies**

In order to answer questions about how literacy policy accommodated local differences, case studies included urban and rural communities in both Canada and Sweden. For example, did literacy and learning have different meanings in urban and rural communities? What differences existed in availability of resources, communications, and learning opportunities?

#### ***Site Selection***

Stake (2000) said that “the more the researcher has intrinsic interest in the case, the more the focus of study will be on the case’s uniqueness, particular context, issues and story” (p. 446). Since I had grown up on a farm in Saskatchewan, I had a natural interest in the implications of literacy for rural communities. In the course of my literacy work, I had visited Melfort several times and a literacy practitioner there had offered to facilitate my research. Furthermore, I was personally interested in trying to understand what underlay the findings of the IALS, having personally spent nearly a decade using the IALS results to promote adult literacy in Saskatchewan and Canada.

Stake (2000) recommended selecting a case of some typicality, but “lean[ed] toward those ...that seem to offer [the most] opportunity to learn [which] may mean taking

the one most accessible” (p. 446). In other words, available resources may justify choosing one site over another because if it is easier to get to a particular site, more time can be spend on-site. In Canada, the province of Saskatchewan, a sparsely populated province in Western Canada, was the location for this study. Saskatoon, the location of the university and my home, was chosen as the urban study site. The rural site was Melfort, located 175 kilometres by road from Saskatoon. These choices minimized the cost and maximized the time that could be spent in each site.

Sweden was chosen as the country for this comparative study because of its position in the International Adult Literacy Survey (1995). In Sweden, the urban site was Umeå, a university city that has been twinned with Saskatoon since the 1970s. It is located in one of the most sparsely populated regions of Sweden but Umeå itself is rapidly growing. The rural site was Kungsör, located just over 100 kilometres west of Stockholm.

### ***Site Establishment***

Another consideration in site selection is how quickly the researcher-participant relationship can be established. In case of the Canadian research sites, I was well-known because of my years of work experience in the literacy field. As a result, I was able to quickly identify key informants and establish a working relationship with them. I used a letter of introduction to explain the research and to request authorization to conduct the research (see Appendix G). This letter was distributed to key informants in each research site prior to interviewing them. This minimized expense and facilitated establishment of researcher-participant relationships.

In Sweden, I obtained contact names from a member of the project advisory committee, a Swedish professor now resident in Canada. Through attendance at a conference in Umeå in September 2002, I met the director of education in Umeå and

obtained preliminary authorization for the study to proceed there. Through other contacts at this same conference, I identified Kungsör as the possible match for Melfort. I traveled to Kungsör to meet with the director of education and the *rektor* of the high school. I explained the intended research and requested preliminary authorization for the research to proceed. I sent formal requests to each authority in January 2003 and asked for assistance in making arrangements for office space and accommodation. A general description of the Swedish and Canadian sites follows with research data and analysis presented in Chapters Four and Five.

### ***Description of Swedish Sites***

Two primary research sites were selected in Sweden based on their relative size and location within the country. Once my research interests became known in the country, I was invited to visit other municipalities; information gathered in these locations served to clarify, extend and challenge my understanding of adult learning in Sweden. A brief description of each primary site follows. Statistics were derived from the Statistics Sweden website (see [www.scb.se](http://www.scb.se))

***Kungsör.*** The rural site was a town of 8200 inhabitants located west of Stockholm. Frequent daily train service to and from Stockholm was introduced several years ago. This has been a great boon to Kungsör as the 90 minute trip is an easy commute to the capital and 20 minutes to a nearby larger city that has more business and industry. Kungsör is located at 59 degrees north latitude and is surrounded by fertile agricultural land, interspersed with wooded areas. Human habitation dates back 3-4000 years and Swedish royalty built castles and hunted in the area as early as the 1500s. The region remains a pleasant recreational area located on the southwestern shore of Lake Malaren.

Over the decade 1991 to 2001, there was a drop of 400 in the population, partly due to a net out-migration of 18 to 24 year olds (Statistics Sweden, 2002). More people now live in Kungsör but work outside of it than the reverse suggesting that it serves as a bedroom community for industries located in the surrounding area. Kungsör is located less than 20 kilometres from two other centres and a single office serves all three communities for many governmental and non-governmental agencies.

The community of Kungsör consists mostly of individual homes surrounded by modest gardens. The manufacturing and mining sector employs the most people followed by health and social care. The community has mainly small industrial enterprises, and electronics and rail transport. It is a comfortable walking or cycling distance to most services. Housing is inexpensive and there are a variety of recreational activities. Environmental conservation has been a priority in the municipality and numerous wooded areas are interspersed with residential areas.

In 2001, 19% of the population had post-secondary education, low in comparison to 30% of the Swedish population as a whole. Municipal adult education, *komvux*, is provided through the Ulvesundsgymnasiet which is located 1.5 kilometres from town. (Kungsör Kommun, 2003). This is the municipality's main school and it provides vocational and industrial training, *Swedish for immigrants*, distance education and secondary school for youth on the same campus. In April 2003, there were 20 teachers and a total of 300 students, including both youth and adult, at the school.

**Umeå.** The urban site in Sweden is a city of 104,000 located ten hours by train north of Stockholm. Evidence of human habitation dates back to 3000 BC but the founding of the city is considered to be 1622 (Umeå, 1999). It is the administrative centre of the county of Västerbotten, with a population density of five per square kilometres. Umeå is

located at 63 degrees latitude and the surrounding countryside resembles the northern boreal forest regions of Canada. Lakes, forest, and farmland are interspersed. The Uman River which runs through the city is bordered by paths that are frequented by pedestrians, cyclists and runners. The average age of the population of Umeå, at 36 years, is younger than that of the Swedish population as a whole. The municipality boasts one of the highest education levels in Sweden with Statistics Sweden figures showing that in 2001, 46% of the adult population had postsecondary education as compared to 19% in Kungsör (*Kungsör Kommun*, 2003).

Västerbotten is one of the most sparsely populated regions in Sweden and “was traditionally one of the poorest [regions of Sweden] lacking a significant industrial base in mining, lumbering, and ironwork”... [As a result] people [were] under the greatest economic pressure to move....Far sighted regional leaders” succeeded in establishing a regional hospital and then a university there in 1963 (Milner, 2002, p. 126). This strategy encouraged the development of a service economy and stabilized the population. The population has doubled over the past thirty years (Umeå, 1999). The city has a diverse and rich cultural life as attested to by the number of festivals and concerts listed in its brochure.

Formal adult education was offered and administered by three municipally controlled agencies and three private agencies. Courses ranged from basic adult education to high school completion and upgrading to vocationally related skill development. Approximately one thousand people attend formal adult education each year. In January 2003, a centralized counselling and admission agency was established as a joint effort of Umeå kommun (municipality), the university, the student loans agency (CSN), and the employment counselling (AF). In addition, study circles are organized by branches of the national voluntary organizations (see Appendix C).

### *Description of Canadian Sites*

Saskatchewan is located in Western Canada and it was established as a province in 1905. It has a population of one million people and is one of Canada's most sparsely populated southern areas (excluding the Arctic region), with a population density of 1.59 people per square kilometer compared to a national figure of 3.07 (Statistics Canada, 2002). The economic base has historically been agricultural, though mining and forestry have assumed an increasing importance in recent years.

The province was originally inhabited by Aboriginal people who were nomadic and lived by hunting and trapping. European settlement began in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and for "the first three decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Saskatchewan was Canada's fastest growing province" (Stabler & Olfert, 2002, p. 1). The population is now 13.5% of Aboriginal origin and this represents the fastest growing segment of the population due to a high birth rate (Sask Trends Monitor, 2003). According to the 2001 census, the province also has the oldest workforce in the country and this has been described as a labour force 'crisis' (Scott, 2003). Since the 1970s, there has been a significant depopulation of rural areas and an out-migration of young people from the province. The population of the province, currently about one million people (Statistics Canada, 2003), remains virtually unchanged since the 1930s.

As a result of the population shift,

smaller communities [declined] while the larger, centrally located rural communities prospered....shopping patterns shifted from the closest rural community to regional shopping centres where more stores, greater variety, and sometimes better quality and lower prices were available. (Stabler & Olfert, 1996, p. 2)

Prior to the 1980s, these changes took place as a result of improved roads and transportation. This shift accelerated during the 1980s when the agricultural sector suffered

a decline. Brief descriptions of the rural and urban locations included in this research follow.

*Melfort.* By 2002, Melfort was one of seven complete shopping centres in Saskatchewan. As a complete shopping centre, it has “virtually all consumer functions...but there are fewer outlets of each type and thus a more limited range of choice” than in a primary service centre such as Saskatoon (Stabler & Olfert, 1996, p. 12). The population of Melfort was 5000 and the population of the region was just under five per cent of the provincial population, having remained relatively unchanged over the period 1961-2001 (Stabler & Olfert, 1996, 2002, p. 77).

Melfort is located at 53 degrees north latitude in the north eastern parkland region of Saskatchewan. The Melfort website (2001) describes the city as a major agricultural service centre for one of the richest and most productive farmland areas in Canada. It lists the following industries: dairy processing, feed mills, seed cleaning plants and the manufacture of farm chemicals.

Melfort has a municipal airport and is served by daily bus service to and from the three largest cities in the province; there is no public transportation within Melfort. It has a prosperous appearance with most public and private buildings being in good repair and a limited number of vacant properties on the main street. Regional branches of the provincial Departments of Learning, Social Services, and Justice are located in one central provincial government building. The civic centre contains an ice rink, a swimming pool, and gymnasium and it is centrally located, next to the public library. The one bookstore in Melfort is located in a shopping mall on the north edge of the town.

The Melfort area was settled by Europeans in 1892 and was designated as Saskatchewan’s twelfth city in 1980. According to the 1996 census, the population of the

city itself was 5759, a slight increase from the 1991 census. Over the past twenty years, there has been a decline in the relative number of under-19 year olds, reflecting national trends to smaller families and out-migration of young people. Over the same time period, there has been an increase in the relative number of people age 40 and over. The population of Melfort is largely third and fourth generation immigrants although it has received a significant number of immigrants from Central Europe and Asia in recent years. Three reservations within 50 kilometres of the town are home to 1188 Aboriginal people (Statistics Canada, 2003). The majority of adult residents of these reserves have less than a secondary school certificate.

Melfort has four elementary schools and one composite high school. Students are bused to the high school from the surrounding region. A regional college provides a variety courses ranging from adult basic education courses to university classes. Aboriginal students made up over 75% of the adult education students at the Cumberland Regional College in Melfort. Community based organizations provide counselling and employment training and the city also has the numerous organizations and services both governmental and community-based. Melfort is one of three complete service centres in the North East Region, one of the largest government service areas in the province.

**Saskatoon.** The city is one of two primary wholesale-retail centres (PWR) in Saskatchewan and is the largest city in the province (Saskatoon, Quick Facts, 2002). A PWR is a functional category that refers to a centre that serves a large geographic area and offers a sophisticated range of goods and services (Stabler & Olfert, 1996, p. 10). Since 1996, the population of the city has increased by 3.1% to 219,056, which is over 20% of the provincial population. This increase is in contrast to a decrease of 1% in the population of the whole province.

Saskatoon is located on the banks of the South Saskatchewan River at 52 degrees north latitude in the parkland between the agricultural plains in the south and the boreal forest in the north. The region had been home to plains Indians for some six thousand years but the city's first streets were surveyed in 1883. Early growth was slow despite interest in establishing a temperance colony, in part due to the "fear of native hostility" that resulted from the North-West Resistance in 1885. Following the building of bridges and other improvements, the city grew rapidly with the immigration to Canada at the beginning of the twentieth century (Saskatoon, Quick Facts, 2002).

Saskatoon provides services to both the agriculture and mining sectors and its central location makes it a preferred meeting location for provincial organizations that bring people together from across the province. The University of Saskatchewan, founded in 1905, is located in Saskatoon. Agriculture has been a focus of the university since its beginning and extension courses and a two-year vocational course are offered increasing accessibility to farmers during the winter season. The focus on agriculture has also generated secondary research interests and Saskatoon is considered the "agriculture biotechnology capital of Canada", according to the city's website (City of Saskatoon, 2002). The city hosts a number of musical and artistic festivals every year and this rich cultural life may be attributed to its geographic isolation and also the influence of the university.

There are over 90 primary (kindergarten to Grade 8) and secondary (Grades 9 to 12) schools in the city (Saskatoon, Quick Facts, 2002). The school boards offer night classes in high school credit courses. Adult basic education and literacy upgrading is offered by the technical institute, Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology (SIAST) and the Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technology (SIIT). SIAST

offers credited programs for Grade 10 and Grade 12, apprenticeship programs in the trades and pre-employment programs for individuals over age 19. A variety of community based organizations provide volunteer tutors for individuals who do not meet the entrance requirements for adult basic education programs.

### ***Comparison of Sites***

In all the locations in this study, global economic forces are having a significant influence on employment and training needs. All four sites have relatively small but significant immigrant populations that necessitated language acquisition programs. The seasonal and climatic changes resulting from the northern latitudes of these sites provide both challenges and opportunities for community and economic development. Seasonal employment and resource-based economies are factors that influence the need for, interest in, and access to adult learning.

The profile of the immigrant population seemed to differ between larger and smaller centres, perhaps because of the job opportunities or other support factors. For example, in Umeå the *Swedish for immigrants (Sfi)* classes were larger and were made up of a greater proportion of men than those in the Kungsör *Sfi* class where women predominated.

While Saskatoon is twice as large as Umeå, both cities are important centres located in relatively sparsely populated regions. Universities play important cultural, educational and economic roles in both cities. Both have a rich cultural life that includes numerous festivals, and live performances. Perhaps this vitality is in part due to their relative geographic isolation within their respective countries. Kungsör and Melfort are small centres, comparable in size and economic activity and the role they play in their

respective regions. They are both home to light industry and are surrounded by agricultural and recreational areas.

The Swedish sites have a much longer recorded history dating back over seven centuries whereas the written history of Melfort and Saskatoon is more limited, dating from the late 1880s when European immigrants first settled in the region. Prior to that time, the history of the region was the history of the fur trade between Aboriginal people and traders (Ryan, 1955, pp. 2-5). Canada is generally known as a country of immigrants and thus more ethnically diverse than Sweden.

Perhaps the most significant difference between the Canadian and Swedish sites is the significant Aboriginal population in both Saskatoon and Melfort. This group makes up approximately ten percent of the Saskatchewan population but it was a definite majority of the participants in adult basic education programs in both Melfort and Saskatoon. The indigenous population of northern Sweden, the Sami, is largely invisible in the rest of Sweden and there was no way of determining if Sami were attending AE classes in Umeå as there is no separate category on the registration forms (M. Olofsson, personal communication, August, 2003). With this map for the study in mind, I now discuss the process of data collection as I journeyed forward in my question for understanding.

### ***Data Collection***

As indicated by Guba (1984), the sources of data and the data gathering methods are dependent on the aspect of policy being studied. For policy-in-intent, my primary sources of data were document review and interviews with key informants in Canada and Sweden. In addition to review of reports and academic literature, policy-in-experience was studied through interviews and participant observation of adult literacy at the community level in both countries. Further clarification was available through selected interviews of

government officials and other stakeholders (Berg, 2001, pp. 238-267). I developed specific questions for each interview based on the general questions listed above. Both aspects of the research took place in a spiral fashion in two dimensions rather than a linear one-dimensional way, since preliminary information often required further elaboration or lead to new sources. This meant revisiting key informants located across the four sites and occupying different the policy cycle.

During initial information gathering in all sites, I focused on policy-in-intent and the establishment of the research sites. Through initial interviews, I obtained broad answers to the research question and contact information for the next phase of the research. Information that I obtained in the study of policy-in-experience provided new understandings and often raised questions that I wanted to understand from perspective of policymakers. This vertical spiral of moving back and forth from the policy-in-intent level to the policy-in-experience level was complemented by a horizontal spiral moving back and forth between research sites. I was immersed in the everyday reality of teaching and learning in adult education through my living and working situations in Sweden.

*In Sweden.* I spent three weeks in Sweden in September 2002 to establish contacts and the research sites themselves. During this time, I participated in an educational tour to an elementary school in a small northern city and had an explanation of before and after school care provided in the school for its own pupils and the children who attended three neighbouring daycare centres. I returned to Sweden in the spring of 2003 for data collection.

I spent April 2003 in Kungsör where I stayed in a private home of a teacher, about fifteen minutes walk from the school and across the road from an open field and wooded area. My hostess was recently widowed with adult children who lived away from home;

she spoke and read English. She readily shared her experiences and opinions about education over meal times, during walks and jogs in the nearby woods. She also showed me around the neighbourhood and surrounding countryside. Her many years of teaching experience included middle school, upper secondary school and adult education during the AEI. She introduced me to other teachers at the school as well as people in the community.

In Kungsör, the adult education centre for the municipality was Ulvesundsgymnasiet, the centre for upper secondary education and formal adult education. Kungsör's regular high school program, adult education, vocational training, distance education and *Swedish for immigrants* were offered in a sprawling complex of seven buildings on the edge of the town. High school classes, offices, and labs were in the main building. There was a workshop for vocational classes, a hall, cafeteria and other building where adult education and Swedish for Immigrant (*Sfi*) classes were held. In April 2003, there was a total of 200 students including both youth and adults. There was a wooded area on one side and open fields on the other, with the main building for administration and classrooms situated at the end of a wooded lane. Other buildings including the auditorium, cafeteria and vocational classroom on either side of the driveway completed the complex.

The main building was a sprawling one-storey structure with classrooms, labs and offices arranged in blocks along its length. I was allocated a desk, phone and Internet access in a bright sunny, south-facing office that I shared with two other teachers. All the staff spoke English, though some more fluently than others. I ate my lunch in the school cafeteria and took coffee breaks in the staff room with other staff members. Coffee break conversation was always animated, often dealing with current events. I was often reluctant to interject English for fear of slowing down the lively conversation.

I attended *Sfi* classes several mornings, learning a little Swedish while getting to know the students and observe the classroom in action. I also observed the vocational class that met in a large room with drafting tables, drills, and machining equipment and I interviewed students in the adult English class. The *rektor* met with me several times and introduced me to key contacts in the community. These included stakeholders in the community who were overseeing the development of the new learning centre, *kunskapsporten* (doorway to knowledge), the opening of which I attended in early June.

At the beginning of my second month in Sweden, I traveled by train the twelve hour trip from Kungsör to Umeå. Spring was late in 2003; it had snowed on April 10<sup>th</sup> and the buds on the birch trees (“mouse ears”) only showed late in May. There were always walkers and bikers on the path that skirted the large river that flowed through this busy city of 100,000 inhabitants in northern Sweden. I stayed in a private rooming house fifteen minutes walking distance from the adult education centre. The window of the shared second floor kitchen overlooked the river and, with the growing day length in May, it was wonderful to see the water change from grey-blue to pink as the sun lowered in the sky. Other researchers, industrial workers from other towns in the region, and social service clients came and went during my month-long stay in the house. The small cast of characters that I met during my month in Umeå gave me first-hand insights into work and life in Sweden. I discuss what I learned from these individuals in Chapter Four.

The adult education centre in central Umeå was housed in an imposing 3-storey brick building, Mimer School that faced onto Friendship Park where signage indicated various cities around the world, including Saskatoon, that have been twinned with Umeå. The main entrance of the building led directly into a spacious and well lit counselling centre, Infoteket, which brought together counsellors from the funding agency,

employment office and the university (see <http://www.infotek.umea.se/>). The building was also home to students in *Sfi*, *komvux*, dyslexia. Another old three storey brick building housed most of the *komvux* classes including the lowest academic level.

On my first day in Umeå, the director of the centre picked me up at the rooming house where I was staying and drove me to the adult education centre. She spent the morning with me, giving me an extensive overview of adult education in Umeå, and touring me through the three floors of the building, formerly a high school, which now houses a number of adult classes, a centralized counselling and an admission centre. She also introduced me to the entire staff and showed me around the library. I was given a desk in the 'work' room, a former classroom that now served as a general utility room with storage cupboards, a photocopier/fax machine; a partial room divider allowed for two computer work stations in the room. The centre's technician hooked up my laptop to a new printer and to the Internet. I also was given free access to the phone, photocopier and the basic office supplies I needed. With the code to the front door of the building and a key to my room, I could work there any time of day or evening and I did so feeling more personally secure than I would have working evenings in my former downtown office in Saskatoon.

I met with the staff at coffee breaks and was invited to the homes of several individuals. I shared coffee breaks and lunchtime in the staff room, often buying my lunch in the small school cafeteria. As I came and went, I could observe students in the hallways. I also met with several classes to talk with the students. Teachers of English in particular liked to have me meet with their students. The room I worked in was sandwiched between two *Sfi* classrooms so I often had a chance to talk with students in the hallways between classes. In addition, I could hear the laughter and tenor of the conversation that came from

the beginning classroom, composed mainly of men from Asia, Africa, the Balkans, the Baltic countries, and South America.

*In Canada.* My understanding of adult education in Canada is based on over twenty years of experience designing and teaching adult upgrading to women, teaching immigrant women and then visiting literacy programs throughout the province of Saskatchewan in my executive role with the Saskatchewan Literacy Network. I had many opportunities to talk with adult students in the classroom, in counselling, and in committee work. I also met and worked with adult educators from across the province and throughout Canada in conferences and organizations. This provided me with a lot of background information and a wealth of contacts in the province as a basis for the current research. My interpretations are therefore based on an aggregate of my earlier experience and data collected during this research.

One of my Canadian study sites was based in a regional college in rural Saskatchewan. The college was adjoined to the high school and shared its entrance with the local employment services office at one end of the newly built one-storey complex. The reception area was a large open area with computer terminals, printers, computer stations, small work tables and racks of information about various courses and training programs. Career and employment counsellors were available to answer questions and to help individuals find work or chose a course of study.

The college section of the building adjoined this common reception area and consisted of offices and classrooms leading off a central hallway. Students began arriving for 9 AM classes and divided into the Adult 10 and Adult 12 classrooms. Another five adults participated in the “learning centre”, a special class one afternoon a week for adults who could not get into the regular classroom programs. A vending machine in the hall sold

coffee and lunches could be bought in the school cafeteria. Desks were arranged in a semi-circle with the instructor's desk closing the circle. In addition to spending time at the college, I also visited other nonformal adult learning centres in Melfort. Two of these were located in small buildings on the main street and one had a coded security entry, which I found surprising in small town Saskatchewan. A dozen students participated in an employment readiness course. The other centre offered a variety of self-help courses related to personal issues.

My second site for data collection was Saskatoon. In that city, formal basic education was offered to adults as one of the many programs in the technical institute and also by an aboriginal managed institution. The adult basic education and English as Second Language classrooms were housed in a five storey tower attached to the sprawling three storey technical institute. General counselling services were on the main floor and the counsellors within adult basic education programs helped students choose classes and deal with personal problems. The Adult Ten class had up to 15 students per term and they studied an individualized curriculum with a goal of completion in 30 weeks. Students had a choice of classes to complete their Grade Twelve requirements.

I spent time observing the classes, interviewing the coordinator and tutoring a student. I also met with counsellors and the administrator at the career and employment services office in central Saskatoon, a large busy open space with a reception desk and pertinent pamphlets and information sheets displayed on racks. There were twenty-four computer terminals and several photocopiers for client use. When I visited the centre, every terminal was being used by someone, presumably searching for job opportunities or writing a resume. Others were waiting to see counsellors whose offices were in the nearby office wing of the building.

### *Data Sources and Sampling Strategies*

To gather information about policy-in-intent, I studied documents that were publicly available such as reports on adult education and literacy strategies. I focused on reports and documents produced since 1995, recognizing all the while the importance of preceding history in defining the context. The details of language acquisition and classroom instruction were not part of this study except as immigrants were accommodated in adult education and literacy programs. I requested documents from local, provincial and national levels of government, in print or electronic format. I also reviewed reports and analyses by non-governmental groups and academics were reviewed. These documents were supplemented as needed through Internet searches and secondary reports. Data sources and categories of informants are listed in the Appendices. The timeline for the research is given in Appendix K.

Although the preliminary phase of the research focused on the policy-in-intent, I was able at this time to make arrangements for the case studies that took place in the second phase of the research. For the study of policy-in-experience, the criteria for choosing communities for the case studies were accessibility and the opportunity to learn as discussed above. On-site locations in each site included community centres such as adult learning centres and libraries. I also made general observations in public spaces such as trains and shopping centres.

I used a snowball sampling strategy (Berg, 2001, p. 146), in that I started by contacting key informants in each community and, as part of the interview with them, I asked for additional contacts and referrals to other key informants. For example, the director of adult education in Umeå facilitated meetings for me with directors of adult education programs, the chairman of the board of education for the city, and a researcher at

the university who had evaluated the AEI in Umeå. She also arranged for me to talk about the research at the weekly staff meeting early in my stay in Umeå. I could talk informally with staff members of the centre in the staff room during lunchtime or coffee breaks. Several staff members invited me to their homes for dinner; one for an overnight stay and traditional sauna and another to concerts and other activities in Umeå. I also conducted general interviews with students in their classrooms.

As the end of my time in Sweden drew near, the snowball risked becoming an avalanche as a seemingly unending number of people were interested in talking with me about adult education. Each person I talked to raised new questions and suggested new sources of information.

*Document review.* Canadian documents that focused on adult literacy strategy dating from 1990 forward were chosen from public records available electronically or from published reports available from government and non-government sources. The year 1990 was used as a benchmark since that marked International Literacy Year and it was the first year in which a Canadian province, New Brunswick, articulated a literacy strategy (1995). At the federal level, the National Literacy Secretariat (2002) was established in 1988 and, by 1990, literacy coalitions had been founded in most Canadian provinces.

With respect to Swedish documents, a few key reports were available in English on government websites. Otherwise I had to rely on and chose from the many secondary sources that were available in the literature. I also interviewed individuals who had played a key role in the development of the Adult Education Initiative. The development of a new adult education initiative to follow the *kunskapslyftet* provided a timely and time-limited example of policy development in Sweden. Because this was such a recent development, it was relatively easy to contact individuals who had played a role in it.

*Interviews.* A description of the research project and sample questions was distributed to most individuals in advance of the interview. A semi-structured interview guide was developed that provided a starting point for the discussion (see Appendix F). This approach allowed for generation of questions and responses by the informants. Most interviews were audio-taped, transcribed and translated. In cases, where taping was not possible, interview notes were based on field notes. Sometimes this occurred because individuals that had been contacted for general information turned out unexpectedly to be very rich data sources; in other cases the setting of the meeting, for example a restaurant, did not allow for taping. As much as possible, I transcribed the interviews within a day of conducting the interviews. This allowed me to ensure that key points were clear and it also helped to inform subsequent interviews.

In the case of recorded interviews, informants were asked to review the transcripts, to provide me with their desired editing and to authorize the use of their comments in this study. In some cases, consent and feedback was provided electronically. Electronic correspondence was archived for use within the parameters of ethical protocol and research design. At the policy-in-intent level, questions included the definition and goals of literacy strategy, timelines, implementation and evaluation plans.

Themes explored at the policy-in-experience level included personal goals, educational history and challenges, access to learning opportunities, roles, networks of support, childcare and transportation. The interview process facilitated, through probing, clarifying, extending and reconstructing, the interviewee input so as to discover the "purest" and "thickest" possible interpretations from the subjects (Berg, 2001, pp. 66-110). But in fact, by being situated in the adult learning centres in both Swedish communities I gained even more understanding than I could have obtained through interviews or

document review alone. As the data collection progressed in Sweden, I found that a growing number of individuals wanted to talk to me about what was happening in their own location. This suggested a high level of interest in the topic of adult education and also reflected the very significant changes that are currently underway in this field.

In Canada, I began with interviews of three provincial government officials at the provincial level that I had worked with previously. I chose key informants based on their role in literacy, either governmental or civic, and I asked each informant for suggestions about other informants. I based the questions on the semi-structured interview guide that I had used in the pilot study I conducted in 2002 (see Appendix I). I interviewed program coordinators, administrators, adult educators, adult learners and counsellors. I recorded interviews with 22 individuals and spoke with an additional 16 individuals comprised of community leaders, librarians, and government officials.

As I reviewed transcripts and interview notes from each location, further questions emerged and I often followed these up with either electronic or phone contact with informants. The qualitative inductive or naturalistic approaches used (Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Guba & Lincoln, 1999) emphasized trustworthiness through checking back with informants and by triangulation, the use of several perspectives to consider questions under consideration.

During my time in Sweden, I conducted 41 interviews of which 33 were transcribed. In addition, I held 5 group discussions and had numerous informal conversations. The people interviewed included researchers, administrators, counsellors, program coordinators, politician and policymakers. I also talked with students in their classrooms. Through the working spaces I had, I could observe the daily life of the adult education centres. I also had numerous informal opportunities to talk about adult

education, during coffee breaks, lunch hours and in social settings. Locations included Stockholm, three regional centres and two smaller centres. In addition, I met informally with educators throughout my stay. There was a great deal of interest shown in the topic of adult education related to the decentralization of decision-making that was underway. There was genuine and general enthusiasm for the research that I was conducting. I observed both while setting up the research sites and also during the data collection that Swedes seemed generally intrigued by the fact that a foreigner was interested in visiting their local centres.

Key informants in Sweden were interviewed in English as most read and spoke English fluently. In one case, when the individual was not confident of her English, a co-worker participated in the interview to help with understanding. I soon realized that although nearly everyone understood English well and most were very interested in talking about adult education, many had little occasion to talk about their work in English. I therefore began distributing a one-page overview of the questions a few days in advance of the interview (see Appendix F).

I found that the longer I was in Sweden, the more people wanted to meet with me both within and beyond Kungsör and Umeå. For example, I was invited to Göteborg twice to meet with researchers and adult educators there. Göteborg is a city of 500,000 on the west coast of Sweden. It has a substantial immigrant population and it had been renowned for its adult education system. That *komvux* system was effectively dismantled following the AEI as a result of the tendering process for provision of adult education introduced by municipal authorities (Beach & Carlson, 2003). Academics seemed intensely interested in what had happened, were anxious to discuss the situation, and to learn about adult

education in Canada (faculty members and graduate students, University of Göteborg, group discussion, June 5, 2003). In addition, I was invited to a small community south of Stockholm to visit the local learning centre. These occasions gave me a chance to see different communities and deepen my understanding of the complexity and increasing diversity of adult education in Sweden.

*Participant observation.* The focus of most qualitative research to date on the literacy lives of adults has been on minority groups (Barton & Hamilton, 1998, p. 14). The importance of this study is that it compared how literacy was practised and valued by individuals in Sweden, a country with high literacy levels, with how literacy was practised in Canada, a country striving to improve its literacy levels. The goal was to derive a thick description of literacy and learning opportunities within Swedish and Canadian communities. A good example of how this happened was how I learned that priority for those with the least education was a legal requirement in adult education. A partial divider separated my desk in Mimer School from the workspace where counsellors and the admissions clerk met for many hours each weekday during May. They were to determine which applicants should get priority based on their previous education.

I had realized soon after first arriving in Sweden in 2002 that I could not conduct an ethnographic study in that country. First, I was not fluent in the language and second, I did not have the time to participate in learning situations in the way that Swedish researchers had already done. In addition, there could never be an even balance between my knowledge of Canadian and Swedish situation. Instead what I could do is learn what I could from the Swedish ethnographies and compare that to the Canadian situation based on my extensive experience in the field of adult literacy in Canada and recent data collection. On the other hand, I went to Sweden with “new eyes” and as a result could see some things

that were not even considered significant or were taken for granted by adult educators there, for example, the widespread reading of newspapers on public transportation.

In Sweden, my research built upon the related research that had already been conducted in that country. Stenberg's (2002) evaluation of the Adult Education Initiative and recently completed ethnographies (Assarsson & Sipos-Zackrisson, 2001; Paldanius, 2002) served as a starting point for this study. In addition, I interviewed researchers who had completed evaluations of *kunskapslyftet* in specific municipalities and used the resulting information to verify understandings. In Canada, the Provincial Literacy Strategy in Saskatchewan provided a starting point for selecting individuals to be interviewed. Typically individuals included community leaders such as the school principal, adult educators, librarians and civic officials. Sites for observation included community drop-in centres, health centres, libraries and shopping centres and adult education programs.

With respect to participants in adult education programs, I attended a *Swedish for immigrants* class in Kungsör as a participant observer and this gave me first-hand knowledge of the classroom and also allowed me to meet students. I also talked with students both in the municipal adult education programs and in those provided by private agencies in the community as well as two study circles. In Saskatchewan, I interviewed students in adult education programs in Melfort and tutored a student in a program in Saskatoon.

In this research participants were allowed to voice their own understandings of their need for learning as well as their own feelings about studying as adults. I used open-ended questions that allowed participants to express their own views about reading and adult education. I informed all interviewees about the confidential nature of the interviews and encouraged their frank disclosure of opinion. I also observed body language and

verbal content of classroom interaction and incorporated these observations into my analysis.

Qualitative studies look at literacy from the viewpoint of people who live out the policy reality and examined, in detail, real life situations (Barton & Hamilton, 1998, p. 15) to understand learning in the lives of adults. This international comparative study of Sweden and Canada showed how local literacies in each country were connected “to social and historical context” (p. 72). My experience was further enriched through assisting a Palestinian woman who stayed next door to me for a few days in the Umeå rooming house. In helping her to get to the court and to social service department, I got a first hand look at how the social service system worked and of the challenges facing those with limited knowledge of the Swedish language.

### *Data Analysis*

One of the important considerations in analyzing written documents is the context in which they were written. A second is recognition of similarities and differences (Hodder, 2000, p. 711). To assist in this process, a matrix of key concepts was developed for use in reviewing the information (Berg, 2001, pp. 238-267). These included goals, timelines, the development process and the government department responsible for the policy. This helped to ensure consistent comparisons and interpretations. The criteria for analysis are further explained in the findings.

I first organized the data by location and then analyzed the information from dialogues, consultations, interviews, and focus groups, based on the presupposition that these discourses contained both words and meanings. The emphasis of my interpretation was on the policy network (Lindquist, 1992) itself. Who participated in it and with what effectiveness as understood by actors at each of the policy-in-intent, policy-in-practice and

policy-in-experience levels? Analytic bracketing refers to a strategy used for analyzing complex data in ethnomethodologies in which “the [researcher] shifts between *products* of reality-constructing procedures and the *resources* from which realities are constituted” (Gubrium & Holstein, 2000, p. 499). In this study, I first described the case study contexts and then compared them. I also had to verify my construction of concepts and terms by referring back to documentation, the literature, and, in some cases, interviewing key informants a second time.

I asked a variety of people including administrators, teachers, and students themselves about the factors that encouraged adults to participate in learning activities. The priority placed on adult education and literacy by individuals, community leaders and officials and responses were compiled and described. After the collection and analyses of the descriptive data was substantively completed, I synthesized my hunches, frequencies, significant relationships and *verstehen* interpretations (Husén, p. 32) and verified them by discussing them with key informants to ensure my understandings were accurate. I then discussed the significant differences and similarities between adult education and literacy policy in Canada and Sweden with Swedish academics. This helped to further extend and verify my understanding.

### **Trustworthiness**

The ways of assessing the validity of research data depends on the methodology used and its underlying epistemology. The validation of qualitative research differs from that in quantitative research. Since this epistemology implies the use of inductive reasoning based on interpretation of the contextual information gathered, it is a philosophy ‘from below’ rather than ‘from above’. According to Janesick (2000) the terms validity, generalizability and reliability come from the quantitative paradigm. Validity in qualitative

research cannot be achieved through the reproduction of results that is expected in rationalistic-scientific research methodology. Since each context yields its own distinct data, generalizability should not be expected although transferability of findings from one context to another serves as an equivalent criterion.

Qualitative research in general and case study research in particular must nevertheless address issues of validity, albeit more in the sense of evaluation. For Janesick (2000), the basic question to be asked of qualitative research should be, can the findings be reliably used as a basis for social action or policymaking? For her, "validity in qualitative research has to do with description and explanation and whether or not the explanation fits the description...Is the explanation credible? [Nevertheless] bureaucrats and policymakers seem to prefer aggregated numbers about certain social conditions" (p. 393). Credibility and reliability help to enhance the policy impact of the research findings. Throughout this research, I sought to ensure that the findings would be transformative to adult literacy in Canada, one characteristic of valid research (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2000, p. 297).

### ***Credibility and Reliability***

The literature in qualitative research methods identifies triangulation as an important design consideration in establishing credibility. This refers to gathering information from several perspectives through different methodologies. Triangulation can entail the use of a variety of data sources, several investigators, multiple interpretations of a set of data, and/or the use of multiple methods to study a problem. In this study, a variety of data sources including documents were used and multiple interviews provided for clarification and extension of understandings. I have discussed above the way in which I sought various perspectives. Key informants had an opportunity to critique preliminary reports in a sequence of interviews and presentations thus helping to ensure accurate

representation. This check on the researcher's interpretations was another way of enhancing the credibility of the findings (Guba & Lincoln, 1999, p.147).

### ***Authenticity***

Lincoln and Guba (2000) proposed that authenticity criteria be considered the basis of validity in naturalistic inquiries. The research should be fair in that all "stakeholder views, perspectives, claims, concerns, and voices should be apparent in the text" (p. 180). The first step in ensuring this was a review of the transcripts by informants. I then cross-checked my perceptions and understandings with informants as the analysis proceeded. In addition, the research encouraged reflection on the part of individual participants. The proposed regional consultations allowed for dialogic interpretation of the findings. The final test of authenticity is that the research findings be catalytic, prompting action on the part of research participants. In this case, this could be demonstrated through the development of briefs or presentations at the provincial or federal level of government.

### ***Personal Perspective and Positionality***

It is generally accepted that the researcher's personal values and philosophy influence the questions asked and the way research is conducted. "[N]either observations nor meanings are theory-independent, being influenced by...worldview; methodology...is not theory-neutral" (Messick, 1989, p. 24). "Values play a part not only in choosing problems but also in choosing patterns of enquiry into them [and bias] is effectively minimized only by making values explicit" (Kaplan, 1999, p. 90). An important aspect of qualitative research is therefore critical self-reflexivity. This means understanding and documenting the mutual interaction between my attitudes and the research itself. The narrative component serves a formative function but will also assist others in interpreting the findings.

In Chapter One, I described experiences in Tanzania and Saskatchewan that had caused me to question the extent to which policymakers understood individuals at the experience end of the policy spectrum. Since working in Africa over 30 years ago, I have been interested in how the accident of birthplace influences life choices. My own life would have been very different had I been born in an African village rather than on a farm in southern Saskatchewan during a period of relative economic prosperity. Additionally, my family valued education and provided me with rich educational experiences outside school. In other words, where one starts a race affects where one ends the race. My experience working closely with immigrant women underscored the importance of language and literacy skills in this society. I also had first hand experience of the challenges of studying while dealing with family responsibilities of raising children and caring for an aging parent.

I consider the goal of adult education as contributing to greater equality and social equity. As the research proceeded, I observed how success in practical trades-related courses could build self-esteem and serve as a bridge into formal education for some adults. This approach has since been described by Schuetze (2003). I also felt internal shock when I first heard the term “human capital” used by a government official in reference to adult education. For me, adult education is a tool for achieving social equity and it is with that perspective that I undertook this research.

### **Confidentiality and Ethical Considerations**

The focus of this research was on individuals, their perceptions, and circumstances. It is of utmost importance that their rights and person be respected at all times in academic research. “The problem of ethics is not unique to case study methodology [but is of paramount importance when reports] may enable recognition of individuals or institutions”

(Sturman, 1999, p. 110). The code of ethics guidelines agreed upon by professional and academic associations were adhered to in this research. These included the following principles as stated by Christians (2000):

1. Informed consent – research subjects were informed about the nature and consequences of the research in which they were voluntary participants
2. Deception - Participants were not intentionally misinformed about any aspect of the research.
3. Privacy and confidentiality – Participants had the right to privacy and are not identified in the reports. Specifically, pseudonyms have been used to protect the identity of individuals in the study. In the cases where identity would be revealed by the individual's position or location, participants had the opportunity to review and approve transcripts before use.
4. Accuracy – Transcripts of recorded interviews were made available to participants to ensure that they accurately reflected opinions.

Once official permission was obtained to conduct qualitative research in a given location (see Appendix B), I met with those to be interviewed to explain in detail the purpose of the research and the way it would be conducted. Each participant was asked to sign a letter of consent that outlined the interview process and how the data would be stored. Data were recorded, transcribed and analyzed and key informants were asked to review the transcription and sign a Transcript Release Form. Transcripts which allow for identification of the participants will be sealed and stored at the University of Saskatchewan for the requisite time period. These procedures are outlined in the Research Protocol for the SSHRC Valuing Literacy grant that funded this research. The Research

Protocol was approved by the University of Saskatchewan's Advisory Committee on Ethics in Behavioural Sciences Research in June 2002 (see Appendix B).

### **Summary**

This chapter began with a brief discussion of the philosophy and epistemology that formed the basis of the research. I then described the conceptual framework that guided the research for the study of policy and the analytical strategy used for interpretation. I described the rationale for using a case study approach and the research sites and followed this with a description of methodologies and an overview of my data sources and analysis. I closed the chapter with a discussion of trustworthiness of the findings, my own perspective on adult education and the ethical principles that I adhered to in the research.

## **Chapter Four**

### **POLICY-IN-EXPERIENCE AND ADULT LEARNING**

*Literacy learning begins and continues when people understand its advantages and know it will benefit them. Langer (1987)*

In this chapter, I focus on the perspectives of individuals studying or working in adult education programs in Canada and Sweden. I begin by describing my own journey toward understanding and then discuss differences in the terms used to designate Canadians and Swedes in adult basic education programs and the ramifications of this difference. The chapter is comprised of a description and comparison of the “who and why” of adult basic education in the two countries. Which adults are studying and why are they studying? I also consider the “where and how” of adult education. What are the learning options and enabling factors for adults who want to study?

#### **My Journey toward Understanding**

Before first going to Sweden in September 2002, I had read a great deal about adult education in Sweden. I arrived with several assumptions about the topic but with “new eyes” to learn what I could. My first assumption was that adult educators in Sweden would be aware of Sweden’s superior standing in the International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) and that both educators and politicians would appreciate the value of system that had yielded those results. I also assumed that Swedes across the socioeconomic spectrum would be taking advantage of the learning opportunities offered by the Adult Education Initiative (AEI). Early in my first trip to Sweden, I met

with faculty and students at the National Centre for Adult Education in Linköping. I assumed the existence of this centre meant that adult educators in Sweden would have post-secondary training in teaching adults. I questioned whether the relative homogeneity of Swedish population might account for the adult literacy levels in that country. Experiences during my two-month stay in Sweden in 2003 caused me to revisit each of these assumptions.

If Sweden had such a homogeneous population, how could I account for the many dark-skinned faces, the myriad colours of ethnic dress and the babble of different languages in Stockholm central train station upon my arrival from the airport? Stockholm central station is the hub for rail travel throughout Sweden and to other parts of Europe. It consists of a confusing labyrinth of underground passageways that connect the train station and platforms to the Stockholm underground system. Train travel was my first exposure to the challenges that face immigrants in Sweden. Most immigrants would never have been exposed to the Swedish language before arriving in the country; most immigrants to Canada would have had at least some exposure to English through the international media.

Although most ticket agents and train personnel spoke English, the ticket offices in smaller centres were open very limited hours and the source of tickets after hours was an automated ticket machine with instructions entirely in Swedish. The story of a Japanese couple who thought they were booking a train ticket from Stockholm to Venice but ended up in Vånnas, a small town 700 km. north of Stockholm illustrates the communication problem of second language speakers in Sweden. Other language challenges I faced included dealing with Swedish forms in the post office: how to fill in the many boxes? I also had the frustration and discomfort of using the street front bank

machines as a large queue formed behind me. I did not know that *klar* meant “okay” rather than “clear” so cancelled my transaction before getting any cash!

That first afternoon in Sweden, on the 90 minute train ride, the fields and woods were brilliant green and gold in the late afternoon sun. This journey proved to be my first introduction to informal learning in Sweden. Three quarters of the people on the train were reading books or newspapers. Although I had read Kapsalis’s (2001) description of the role of newspapers in Sweden, I was not prepared to see such a vivid example of it. I saw the same pattern on other train journeys as well as on the Stockholm subway where patrons read the daily complimentary tabloid or books. Did this exemplify a reading habit, a possibility resulting from public transportation, the availability of newspapers or, as an Somalian immigrant student later observed, the fact that Swedes preferred reading over talking to others because they “were not friendly”?

During the two months I spent in Sweden, I spent a lot of evenings and weekends on my own. On weekend mornings, prior to the start of regular TV programming at 8 AM, eight to ten of the headlines for the day scrolled slowly and across the screen without the distraction of images or sidebars and I had time to look up words in the dictionary, get the gist of the story and learn some Swedish vocabulary in the process. Television may provide important language learning and reinforcement for immigrants and for sustaining the literacy skills of Swedes themselves. A point of note is that of the three channels available, two were public channels which did not show advertising.

### **Learners or Students? What is in a Name?**

In Canada, the term “learner” is used to designate adults who participate in literacy programs. Learners are thus labeled as a category distinct from “students” who are in higher levels of adult education programs or postsecondary education. Despite the

best efforts of literacy advocates and the IALS to promote an understanding of literacy as a spectrum of skills, the term still holds a negative connotation for the general public who understand literacy as a dichotomous skill that is acquired in the formal education system. The dichotomous understanding of literacy results in a deficit perspective and learners become objects of charity.

The Canadian government's decision to assign the literacy file to a parliamentary committee responsible for the Status of Disabled Persons (Movement for Canadian Literacy, June 2003) is a doubtless unintentional example of this stereotyping by association. From this viewpoint, either one can or can not read but, in today's society, where few people are completely illiterate, how well one can read and in what contexts is the more appropriate question.

One consequence is reluctance or lack of interest in formal adult upgrading on the part of individuals who might benefit because of the stigma attached to literacy. A 40-year-old aboriginal man in the Adult Ten program was reluctant to meet with me in the cafeteria of the institute where all the young, mostly white male technical students would see him being tutored in basic English by me, a white woman.

The Swedes had no separate label for participants in basic adult education classes. They were referred to as students just like others who were in higher levels of education. The classroom in Umeå was housed in the building where most municipal adult education (*komvux*) classes took place. The friendly middle-aged teacher had trained as an elementary teacher but ended up teaching adults because there were no jobs in youth education when she arrived in Umeå twenty-five years before. She had taught the basic level of adult education for the last ten years and had a class of 15 men and

women. When I asked her whether these students suffered from any stigma because of being in this basic level, entry class, she said:

I think there was some problem before (when we were in a building with dyslexic and immigrant students). Now we are in the same building as all the (adult education students). Nobody knows what level (my students) are at. It is much better because nobody knows what they are doing. Now they feel like “normal” students. (SU 3, p. 3)

It was important to be included with everyone else. When adult education was understood as a spectrum of skill levels, students at the basic level could blend in with other students who were completing their upper secondary school education.

### **A Profile of Adult Education Students**

During this research I met with adults in a variety of learning settings. To get a sense of who was attending adult basic education classes, I both observed classrooms and spoke with Canadian instructors and Swedish teachers (another difference in terminology). In both countries, the opinion of experienced teachers and administrators was that students in adult basic education are younger now than they were twenty years ago. One administrator, a former *komvux* teacher with many years of experience, said she thought that students were less “clever” [sic. motivated], now than they had been in the past.

A program coordinator in Canada made similar observations:

In the 80s, students had strong academic skills and seemed to be able to easily connect to the labour market; now many are social assistance recipients and have further to go to achieve academic success; they require significant life skills and employment skills development, [there are a] significant number of aboriginal learners. (CS 3, p. 1)

In Canada, the aboriginal population generally has completed less formal education than has the mainstream population. No universal compensatory approach has been taken at either provincial or national level in Canada. The large majority of the some fifty

students in formal adult education programs in this study were aboriginal with the result that adult education programs in Saskatchewan now seemed to be playing the compensatory role for the aboriginal population that *kompvux* played in Sweden in the late sixties and seventies.

Despite Sweden's compensatory and universal adult education program there were still mainstream students in that country who needed to start at the bottom of the adult education ladder. The male and female students in *grundskolan* ranged in age from early twenties to late thirties and their teacher described their skills when they start her class by saying "they can't write, they can't do math. Not even two sentences. They don't know what they want to do afterwards. They have to start somewhere to know what they can do." She further explained that her students:

[had] been at school for 9 years (compulsory schooling) but only in body – not the mind! They have to start like the children do, with easy material. Because they have to do every step but you have to treat them as adults.

One girl has been here for three years. She had no self-confidence, had been badly treated by her parents. She really wanted to be successful, so she has worked days and nights with school. In Swedish she wrote two sentences when she came. Last year she got certificate G [good] in Swedish B at the gymnasium. Then she felt like she had won a million! (SU 3, p. 1)

The importance of professional and individualized support for these adults was evident. These Swedish students also had the benefit of studying in a group so they could realize that they were not alone in needing to begin their studies at a basic level. As well, they were incorporated into the overall adult education program along with others who were studying for high school completion and who could serve as mentors and role models. However adults over the age of 50 had difficulties accessing funding for their studies. One administrator observed that:

It is dreadful [that many people are not able to get study grants because they are

over 50 years of age]. It doesn't fit with the idea of lifelong learning. There are many examples of people not getting study grants. An elderly lady, elderly! 51 or 52 had finally come down to studying. She wanted to learn English because her daughter was studying at the university and she wanted to be able to discuss with her daughter's friends and she couldn't. Now she had finally started and studied a little mathematics and some literature and she had to stop because she was 51 and she couldn't go on. (SU1, p. 2)

Public policy gave preference to those under age 50 presumably because they were more likely to participate in the labour market. Although adults over age 50 could not get study grants, they could possibly participate in study circles, but this would not result in a recognized credit.

Immigrants and refugees make up a growing percentage of the Swedish population. The *Swedish for immigrants* class in Kungsör was small. Eight of the ten students were women. Most were young women who came from Thailand, Columbia, or Latvia and had recently arrived in Sweden. Most had come to Sweden as "love immigrants" having married Swedish tourists, but an older Afghani woman had arrived in Sweden several years before. She, her husband and their five children had come to Sweden as refugees, and only now, with all the children in school, was she free to be able to learn Swedish. A young man in the class was learning disabled and had been unable to complete the regular high school program. The other young man was a wiry, young Romany man who was restless and seemed bored with sitting at a desk in a classroom. The small class size in Kungsör meant that one learning disabled student was incorporated into the *Swedish for immigrants* classroom.

Umeå, a larger centre, had a larger immigrant and refugee population, with more men in the classes in that centre, perhaps reflecting the greater economic activity in the region. The immigrant population reflected the cycle of trouble spots in the world.

Twenty years ago, many refugees came from Iran. More recently, they came from the Balkan region and now from Latin America, Africa and the Middle East.

### ***Gender and Ethnicity***

In terms of gender balance, there were more women than men in adult basic education in the Swedish sites in this study. In Kungsör, there were eight women and one man in the *Sfi* classroom. In Umeå, women also outnumbered men in the formal adult education programs; although figures vary somewhat at different times, 58.9% of the students were women in May 2003. This pattern was borne out by the ethnographic studies conducted around Linköping. The classroom study was comprised of women (Assarsson & Sipos-Zackrisson, 2001) and the study of why adults chose not to study focused on men (Paldanius, 2002). Adult education programs did not record ethnicity so no figures were available for the number of Sami students. Boström, Boudard, and Siminou (2001) had found that “over 60% of the students in basic adult education were born outside Sweden. In upper secondary adult education the corresponding proportion is about 17%” (pp. 20-1).

In the two Canadian sites, there tended to be more men than women in formal literacy classes during the period studied. In Melfort, more than half of students were men at the time of the study. In the community-based adult education program in Saskatoon in 2002-2003, 75% of the 197 adults who registered in the program were women. In the SIAST literacy program, 58% of the students were men but this figure dropped to 29% in the Adult 10 program. At this time, 70.8% of the students self-declared as aboriginal although this figure was likely low as “many students do not declare their aboriginal status” (R. Goertzen, personal communication, January 9, 2004).

Table 4.1

Age, Gender, and Ethnicity of Participants in formal Adult Education, 2003

	<b>Kungsör</b>	<b>Umeå</b>	<b>Melfort</b>	<b>Saskatoon</b>
Age	< 50 years	< 50 years	undefined	undefined
Male	13 %	40.2%		
Literacy			> 50%	58%
Adult Ten				29%
Community				25%
Female	87 %	59.8%		
Literacy			< 50%	42%
Adult Ten				71%
Community				75%
Aboriginal <sup>1</sup>	--	--	> 80%	70.8% <sup>2</sup>

NOTE: 1. Ethnicity is not recorded in Sweden 2. Self-declared at registration

The observations in Table 4.1 give a general overview of those in the formal adult education system in 2003. Interestingly, 75% of the participants in the community based literacy program in Saskatoon were female compared to 42% in the institutional program. Availability of transportation and childcare issues may have accounted for this difference since it was easier for women to attend programs in their own neighbourhoods. While some differences existed between the two countries in terms of who was actually learning and why they had chosen to study, were there differences in the self-perception of adults who go back to school?

### ***Self-perception***

In both countries, the educators I interviewed spoke frequently about the low self-esteem and limited confidence of many adults who enter adult education programs.

The teacher of the *grundskola* class described her students as follows:

The youngest are 20 and the oldest are 55 years of age. Some have no self-esteem and no self-confidence. Most of my students are ones who have recently been in jail or in 'detox' centres, or on social assistance. One girl had been badly treated by her parents (SU 3, p. 1). One of the [women] had written about something and I wrote 'good' on her paper and she said "good what? What does that mean?" After I said that her work was good, she told me "that is the first time anyone told me that I had done something good". These students hate[d] school but the day they say [to me] "I love to come here" that really makes me feel good. (SU 3, p. 3)

These are poignant examples of the feelings that adults may experience when they decide to return to school.

A Canadian program coordinator quoted students in one basic education program as follows:

We have learners who come and bring with them incredible 'paintings' of their life experiences and it is not always happy. There are brilliant colours of negative things and it could be the whole gamut of abuse, physical, social, spiritual, emotional, sexual, etc. Crime, our learners have had significant experiences with the law, of having experienced violence in some way, of being someone who has been afraid to go out because of fear of beating. (CS 3, p. 4)

He went on to say that, despite these very difficult life circumstances,

We have learners who love to learn and are coming back to school because they do love learning; they want to help their children and to connect to higher learning and employment. (CS 3, p. 4)

Such observations suggest that hope for a better life can serve to motivate adults to start back to school and overcome their misgivings and self-doubts. Given the bad school experiences and low self-esteem, why do individuals decide to participate in adult basic

education programs? The following descriptions are based on conversations and interviews with two adults who decided to go back to school follows.

***Going Back to School – Two Personal Stories***

The experience of Canadian and Swedish adults once they are in the classroom does not differ substantively. On the other hand, there are considerable differences between the two countries in terms of access to education, financial support, and childcare options for adults who want to go back to school. The stories of Liv and Albert (pseudonyms) highlight some of the differences between access to learning and support for participation in formal education in the Sweden and Canada.

***Liv's Story.*** Liv was an outgoing, thirty-five year old woman living in Kungsör, a single parent of a six-year-old daughter. She explained how she decided to go back to school and the steps she had to take. The following profile is based on comments she made during a focus group discussion with a group of adult education students (SK 10).

A friend of mine works at the school. We used to work together at [a shop in town]. She went back to school and got her upper secondary credits. Now she has an office job. I want to be a teacher but I didn't have upper secondary Swedish, English and Math that I need to get into university.

My friend told me what I would have to do and encouraged me to go and talk to the adult education counselor. The counselor helped me figure out what courses to take and showed me how to fill out the forms to get the funding. Then I had to go to the CSN and fill out the forms there for the study grant. All in all, it wasn't too hard and I got in right away. I was able to start right away in the fall term. I'm a lot more motivated than when I was in school before.

I ride my bike to school because it only takes about twenty minutes and there isn't much traffic. I start school at 8:15 and when I come to school, I drop my daughter off at her school and she stays there until I am finished class around 3:30. She has her lunch in the school cafeteria. If I have to stay later to talk to a teacher I can call the school and ask for my daughter to stay later. I have to pay a little for that but it isn't very much.

At school, I don't have that much in common with the other people in the class. A couple of the people in upper English class are only nineteen. Another woman is in her forties and already has a job she likes. The person I take the most classes with is Johan. He is about my age but he doesn't really know what he wants to do. The English teacher is younger than I am but she has children of her own so she understands what I am dealing with.

Liv was able to get into an adult education program when she wanted to improve her education for the sake of her daughter. She lived in a small centre and a friend was able to provide the information she needed about how to register and how to get funding she needed.

*Albert's Story.* Albert, a First Nations man, was completing his high school education in Melfort. His story based on an interview and discussions highlights some of the challenges that face adult students in Canada. It also speaks to the determination of individuals who choose to go back to school and to the support that they receive once in school.

My name is Albert. I am thirty-eight and I live on the reserve, about half an hour drive from town. There is no public transportation so I have to drive each day to come to school. I decided to bring my daughter to the town school 'cuz I think they get a better education.

Now I start school at nine o'clock in the morning. That means I can drop my daughter at school on my way here. When there is no school, I leave my daughter with my auntie. I have trouble on the days she is sick and can't look after my daughter. They are real strict here at the school. They say that family is first [priority] but when it comes to this kind of situation where I might have to miss school, they don't understand. I stay at school until 3 PM and then I can go and pick up my daughter from her school. At night, I don't have a good chance to study because our house is very small and a lot of people live in it.

I like coming to school. Getting the training allowance makes me feel like I have a job. Most of the other students in the class are younger than me. I don't have too much in common with them but the teachers are really patient and they help me a lot. I enjoy learning. (CM 10)

Albert had not only to drive to and from town (some 30 kms. each way) but also ensure childcare for his daughter so that he could attend class each day. Going back to school represented both a financial and personal cost for him.

Two different individuals, two different stories, but once in the classroom, their experiences were more similar than different. The major difference was the ease with which they got into the classroom and the childcare support they enjoyed while studying.

Many Canadian adults who read at a basic literacy level have to wait for long periods of time to get into classroom programs. They will usually have to pass a pretest before being accepted into an adult upgrading class. Although there is not usually a fee for basic education courses, participants need funding to cover their transportation and living allowances. Once into a program, adults with children typically have to arrange childcare for preschoolers and school age children. This will most often not be in the neighbourhood school. For older adults and others not interested in employment, very few options exist. Even those who have the will and courage to seek a volunteer tutor may have to wait.

### **Why Adults Go Back to School**

An ethnographic study of adult students during the AEI found that many of them were there because they needed money and had to be doing something to get it. Swedish researchers found that,

a lot of them don't go to school to learn, it is a place to be and see their friends, [and] you get paid for it. A few people have very clear ideas of what they want to do afterwards; a big range between the students. Some of the participants knew each other before they came to the classroom. They were doing a café in the classroom. (S 1, p. 1)

The following examples from Canada and Sweden show that a better job or improved lives for themselves and their families are common goals for studying. The aboriginal students I spoke to in Canada wanted to get their high school accreditation to get into the workforce or skilled trades training. A Swedish man who completed a one year course in Swedish, English, mathematics, and computer in a condensed program that offered classes in the morning and individualized help in the afternoons told me that:

It's twenty years since I left school. I wanted to help my daughter. She's fifteen and does not like school very much. I work in a factory that makes forestry equipment and got this year off to study. I got a study grant that is a little bit less than what I earn in my job. I am going back to my job now that I have finished this year. (NTI student, May 23, 2003)

The desire to help their children was a common motivation for many adults. Three of eight participants in the ABF day school said they were studying to help their children who ranged in age from nine to nineteen years. The other major goal was improved job prospects.

Liv, the Swedish mother mentioned earlier, said she was back at school in order to provide a better life for her daughter. Her friend had encouraged her and provided her with the information she needed to go back to school. She received financial support from the municipality and could be secure in the knowledge that her daughter was cared for by the school system.

A 35 year old aboriginal man in Melfort explained how taking a practical course had helped build his confidence so he could take on the challenge of an academic course:

I think I quit school in '79-'80. I was doing [grades] seven and eight. I quit. I started working and that, but when I applied for jobs I needed grade ten. You needed education then to work. It was getting hard for me to find a job, so I

applied for odd jobs like security guard and working in the sawmill. Also, I took a cabinetmaking course here in Cumberland College. I went to pursue after I done that, the kind of work we were doing there, I think it was 10, 11, and 12, and I found myself that I could do it...Now I am thinking further. Because I'm getting into it and it's very interesting what I'm learning.

My favorite subject is history. I'm getting 80's on that. I'm just one of those people that is very interested in how we became about, how it all started. I really want to find out. If I do pursue my grade 12, I'd like to go further. One of my dreams is to be a recreation director. I was a recreation director, but I did it through my life experiences. (CM 10, p. 1)

To hear an adult student say "I'm getting into it and it's very interesting" is inspiring and speaks volumes about the need for a second chance that begins with the interest and needs of the student. Another aboriginal man told a similar story and explained:

I had a lot of problems when I went to school. My father was drinking and other kids picked on me because of that. I quit school after grade seven. I've been in jail a couple of times. Now I want to do something. I'd like to be a guard [in the prison system]. (personal communication, February 17, 2003)

Another 41 year old aboriginal man explained why he was studying to complete his

Grade Ten:

The reason I wanted to come back to school because I need my education more 'cause every time I look for jobs, they mostly need grade ten or grade twelve, so that's the reason I want to go back to school. (CM 8, p. 1)

Adult education offered a second chance for these learners. Sometimes the motivation was more personal and was the result of supply and easy access. A 45-year-old Swedish woman, participant in the ABF day school, said "I wanted to do something different". This woman had job security as a personal care worker for the municipality and was not seeking a different job but rather the interest through meeting others in a non-threatening learning environment.

A woman in Saskatoon sought help for her father explaining that "he is 50 years old and has been working at [a local factory] for over 25 years. Now he has a new piece of equipment to use and he has trouble reading the manual" (anonymous

communication, October 1999). This is the same type of problem faced by industrial workers in Sweden as described earlier but this was the type of individual who would not likely think of attending a literacy program.

A number of younger students, recent graduates of upper secondary school in Umeå, were studying to improve their high school marks. Because entrance to higher education is very competitive in that city, adult education provides high school graduates with a second chance. According to the chairman of the Board of Education, some high school students “just want to have a nice three years” while in high school knowing that they can always have a second chance to improve their marks. One politician suggested requiring that people be out of high school for more than five years before they could attend adult education classes to upgrade their marks since high school students seemed to consider the *komvux* system as a fallback option (SU 12, p. 2).

A young man, a sessional lecturer at the university, led an introductory computer study circle for disabled adults. It was his opinion that getting back into society was even more important for the participants than what they learned about computers because they were socially isolated because of their injury or illness. In this instructor’s assessment, the self-confidence gained through social contact with others was more important for adults on long term disability than any newly gained knowledge about computers. This was of particular importance for people on disability allowance.

An example of this was Johnny, an unemployed photographer, temporary resident in my rooming house, who had been on disability allowance related to substance abuse for over two years. He had never had the opportunity to attend a course. Government regulations seemed very rigid about what clients on long term sick leave

were allowed to do. The assumption seemed to be that individuals who were well enough to study should be well enough to return to work.

Canadians and Swedes gave similar reasons for going back to school. In general, they hoped to get a better job, improve their lives or help their children. In Sweden, entrance into post-secondary education was the objective for many adult education students. During the AEI, women found that study provided them with a chance to meet and socialize (Assarsson & Sipos-Zackrisson, 2001). For some individuals, just doing something new was important. In short, Canadian and Swedish adults studied when they saw a direct benefit to their efforts. This benefit could be meeting new people, learning new skills or improving their life chances, and rarely would include equipping them for employment in the New Economy (Livingstone, 1998; Quigley, 1997). The next question is where and how adults access learning opportunities once they see a need to study.

### **Where Can Adults Learn?**

Learning takes place in a variety of ways, ranging from formal learning that is usually “other” defined to informal learning that is self-defined on an “as-needed” basis. There was a considerable difference between Canada and Sweden in the variety of adult learning options and the access of individuals to them. In addition, differences occurred between rural and urban centres within each country. How did adults in Canada and Sweden access learning opportunities that interested them? What counselling support did adults receive and how long did they have to wait to get into the program they wanted?

#### ***Sweden***

Early observations of literacy practices in everyday life and conversations with Swedish practitioners indicated the importance of informal and nonformal learning

opportunities as an important area of investigation. In both Umeå and Kungsör there were a wide variety of learning opportunities both within and beyond the formal education system. Not surprisingly, Umeå, population of 100,000, had a wider range of learning opportunities for adults than did Kungsör, population of 8,000.

In Kungsör, adult education courses were offered in the upper secondary school located 1.5 km. from the town centre, with a wooded area on one side and open fields on the other. The main building for administration and classrooms was situated at the end of a wooded lane. Other buildings made up the complex including the auditorium, cafeteria and vocational classroom on either side of the driveway. I shared my work space with two other teachers, and stayed at the home of a female English teacher who had many years of teaching experience. The school offered an upper secondary school program, adult education, vocational training, and distance education. Students could attend courses in other municipalities if a specific course they needed was not offered in Kungsör. Municipalities paid the host municipality for any residents who took a course in a location other than the home municipality.

The *Swedish for immigrants (Sfi)* class was held in the building that housed the computer lab, a study area and several offices. The classroom was a bright room with eight tables, a VCR, and whiteboard. Because the instructor admitted new students at the beginning of each month, there was a great variation in the language skills of participants in the classroom. Each morning started with a review of vocabulary for basic topics such as the weather, current events and so on. Then students worked on individual assignments and some spent time in various workplaces to learn the language in situ.

In May 2003, a new learning centre, *kunskapsporten* (the doorway to learning) opened in the centre of town. The *rektor* of the school had played a major role in establishing the local consortium that obtained a regional grant from the European Union to fund the renovations and equipment. The goal was to enable more self-directed learning and the centre had plans to provide 24 hour access to a computer. In Kungsör, study circles were offered by local branches of two national voluntary organizations.

In Umeå, adults could complete upper secondary school through the regular day program offered by municipal adult education (*komvux*) or a variety of other programs in the municipality. The adult education centre in Umeå was housed in an imposing 3-storey brick building. The main entrance of the building led directly into a spacious and well lit counselling centre that brought together counsellors from the funding agency, employment office and the university (Infoteket, 2003). The building was also home to students in *Sfi*, *komvux*, and the classroom for dyslexic students. Another old three storey brick building housed most of the *komvux* classes including the lowest academic level, *grundskola*.

According to one administrator, the *komvux* formal classroom model required more independent and self-directed learners than some other options (SU 13, p. 2). Students with more difficulties studied in private agencies such as NTI that offered classroom instruction in a condensed course schedule with on-site tutoring in the afternoons (see <http://www.nti.se/english/index.html>). Another option was Strömbäck, the regional folk high school (see <http://www.umea.se/>), a boarding school in a rural setting with a mentor who lived on campus.

Nonformal learning opportunities in Umeå included the ABF day school, study circles, and vocationally oriented courses at Lernia. According to its brochure,

Arbetarnas Bildningsförbund (ABF), the trade union affiliated voluntary organization, was “the oldest and largest voluntary adult education organisation in Sweden” (Arbetarnas Bildningförbund, 2003, p. 1). ABF offered a number of cultural activities such as concerts, lectures and readings in addition to circles ranging from foreign languages, knitting, pottery, painting, computer introduction.

The ABF day school was one day per week for thirty weeks and included Swedish, English, mathematics and civics. The participants paid no fees, had study leave from their workplaces and received the equivalent of strike pay from their union for the day they spent in school; their position was supposed to be filled by an unemployed person for the day they were in school. Five of the participants were Volvo employees; others worked for home care or in daycares.

*The study circle option.* The study circles I visited give an idea of the extent and diversity of learning opportunities for adults in Sweden. The temperance movement first established study circles by in 1902 when Sweden was “burdened by large-scale social and economic inequalities” (Oliver, 1987, p. 2). By 1947, when the Swedish state began providing funds for study circles (p. 5), eleven national voluntary organizations were involved and remain so today. Each had its own base of adherents in the country. Participants paid a small fee for most study circles and bought the necessary books and materials. Courses ranged from handcrafts to political discussion. To qualify for state support the circles had to have at least three people, including the leader, and meet for at least three hours for three times. The leaders were usually paid a small honorarium (SU 11, p. 1).

The ABF is connected to the trade unions and the social democrats. In Umeå, the agency in collaboration with the national association for disabilities offered an

introduction to computers three hours a week for twelve weeks. Participants, who were on disability allowance, met in the back of a small coffee shop that was run by a community agency. This provided a significant opportunity for these individuals, as discussed above, since they were ineligible for study grants.

The opposition political parties and the national farmers' organization support the Studieförbundet (SV). SV organized many activities in Kungsör and in conjunction with branches in two nearby towns. The SV was a collaboration of the centre party, the liberal party and the national farmers' organization. Funding for the organization came from those organizations and the Swedish state. In Kungsör, an SV circle of fifteen retired men and women gathered for three hours one afternoon a week over a three week period to discuss the upcoming referendum. This group was discussing the pros and cons of joining the European Monetary Union. The group was engaged in lively discussion over coffee and pastry using booklets, published by the government, that presented the 'yes' and 'no' sides of the argument. When I visited, participants asked me many questions about how the North American Free Trade Agreement worked in Canada. The group leader, a retired teacher, had also been a school principal and director of education. He later described study circles as "the best way for education. Everyone has a chance to speak. The most important thing is the sense of community that we feel. I have got so much from the circles" (SK 11).

When asked why people would chose to come to the ABF language courses rather than one of the many other options available in the city, the coordinator said that it gave them a chance to try out studying, and to meet other people. She explained that: "We have mostly workers. They don't have higher education so they are more comfortable coming to our circles" (SU 11, p. 2).

In summary, Swedish adults could choose from a variety of learning opportunities whether they lived in a large or small centre. The municipality offered formal education up to high school completion in a traditional way, giving priority for admission to adults with the least education. In Umeå, high school completion was also possible through other providers that offered more counselling or specialized courses. There was no fee for adult education courses and most applicants in Umeå could get study grants.

### *Canada*

The main opportunity for formal adult education in Melfort was the regional college, adjoined to the high school, about two kilometres from the main street. It shared a large open reception area with regional career and employment services office. Computer terminals, printers, computer stations, small work tables and racks of information about various courses and training programs were available for the use of the public. Counsellors were available to answer questions and to help individuals find work or chose a course of study. In the classrooms desks were arranged in a semi-circle with the instructor's desk closing the circle. The atmosphere was friendly and supportive and staff generally had many years of experience working with adults. A vending machine in the hall sold coffee, and lunches could be bought in the school cafeteria.

When setting up interviews I was struck by the sheer geographic size of the administrative region. Staff and students often commuted considerable distances to their jobs and classes without the benefit of public transportation.

Community agencies housed in small buildings on the main street of the town offered nonformal learning programs. A dozen students participated in the employment

readiness course, again predominantly aboriginal. Another centre offered a variety of self-help courses related to personal issues such as parenting and anger management.

In Saskatoon, adult basic education classes were offered at a large technical institute, a short bus ride from the city centre, and an aboriginal institution in the centre of the city. The technical institute offered trades and technical certificate courses and the basic education program was a small proportion of total programming. The majority of students in the entry level program were aboriginal. English as a Second Language courses were also offered at the institute. Individual tutoring initiatives had been started to address the significant dropout rate of aboriginal students and try to improve their success rate. The school boards offered individual high school courses in the evening; adults older than 21 had to pay a fee for each course.

The career and employment services office in central Saskatoon was a very busy place with several computer stations and tables for client use. When I visited, every one of the 24 terminals was occupied and people young and old of various ethnicities were waiting to see counsellors. The Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technologies celebrated the grand opening of its own Career Village in November 2003 (StarPhoenix, Nov. 1, 2003, pp. E 10-11). When I visited this centre in mid-December, two of the some twenty computer terminals were being used.

***Volunteer tutoring.*** Adults who lacked the entry-level requirements for formal adult education programs could either seek individual tutoring or attend a drop-in learning centre. A limited number of spaces in a bridging program helped prepare adults for study in a formal setting. In Saskatoon and Melfort, community-based organizations and institutions recruited volunteers from the community. These volunteers received up

to twelve hours of basic instruction in literacy tutoring before being matched with adult learners. READ Saskatoon's website describes the training offered to prospective tutors (READ 2004). Typically a learner and tutor would meet once a week at a location of their mutual choice. Learners who must rely on one-on-one tutoring often have special learning challenges such as dyslexia or second language learning. Throughout Saskatchewan, additional day long training, second level has been developed so programs could provide this for tutors who wanted to improve their skills in these areas (Saskatchewan Literacy Network, 2003).

In Saskatchewan, adults must pass a pretest that serves to determine their placement level (B. Mellon, personal communication, May 11, 2003) but also to screen out those who are functioning below a Grade Five level. Access to learning therefore goes to the most able or most "employment ready". The recourse for adults who are functioning at a very basic level was to seek a volunteer tutor with the result that those with special learning needs may not receive professional instruction.

### **Rural and Urban Learning Options Compared**

The differences between rural and urban centres in this study were similar in the two countries. The rural centres generally had smaller classes and were often challenged to find enough students and qualified instructors. In Kungsör, adult classes were small and options were more limited than in Umeå. There were ten students in the English class I visited and eight adults in the *Sfi* class, including one high school student with dyslexia. For some courses, adults were incorporated into the regular youth classes if they wanted to get a particular credit. Some rural municipalities in Sweden were penalized because they did not have enough students to meet the numbers expected for

the AEI (SU 6, p. 3). During the AEI when there were a lot of students, teachers from the high school, such as the woman I lived with, had been reassigned to teach adults or taught adults and youth in the same classroom. In other Swedish municipalities, it was difficult to find enough qualified teachers, particularly in certain subjects and so students might have to travel to another municipality to get a specific course. When that happened the home municipality would pay a fee to the host municipality for the student.

In Melfort, there was no ESL course offered as there were not enough English as Second Language students to hire an instructor. A hairdresser from Hong Kong was attending the learning centre at the college along with mentally challenged adults to improve her English.

Although learning options were more limited in smaller centres, students could find out about these opportunities more readily from their friends. Administrators and counsellors found it easier “to connect with other organizations because it is a little town, because there are not so many steps. There is better cooperation here” (SK 2, p. 3). The greater choice of courses and learning opportunities in larger centres also meant greater waiting lists to get into courses in Canada. Canadian adults at a basic literacy level had to rely on volunteer tutoring to improve their skills. They had to pass a pretest and usually had to wait for a long time to get into adult upgrading programs.

### **Does Supply Meet Demand?**

Langer observed that adults learn when and what they are motivated to learn (1987). In this section, I discuss waiting lists for adult education classes and funding for living expenses while studying. This is where a major difference between Canada and Sweden was evident at the policy-in-experience level. In Sweden, priority in adult

education placement was given to those adults with the least education, whereas in Canada priority was given to those who met an entry requirement determined by a pretest.

### *Sweden*

In Sweden, adults generally did not have to wait to get into adult education programs, but in 2003 there were reportedly lengthy waits in Göteborg where the *komvux* system had been dismantled and population pressures were greater. Adult education was offered in a separate facility or in combination with youth high school programs. Folk high schools offered residential courses that benefitted people with special needs or transportation problems. A number of private providers also offered formal upgrading in less structured ways as described above. Nonformal courses were available through unions and the national voluntary organizations.

In Umeå, a centralized counselling service was the joint collaboration of the employment agency (AF), the university, adult education and the student funding agency (CSN). The counsellors assessed the educational background of individuals and then prioritized them for admission for the next school term. Those with the least education received top priority. The centralized admission to adult education in Umeå recommended one of the many programs in the city to prospective students.

In Kungsör, the one adult education counselor for the municipality met weekly with the employment counsellors in Kungsör rather than monthly as she had in a larger centre (SK 2, p. 2). The diversity and availability in the formal system meant that adults in Sweden rarely waited to get into programs and the wide variety of informal learning opportunities offered alternatives in any case.

According to a national regulation, priority in the spending of municipal adult education funds must be given to the least educated. None of the adult students that I spoke to in Kungsör or Umeå had to wait to get into programs. This did not hold true in all parts of Sweden, particularly in *Swedish for immigrants* in larger cities such as Stockholm and Göteborg. Interestingly, program funding was dependent on the number of course hours completed in the previous funding period. This meant that there was a special onus on programs to ensure that students successfully completed their courses.

### *Canada*

There were usually waiting lists to get into formal basic adult education courses in both small and large centres; as confirmed by both students and practitioners in this study. Several students in adult basic education 10 and 12 in Melfort said they had to wait. One man said, “I’ve been applying to go to school for a couple years already” (CM 8, p. 1). In Saskatoon, an adult could wait up to two years to get into the basic education program. The intake process for students in Saskatchewan included completion of an application form, writing a Canadian Basic Skills Test (Grade Four elementary school level), attending an information session and participation in an interview to discuss background, goals and objectives (CM 1, personal communication, May 11, 2003).

A counselor who was responsible for adults interested in adult basic education said, “It’s sad that people have to wait to get started when [they] come in and are ready to go. They may have just gone through their year of sobriety and they are ready. I hear it so many times” (CS 4, p. 4). The coordinators of a volunteer literacy program explained that “we usually have 10-15 people on the waiting list...It depends on when they register in relation to when we have trained tutors. It might take longer for people with dyslexia or English as a Second language” (CS 2, p. 3). Even with additional

training, it is hard to expect a volunteer to take on the responsibility of helping an adult with a learning disability although these might be the very individuals who would have difficulty meeting entrance requirements to get into adult basic education programs.

What do adults do during the long periods while they are waiting to get into adult education programs? The effect of waiting as a result of situational factors can have unfortunate results for individuals. A basic education counselor said, "Sometimes they [aboriginal adults] write the pretest and get on the wait list and then go back to their reserve" (CS 4, p. 2), often losing their readiness to study. One program coordinator described the case of a young woman who had successfully completed her adult Grade 12 but when she registered in a nursing program two years later, she no longer read well enough for the course (R. Goertzen, personal communication, August 6, 2002). This speaks to the sociocultural context for literacy, because evidently her social context did not support and sustain her literacy skills.

The coordinator of an adult basic education program at a rural college explained how a student might get into a trades course without the necessary prerequisites. She said that

Since our BE [basic education] wait lists are so long, sometimes students take a technical program before starting BE. One fellow had applied for Grade 12 but was on our wait list, [he] took welding and then is now finishing the Adult 12 course. (CM 1, personal communication, Feb. 11, 2003)

In the case of two men I interviewed this had proved to be a very good option because they had gained confidence through their success with carpentry and welding.

In Canada, public awareness campaigns have succeeded in increasing demand for literacy programs within a segment of the population, but there has not been a concomitant increase in the supply of literacy programs. In Sweden, the emphasis has

been on increasing and diversifying the supply of adult education programs without first assessing the demand for these programs. In both countries, older industrial workers have been reluctant to study in formal programs.

### **Special Needs: Dyslexics and Immigrants**

The way in which the education system provides for its most disadvantaged citizens reveals its public philosophy. Included in this group are those with dyslexia and those with special language needs such as new immigrants. Though immigrants who are learning the national language and those with dyslexia face very different problems, they are considered together here because special needs groups were not the main focus of this study. Students in these two groups were attending classes at the adult education centres in Sweden where I conducted this research.

#### ***Sweden***

A separate state allocation provided funding for language and adult education for immigrants was provided under. That for dyslexics came out of the main municipal allocation for *komvux* (L. Kaev, personal communication, May 28, 2003). Given the additional cost for staffing the dyslexia classroom, she speculated that it might become a challenge to fund the program in future.

***Dyslexia.*** People were tested depending on the entrance interview with counsellors and then, according to a Swedish Counselor in Umeå:

They can go to the special course half time and then do Swedish and English in the rest of the time. They then get help with their homework. Other organizations can send their people here for the test for a fee. They can go to the special course half time and then do Swedish and English in the rest of the time. They then get help with their homework. (SU 5, p. 3)

A woman with many years of teaching experience and seven years as the head of the program for dyslexics commented that the body language said it all. She demonstrated

how students began the class, hunched over and withdrawn, and then after studying in the class, they left holding their heads up, were proud of themselves, and were able to speak up (SU 14, May 30, 2003). In Kungsör, a young man with learning disabilities received individual instruction in the *Sfi* classroom. There was no special class for dyslexics, likely because numbers in that municipality did not warrant it.

*Swedish for immigrants (Sfi)*. There was special state funding for these students and they continued to attend until they could pass a national exam in Swedish. The funding for *Sfi* was in addition to the general allocation for municipal adult education (SU 1). When I asked a CSN counselor about problems with funding for immigrants, she replied without hesitation, “Oh no, they need Swedish to participate in the community!” (SU 7). When I asked how long it might take for students to pass the national exam, the counselor responsible for *Sfi* students replied that generally adults could study as long as they needed to pass the national exams.

My office in Umeå was sandwiched between two *Sfi* classrooms. The beginning level classroom was mainly men and judging by the laughter and conversations that I heard through the wall, they were enjoying themselves. I also wondered how long they would be happy sitting in a classroom, rather than out working or doing some physical activity. Once students acquired basic Swedish after a period of time in *Sfi*, they might learn Swedish more readily on the job than in a classroom. A new national program was attempting to bridge immigrants into the workforce. It would bring long-term unemployed individuals and immigrants together in a community work program (SU 1).

Despite the generous funding and readily available childcare, not every immigrant had access to learning Swedish. Sihim was a tall, thirty-year-old Israeli Arab woman, mother of three preschool children. I found her wandering around in

bewilderment one evening outside the rooming house where I was staying. She was wearing her hijab and traditional dress, but she had a phone card and wanted to phone her sister who lived in Denmark. I learned her story in the course of walking with her to the nearest phone that would accept her card, not an easy task! I learned more about her situation while sharing some of my food with her in the common kitchen of the rooming house.

Sihim had finished high school in Israel. She was articulate and had an adequate understanding of English. Although she had lived in Scandinavia for ten years and had been married for six years to a Palestinian man, her husband had never allowed her to attend Swedish language classes. She decided to divorce her husband for reasons I could only guess. She did not believe that she could seek support from members of her community because her husband was well liked. A social services worker had brought her to the rooming house and left her there for the night with 10 SEK (\$2 CDN). After sharing breakfast with her the next day I walked her to the court house so she could file divorce papers. She did not have the 400 SEK (\$80 CDN) needed to file the papers and the forms were in Swedish, which she could not read. She needed the divorce paper to set up her own bank account. This intelligent young woman had not been able to access the free language classes in spite of the readily available childcare due her personal family situation.

### *Canada*

The absence of universal funding for adult basic education in Canada meant that there was no consistent access to learning opportunities for adult with special needs whether learning disabled or learning English as a Second Language.

***Learning disabilities.*** Many of the adults who sought help through literacy programs have learning disabilities (this term is more commonly used than dyslexia). This should not be surprising since “the large majority of people at all levels of the IALS say they are not limited by their reading skills either at work or at home” (Sussman, 2001). The result is that individuals with particular disabilities will more likely self identify as having limited literacy skills and respond to public awareness campaigns. In most cases, adults would not have an experienced professional to help them with adult basic education. The Learning Disability Association of Canada (2003) has developed short-term training for volunteer tutors. It is a major challenge for literacy programs to provide adults with the best help they can and train tutors with the skills needed to work effectively with learning disabled individuals (CS 2, p. 3).

***English as Second Language.*** English as a Second Language (ESL) courses were offered through immigrant settlement agencies and through volunteer groups. The length of language training the government provided was typically time-limited rather than competence determined. In Saskatchewan, immigrants were provided with one year of English language training. Adults could proceed through five levels of language benchmarks but at the end of their allotted time, adults often did not have sufficient English to pass the pretest for adult upgrading. There was no systematic provision for work placements so that immigrants could learn the work culture. Moreover, little opportunity existed for learning to read English in informal ways such as subtitled television programs because most television programs in Canada are in English (or French). Some newspapers were offered free on airplanes but not on other public transportation such as train, bus or subway. In any case, public transportation in Saskatchewan was not as widely available as it was in Sweden.

### **Funding Adult Basic Education Students**

Financial support is critical if adults are to be able to study. The issue of funding is one of the biggest differences that I found between Canada and Sweden adult education policy.

#### *Sweden*

Education at all levels, from kindergarten up to and including university, was free for residents of a municipality (see <http://www.skolverket.se>). Study grants and/or loans were available to offset living expenses. With admission in hand, prospective adult basic education students went to the local office of the Swedish National Board of Student Aid (CSN) to apply for a study grant or loan. Here again, priority in issuing the grants was given to those with the least formal education, with the exception of those over the age of 50. During the AEI, a greater proportion of the funding was available as grants rather than repayable loans.

A Director of Adult Education who had been teaching for many years and was nearing retirement said, “The number of students doubled during the AEI because of the generous student grant (SU 9, p. 1). The additional funding available through the AEI may have encouraged some people to study who otherwise would not have done so. Increasing the supply of adult education opportunities and the new funding alone however was not however enough to encourage industrial workers, particularly middle-aged men to upgrade their education. The offer of one year study leave and the study grant was not enough to interest industrial workers in full-time study at the upper secondary level. A counselor from Infotek at the adult education centre in Umeå explained as follows:

We will tell you about our Volvo experience. They [the workers] get 20,000 SEK per month, or maybe more with 2 years upper secondary. Some have none [upper secondary courses]. The grant is 8000 SEK. Hard to motivate them. I think budget is the reason they don't start. They always know they can find something better. They always want to have more money to live the way they want to. (SU 5, p. 5)

Volvo and municipal workers who were attending the ABF day school were doing so through an agreement with the trade union so that they got one day a week to study with their salary for that day paid by the union.

The importance of retraining for industrial workers is illustrated by a second anecdote:

But I met a man today who taught me a lot. He had worked in Stockholm as the manager for logging as a "foreman" with many employees under him but the company went bankrupt. He's forty years old. He felt that AF [the employment counselling agency] "pushed him down". I looked at his degree and suggested that he could go to university. That is where we have to go. We have to work together with other agencies so we can have contact about the client. (SU 5, p. 5)

Although study grants for adult basic education were readily available during the AEI, funding post-AEI was more limited. One counselor in Kungsör thought that the most important way to improve adult education in Sweden would be "if the students could be [financially] secure, perhaps get enough money to study for a year, everywhere in Sweden. They can get study leave [from their jobs] but they don't get money to study" (SK 2, p. 2). The issue in a small centre like Kungsör might be to find enough students to offer a course. The issue of study grants to compensate for lost salary is more relevant for undereducated industrial workers whose salary was much greater than any study grant they could receive. While funding to support adult studies is important it is apparently not sufficient. There also must be motivation and interest.

### *Canada*

There is no general funding for students in adult basic education across the

country, but the Province of Saskatchewan introduced a Provincial Training Allowance for this purpose in 1999. Funding allocations are made each year, dependent on the social services numbers. One coordinator said that the only reason people were in school was for the training allowance. But one adult basic education student said:

I look at it as a job, just the same as if I was working. I have to get up, pack myself a lunch, and I'm out all day...When I'm done school...I don't have to retrain myself to get up and go to work. (CM 10, p. 3)

A program administrator observed that when the annual budget for training allowances was spent, no more students were registered in the classes (CM 1, p. 3).

Adults receiving tutoring did not receive any subsidy but those in the bridging program might be on social assistance. Funding and access to suitable programs are only two factors that enable an adult's learning. Issues of childcare and transportation are also important facilitating factors and they are often cited as barriers to learning in Canadian studies (Hoddinott, 1998; Long, 2001). In the following section, I consider some of the ways in which childcare and transportation policies enable or hinder opportunities to study.

### **Childcare and Transportation- Barriers to Learning or Social Benefits?**

Although not a direct part of adult education policy, the availability and cost of childcare and public transportation bear an influence on participation, particularly for some subgroups of the population.

#### ***Sweden***

A municipal strike exemplified the significance of childcare and schooling for adult students. During my stay in Umeå, a two week rotating strike of municipal workers put school cafeteria staff and janitors on the picket line. After several days with garbage piling up in the school corridors, school authorities decided they had to close the schools

for sanitation and safety reasons. An attractive thirty-year-old woman walked in late to the English class I was speaking to. She arrived with her six-year old daughter and another young child whom she cared for after school hours. Teachers explained that attendance was low in other classrooms because students had to stay home to look after their children during the strike. This situation provided evidence of the importance of childcare as an enabling factor for adult learning in formal settings.

Transportation was not a major issue in the Swedish centres in this study. Bus and train service was extensive throughout the country and bicycles were a common mode of transportation. In Umeå, paths were clearly demarcated throughout the city, plowed in the winter, and the speed limit in the centre zone was 30 kilometres per hour with pedestrians and bicycles having the right of way. Many buses passed through the transfer point in the middle of the city, which was close to the adult education centre. Childcare and public transportation were social benefits that facilitated the reentry of adults into the education system.

### *Canada*

Childcare was not universally available and typically was not be available for children under the age of three years. “Canada....provides regulated childcare to only 12 per cent of children under 12” (Galloway, 2003). The challenge of studying and parenting is illustrated by the comments of one male student who commented that

They [program administrators] say the first priority is your family, your immediate family like your kids. Single parent, and day care. I take [my daughter] to day care everyday, well, not me, Aunty or somebody. Sometimes she's been sick and [my daughter] got sent home from day care so she won't pass her cold on. Friday and Monday I had to stay back, and I told them about that, but still they'll mark me down as absent.... That was what I was kind of worried about. I didn't want to miss too much. I explained that to them also. The family is first before anything else, now you're saying that I'm missing too much school

and I'm on probation, and I don't want to be on that, and I explained it to them. (CM 10, p. 5)

The preschool programs that offered half-day programs a few days per week were for targeted groups such as inner city or aboriginal communities. Others were run as parent cooperatives. Adult education programs for women often tried to build in childcare as part of their budgets. With respect to transportation, the aboriginal students who lived on the reserves outside of Melfort had the expense of driving to and from the town every day to attend adult upgrading classes.

### **Summary**

Although little difference appeared in the learning goals of adults in the two countries, a wide difference existed in the access of adults to learning opportunities. My observations reveal the truth of Langer's (1987) statement for both Canadians and Swedes: learning happens when adults both see the benefits of learning and have the opportunity to meet those learning needs. Self-perception and social attitudes also bear an influence on personal decisions to study or not. The differences in student profiles between the two countries, however, may reflect related social policy. This deserves study beyond the scope of this research.

According to Guba's (1984, p. 69) framework, policy-in-experience is the micro-perspective on policy. It includes the way clients, in this case adult learners, describe the policy. The impact of policy in this study was inferred from who participated and who did not and the relative ease of access to learning opportunities.

In Sweden, the majority of students were women who wanted to improve their grades in order to go on to post-secondary education. Adult education was a "smart" second chance for them (SU 12), particularly in Umeå a municipality where higher

education was valued (Milner, 2002). In Saskatchewan, the majority of students in adult basic education in both rural and urban sites were aboriginal, with a more equal gender balance. Universal daycare in Sweden gave a relative advantage to young women in that country. The Canadian and Swedish micro perspectives on adult education and literacy policy are compared in the table below.

Table 4.2

*Comparing Policy-in-Experience*

	SWEDEN	CANADA
Goal	Better job, higher education, help children with school	Better job, higher education, help children with school
Profile	Young, majority female	Aboriginal (in SK) and immigrant
Self-image	Poor self-esteem, lack of confidence	Lack of self-esteem and confidence
Waiting time	Minimal , distance learning; longer waiting in larger centres	Up to two years in both urban and rural
Childcare	Universal, low cost, school lunches	Variable, funded for aboriginal people Breakfasts in low SES neighbourhoods
Learning options	Formal through municipal, some private providers; condensed schedule boarding school; study circles	Volunteer tutoring for basic literacy level Formal adult education programs Private schools (technical courses)
Learning disabilities	Special classes, together with upgrading	Volunteer tutors
Second language	<i>Sfi</i> until they pass national tests (4 levels possible)	52 weeks (Literacy Instruction for New Canadians, LINC)
Rural-urban	Waiting lists only in some large metropolitan centres	Waiting lists for adult basic education
Counselling	Admission and course choice, varied according to course choice	Admission, selection, crisis intervention

A common theme was the difficulty of interesting middle aged men employed in the industrial sector to upgrade their skills through formal education programs. One politician observed that that young people were taking advantage of the *kompvux* system (SU 12, p.2).

The cost-benefit analysis of adult learning includes a personal assessment of financial cost, accessibility, self-respect, and projected outcomes. The goals of adults in this study were commonly a better job, often through higher education, but more certain outcomes might be the sense of personal accomplishment and a connection to others that can come from learning in a group. Sweden made no distinction in its rich variety of adult learning options for those with limited education. Nevertheless, based on the example of Sihim and the older industrial workers, not all Swedes took advantage of available learning options. A greater variety of options for learning, in both formal and informal ways, included more sectors of the community. Dropout rates from formal programs were comparable to those in Canada, and, as in Canada, most adult educators were trained as teachers.

In conclusion, adults in Sweden and Canada shared similar goals and motivations with respect to “going back to school,” but significant differences occurred in the opportunities and support that they had to do so. In Sweden, studying as an adult was socially accepted, with many learning opportunities to do so. Education was free and loans and grants were available to defray living expenses. Universal childcare and a school lunch program also facilitated adult study. In Canada, adults often had to wait to go back to school, and those at a basic level of education, including English as Second Language learners and those with learning disabilities, usually had to rely on volunteer tutors. In addition, childcare and financial supports were not universally available.

## **Chapter Five**

### **POLICY-IN-INTENT AND ADULT LEARNING**

In this chapter, I compare adult learning in Canada and Sweden from the perspective of policy-in-intent, specifically policy development, explicit and implicit policy goals, and the policy tools. Because the International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS, 1995) provided the impetus for this study, I begin by explaining my decision to focus on policy as related to adult learning rather than adult literacy policy per se. I then discuss underlying public philosophy as the background for discussion of policy-in-intent. My findings are based on a review of selected government documents, interviews with key informants and observations in both countries. Finally, I discuss the impact of related social policies on adult learning and the relationship between policy and nonformal and informal learning in the two countries.

Governments and politicians see a highly trained workforce as an important key to effective participation in today's economy (R. Pawliw, personal interview, Jan. 8, 2002; Human Resources Development Canada, 2002; Doray & Rubenson, 1997; Statistics Canada, 1997; SU 12). The global economy has an impact on individuals and businesses as revealed by the following two conversations. A Swedish director of education observed that workers in local industrial plants often had difficulty learning how to use new machines (SK 6, p. 1). Manuals for new equipment were usually written in English, a language that older workers had not learned in school. Any training courses related to the equipment were often given in English. A similar situation would face

industrial workers who read but did not have adequate literacy skills to understand printed technical information, particularly in a second language. The restructuring of entire industries and occupations also had a profound effect on individuals as shown by the following conversation.

One night, over supper in a Stockholm restaurant, a healthy, outgoing thirty-year old Swede, told us that his sister was “smart” but that he was not and was terrified of computers. As a merchant marine, he had learned on the job. After the merchant marine disbanded (possibly due to globalization), he had tried to get into the navy but had failed the test. He joked that “he knew too much for the officers.” He was now working as a guard in a consulate and studying Italian at night school because his sister was living in Italy. Although this young man did not meet the expectations of the formal testing system, he may well have had skills and aptitude for a navy job that could have been demonstrated through an assessment of prior learning or *validation* as known in Sweden. He also was willing to take on the new challenge of learning Italian when he was personally motivated. Perhaps this was a person who learned better by watching rather than in a classroom setting (Scheutze, 2003; Voss, 1993).

The above observations of an educator and the experience of a young worker typify the genuine challenges facing policymakers, industrial leaders and workers themselves. On the one hand, globalization and technical change put pressure on industries but often experienced workers are ill-suited and disinclined to learn in a conventional formal classroom. How well can public policy accommodate both the needs of the economy and the learning needs and interests of individuals?

### **Literacy or Adult Education?**

My decision to focus on adult learning and policy in this research resulted from the different ways in which literacy is defined and understood in the two countries. During my initial document review, I did not find the term “literacy” in the English translations of documents about adult education in Sweden. Later, during my fieldwork, I asked two people, each of whom had many years of experience in the field, about the use of the term literacy in Sweden. Both the woman who had been the secretary and coordinator of the planning commission for the adult education initiative and a professor emeritus whose experience in adult education extended over five decades and two continents confirmed that the Swedish translation of “literacy” connoted illiteracy. Adult education was understood to include compulsory basic education and upper secondary education, comparable to youth education, the school system provided for Swedish youth (A. Sohlman, personal communication, April 14, 2003). The common understanding seemed to be that “literacy is not an issue in Sweden. Everyone here can read” (J. Norberg, personal communication, Sept. 17, 2002).

Swedish policy documents talk of raising “the educational level” (Sohlman, 1999) rather than reducing illiteracy. This is not surprising because, in the literature, it is commonly accepted that Sweden achieved mass literacy before the nineteenth century (Graff, 1991, p. 223). The idea of raising the educational level of the Swedish population, *folkbildning*, has been connected to adult learning for over one hundred years. It began with the establishment of the first folk high schools and study circles to provide education for the children of farm families who often could not attend school because they were needed to work on the farms. The municipal adult education system

was established specifically for those who had been denied access to upper secondary education in the formal system prior to education reforms implemented in 1957.

In Canada, literacy was typically understood as the lowest level of adult education. The ability to read and write at a basic level such as Grade Five is often a prerequisite for acceptance into formal adult education programs. No equivalent term was used to differentiate the basic level of formal education in Sweden. Adult education included compulsory education (*grundskola*) and upper secondary school, the later level being a requirement for post-secondary education at the university level. The basic entry or literacy level of classroom instruction was therefore an integral part of the formal adult education available to Swedes over the age of 19. Consequently, for purposes of this study, I focused on adult learning as comprising both literacy in Canada and adult education as understood in Sweden.

In Canada, the term literacy has become reified. It figures in the name and/or mandate of a large number of local, provincial and national organizations (National Adult Literacy Database, 2003). “As early as 1986, the [Canadian] government committed to work with the provinces, the private sector and voluntary groups to...ensure that Canadians have access to the literacy skills that are the prerequisite for participation in [an] advanced economy” (Selman, 1998, p. 223). Statistics Canada played a key role in the development and implementation of the International Adult Literacy Survey and the National Literacy Secretariat (NLS) has actively promoted public awareness of the results. The NLS held several briefings on the results of the IALS for literacy practitioners during the years after its release. Of the seven provincial governments in Canada that are presently developing or have recently developed literacy strategies, only the province of Québec focused on lifelong learning (Ministère de

l'Éducation, 2002) as opposed to literacy. Next, I compare the goals for adult education as stated explicitly in policy documents and as implicitly revealed by government actions.

### **Policy Goals**

The underlying public philosophy and understanding of a given problem influences the way in which policy seeks to address it. The human capital perspective considers the individual as an economic unit and sees public and personal investment in adult education as an economic imperative. The social equity or humanistic perspective considers the whole individual and his or her contribution and participation in work, community and family. From this perspective, public investment in adult education is accordingly a question of mutual betterment of both individual and society. The issue of individual versus public responsibility also figures in the establishment of public policy goals. To the extent that adult literacy is a government focus, it is often a labour force development issue within the framework of Human Capital Theory.

The definition of literacy and the responsibility for it within government both have important implications for the delivery and effectiveness of programs. If literacy skills are considered a basic human right, then the role of government is to ensure that citizens have the opportunity to gain those skills. If low literacy skills are considered a deficit, either in the economy or society, then literacy is considered an economic imperative with the onus for skill development perhaps falling to individuals or the business sector. The government department that is responsible for literacy sheds light on whether literacy is considered a basic human right or an economic imperative.

### *Sweden*

The national government set up the Municipal Adult Education system, *komvux*, in 1967 expressly as a compensatory system for adults who, as youths, had been excluded from higher education in the hierarchical school system that existed until 1957. "Adult education was no longer a marginal activity...with the introduction of adult education [as] an educational equivalent to primary and secondary school, and the founding of a permanent structure for educational TV and radio programmes" (Rubenson, 1997, p. 72). Although the changes introduced through the Adult Education Initiative were designed to revitalize the adult education system, many aspects of the earlier reforms were still in place in 2003.

My understanding of what it means to 'educate the least educated' came from observing the review process for upcoming adult education programs in Umeå. The admissions clerk and the counselors in the adult education centre reviewed applications for two to three hours most mornings throughout the month of May. From my workspace behind a divider, I could see the time and effort that went into this task of reviewing the thick stack of 1000 applications to determine which students should have priority for the 700 spaces available in fall programs. The counselors, each in turn, spent several mornings beside the clerk to review and discuss the previous education and goals of applicants for placement in a given program area. The admissions clerk was a patient, soft-spoken, middle-aged woman who entered names and background into the admissions database after she and the counselors reached consensus on who should have priority and what program they should register in. Frequently, the nearby fax machine whirred as transcripts or information for applicants came in from another municipality, educational institution, or from another country.

In Kungsör, a municipality less than one-tenth the size of Umeå, one counselor reviewed all applications and assigned placements. The challenge in this smaller centre was to ensure enough students to maintain the courses and to justify staffing and budget allocations.

In Sweden, "the 1960s reforms were heavily influenced by contemporary Human Capital Theory that was broadly embraced within policy circles" (Rubenson, 2001b, p. 330). In the 1970s, there was a greater emphasis on social justice issues including "a fairer distribution of education and income" (Segerholm, 2001, p. 3). Rubenson observed that "[in the 1990s] education was increasingly presented to promote the competitiveness of the Swedish economy [and] the Adult Education Initiative [was] informed by a conviction that adult education is an instrument for providing better opportunities to get and/or change work" (p. 332).

Sweden implemented the Adult Education Initiative (AEI) (Sohlman, 1999) in response to relatively high levels of unemployment in the early nineties (A. Sohlman, personal communication, April 15, 2003; S. Larsson, personal communication, May 31, 2002). One goal of the AEI was to reduce unemployment by fifty percent, a shift towards the economic imperative as a policy goal. The AEI funded adult education classes from lower levels up to and beyond upper secondary school. Nevertheless, for the unemployed there was a human face to this Human Capital perspective. The term *kunskapslyftet* itself means lifting up the educational level of the population, suggesting that this was an implicit goal of the AEI. The infusion of new funding into an already well endowed adult education system benefited a large number of adult Swedes.

Despite the rhetoric relating adult education to competitiveness and the need for the Swedish economy to compete internationally through knowledge and a skilled

workforce, the belief in education as a tool for achieving social equity seemed to be commonly understood as a part of the public philosophy in Sweden, regardless of political affiliation. Municipal politicians of Social Democratic (SU 12) and Centre Party affiliation (SK 8) both thought that adult education would continue to receive support at the municipal level after decentralization in 2006. The understanding that a reduction of unemployment was a cornerstone of social cohesion served to moderate the human capital rhetoric of policymakers. The focus of the AEI was on “supply” while the sequel of the AEI was to focus on “demand”, responding more effectively to individual needs and interests (SK 6, p. 2).

By national regulation, municipalities had to give priority to the least educated in the expenditure of municipal funds for adult education to receive the AEI funding (SU 1, p. 2). This observation exemplified the long-standing emphasis on the role of education as a means of achieving social equity in Sweden. The social benefit and related costs to communities of having unemployed individuals studying rather than how they might otherwise fill their time could be the subject of further research. The increasing theme of human capital objectives in the Swedish discussions played out as an increased supply of adult education. One Swedish researcher observed that

there is paradox in a reform that is designed to supply workers for particular sectors where they are needed and at the same time in order to get adults to study, you need a rhetoric that is interesting for their personal development and about personal choice” (SU 8, p. 2).

This researcher did not see how greater individual choice would necessarily result in educational and training choices that matched the needs of the labour marketplace.

## *Canada*

The formation of the National Literacy Secretariat (NLS) in 1988, during the United Nation's International Decade for Literacy, was Canada's response to the International Decade for Literacy. This decision came soon after the publication of *Broken Words* (Calamai, 1987) which showed that a large number of Canadians had trouble understanding printed information in their everyday lives. The positioning of the NLS in the Department of the Secretary of State implied that literacy played a foundational role in building social capital and ensuring the inclusion of all citizens in the life of the country. This suggested a broad social equity understanding of literacy connected to civic participation and social capital in correspondence to the mandate of the Secretary of State.

During the recession of the 1980s, Human Capital Theory influenced labour market training in Canada. "[It] was seen to explain economic development as well as inequality in earnings" (Rubenson, 1987, p. 79). In 1993, the NLS was moved temporarily from Secretary of State to Multiculturalism and Citizenship and ultimately to Human Resources Development Canada (L. Lalonde, personal communication, March, 2003), the federal department responsible for employment and labour market issues. A senator was assigned to the role of Minister Responsible for Literacy. This appointment did not constitute a new government department, any national authority for education, or additional funding for adult education. The mandate of HRDC, the ministry currently responsible for adult literacy, provides insights into the goals of that policy framework.

The mission of HRDC (2001) is "to enable Canadians to participate fully in the workplace and the community" giving primacy to employment, as borne out in its recent

discussion paper, *Knowledge Matters* (HRDC, 2002). In each case, the federal government identified these priorities: children and youth, post-secondary education, labour market development and immigration with an emphasis on skill development for the knowledge economy (Rubenson, 2001b). This shift implied that literacy was now considered more as an economic imperative within the human capital framework rather than a basis for social inclusion.

The location of the NLS within HRDC suggested that the primary focus of literacy development, in the minds of federal policymakers, was the economy and human capital development. This conforms to the historical role of the federal government in education, which was limited to adult retraining for reemployment purposes. Since the 1980s, an increasing shift has occurred from 'social demand' to 'economic imperative' as a rationale for adult education (Doray & Rubenson, 1987, p. 23), at both the federal and provincial levels of government.

This emphasis on workforce skill development is born out by a preliminary analysis of the recently released green papers, *Knowledge Matters* and *Achieving Excellence* (HRDC, 2002). The federal government's Skills Initiative focuses on education for the sake of the economy but, to date nothing has been included in a federal budget to address the concerns raised. In early 2003, the Standing Committee on Human Resources Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities was assigned the task of developing recommendations on literacy. This was the first time that an all party committee had met to discuss literacy but nevertheless the association of literacy with disabilities implies a deficit perspective on the issue. The report of this committee was tabled in the House of Commons on June 12 (Report of Standing Committee, 2003). It contains twenty-one concrete recommendations (*Federal Literacy Facts*, June 2003).

The government response to this report was released in November 4<sup>th</sup>, 2003 (see [http://www.hrdc-drhc.gc.ca/dept/reports/responses/031105/5\\_e.shtml](http://www.hrdc-drhc.gc.ca/dept/reports/responses/031105/5_e.shtml)) but federal or provincial government policy outcomes remain to be seen. In my experience, and throughout this study, I have not seen the reduction of unemployment levels or social cohesion mentioned as goals in federal or provincial policy discussions about adult literacy in Canada.

*The provincial level-A pilot study.* Since the signing of labour market agreements in all the provinces in the mid 1990s, the provincial role in developing adult education policy has become of even greater importance. New Brunswick (1995) was the first province to undertake a provincial literacy strategy. Several other initiatives were announced in recent years (Newfoundland and Labrador, 1998; Prince Edward Island, 1999; Saskatchewan Literacy Network, 2001; Yukon, 1999). A preliminary review of all of these strategies revealed that the economy was a priority in all of them.

New Brunswick named a Minister of State for Literacy, the only province to do so although Alberta recently established a Department of Learning that comprises Education and Adult Education and Saskatchewan did likewise in March 2003. In Prince Edward Island, Newfoundland and Labrador, and the Yukon, adult literacy fell under the jurisdiction of the Department of Education. In the Yukon and Saskatchewan, the literacy strategy was part of training strategy in 2002; in Newfoundland, literacy was part of the *Strategic Social Plans* entitled “The Renewal Strategy for Jobs and Growth” (*Words to Live By*, 1998).

In New Brunswick (*Like a Great Wave*, 1995) and Prince Edward Island (*Tough Challenges*, 1998), the goals were to reduce low literacy as a way of breaking the cycle of dependency. In Saskatchewan, adult literacy as of March 2003 was the responsibility

of the Department of Learning; formerly it was within the Department of Post-Secondary Education and Skills Training. In the Northwest Territories, responsibility for literacy was within a joint department of Education, Culture and Employment (*Towards Literacy*, 2001).

At the provincial level and in the context of an impending skill shortage in Saskatchewan, an important role of the Department of Learning was still seen to be the “development of human resources through [provincial] institutions” (R. Pawliw, personal communication, Jan. 8, 2002). Over the past twenty years, responsibility for adult education in the province has changed departments seven times. Beginning in 1980, it was within the Department of Education. In 1987 it was moved first to a separate department and then in March 2002, back to Saskatchewan Learning with five back and forth movements in between. (D. Woloshyn, personal communication, August 2003). These changes have used considerable amounts of energy and resources and they suggest uncertainty of how best to plan and administer adult education.

Although both Canadian and Swedish policymakers ascribe to the Human Capital Theory, the primary beneficiary of adult education and the responsibility for it seem to differ. In Canada, the economy appeared to be the primary beneficiary with the individual contributing to that. In Sweden the emphasis of the AEI was on reducing unemployment, suggesting that the individual and the society were both beneficiaries of adult education. Furthermore, adult education policy in Sweden continued to place a priority on those with the least education in contrast to the Canadian approach. Finally, the assigning of the literacy file to a Human Resources Development committee responsible for persons with disabilities underscored the deficit perception of

policymakers on this issue. A summary of a preliminary document review conducted in 2002 is provided in Table 5.1 below.

Table 5.1

*Summary of Review of Selected Documents as of March 2002*

Government	GOALS	DEFINITION	PROCESS	TIMELINE	DEP'T
CANADA	Human capital	IALS	Public consultations	2001-2003	Human Resources <sup>1</sup>
Newfoundland/ Labrador	Human capital	IALS	Ministerial Committee	1998-	Education <sup>2</sup>
New Brunswick	Human capital	IALS	Public consultations	1991 - present, annual review	Education <sup>2</sup>
Prince Edward Is.	Human capital	IALS	Public consultations	1997-2001	Education <sup>2</sup>
Saskatchewan	Human capital	See below #5.	Public consultations	2001 -	Post-Secondary Education and Skills Training <sup>3</sup>
Yukon Territory	Human capital	IALS	Public consultations	1993-1999	Education
North West Territories	Human capital, cultural	IALS	Public consultations	2001-2005	Education, Culture, Employment

NOTES:

1. National Literacy Secretariat is a small division within Human Resources Development Canada.
2. There is a division within Department of Education responsible for Adult Education or Literacy
3. Department of Learning as of March 2003.
4. IALS definition of literacy: *the ability to use printed and written information to function in society, to achieve one's goals, and to develop one's knowledge and potential.* (IALS, 1995, p. 14).
5. Literacy is foundational to a lifelong learning process that empowers individuals to draw on the first of mind, body, heart and spirit toward the fulfillment of personal and family goals and community responsibility. Literacy is a continuum of skills, practices and learning that are necessary for everyday life, and includes reading, writing, spelling, numeracy, oral communication and computer literacy (proposed, February 5, 2003).
6. A government delegation from the Province of Quebec visited 4 European countries in May 2003 as part of the development of a comprehensive adult education strategy for that province.

## **Policy Development**

Policymaking takes place in the context of the population, geography and government structure of a country. In 2003, Sweden's population was a little less than one third that of the Canadian population with its land mass roughly one-twentieth that of Canada. The resulting ratio of population densities was 22 persons to three. This resulted in greater communication and transportation challenges in Canada. This reality coupled with the federal system of government in Canada, in contrast to Sweden's unitary system of government, results in a very different context for adult education policy in Canada.

Highly organized state direction in Sweden contrasts with pluralism in Canada's "reactive policy-making" (Lindquist, 1992, p. 135). Within a given context, the relative power and organization of government and non-governmental groups influence the nature of policy and its development. Sweden would fall within the State Direction quadrant of Lindquist's configuration whereas Canada could be considered to be in the Pressure Pluralism quadrant.

### ***Sweden***

Sweden has been an exemplar of Lindquist's (1992) State Direction Model in which the state is highly organized and the public has little direct input in policy development. Until the 1990s, Sweden's central and unitary government resulted in a "powerful national [education board] to enforce similar rules and curricula throughout the nation." (Heidenheimer, Hecllo & Adams, 1983, p. 23). With the exception of six years in the early 1980s, the same political party held power in the Swedish parliament allowing for a longer view of public policy. The Swedish system had the capacity for

“radical policy innovation, but with widespread consultation and great efforts to wear down and convert opposing interest” (p. 317).

A recent example of public policy development in Sweden was the public discussion prior to the September 2003 referendum on whether Sweden should join the European Monetary Union. The national government funded the publication of information for both the “yes” and “no” sides. These materials were distributed to classrooms and study circles throughout the country and resource people were contracted to facilitate discussion of the issue from both points of view. In Kungsör, when I met with a study circle of retirees studying the issue on Friday afternoons during the month of April, they asked me how the North American Free Trade affected Canada. Prominent public billboards in Umeå posed the question “Kroner or EMU?” thereby encouraging people to think about the issue on their way to work.

The decision to establish the *komvux* system in 1967 was a decision of the central government. This reform removed institutional barriers to education but did not ensure that the least educated took advantage of it. Rubenson (1997) argued that “increasing social power of the trade-union movement in Sweden” was behind the government’s change in policy related to adult education (p. 73) in the 1970s that gave priority for adult education funding to those with the least education. In 1988, 86% of Swedish workers were union members, compared with 38% of the Canadian labour force (Rothstein, 1992, p. 85), which gave organized labour in Sweden a greater possibility of influencing government decisions.

The policy development process behind the Adult Education Initiative (AEI) is another example of the State Direction model. The woman who had been the secretary to the state commission that had directed the AEI had been a civil servant for many years

and was described by many as the best source of information about the initiative. I interviewed her at the site of her new job in the Department of Labour in central Stockholm and she explained the background and devolution of the AEI.

The AEI was the idea of the Minister of Education and the then Minister of Finance, Göran Persson, current Swedish Prime Minister. They predicted a big increase in unemployment and labour market training as a result of the recession of the early 1990s and thought it would be less costly to pay study grants to the unemployed rather than unemployment benefits and the labour market training provided by the government. The study grant to be given to students was equivalent to the unemployment benefits they were entitled to. Also the existing labour market training did not provide education for those people who lacked basic or upper secondary education (A. Sohlman, personal communication, April 14, 2003).

In 1995, a parliamentary commission, of which Sohlman was the executive secretary and chief administrator, was set up. The commission comprised 10-15 people including politicians and the social partners (employers and labour representatives). Its task was to review adult education (AE) and develop ideas for implementing a new strategy that would support lifelong learning through information, outreach, counselling, prior learning assessment and recognition, flexible and accessible learning, and distance learning. Youth education, AE and lifelong learning were to be part of a comprehensive model. The national government established the policy and implementation guidelines and the plan were approved by parliament for a July 1997 startup. One municipal coordinator spoke of how quickly the local AEI plan had to be implemented to access this new funding.

Although the plan, guidelines and funding came from the national government, there was discussion at the municipal level about implementation (S4, p. 1). Members of a team of civil servants were each assigned to advise municipalities within a given region on the implementation of this new way of delivering adult education. They traveled to their respective regions and met with local authorities to inform them about the initiative and to discuss any problems or questions. The time frame for implementation was very short with little information at the local level beforehand. With the help of the team, some networks of support were developed but there was little time to build alliances and to show results.

A project coordinator in one municipality commented about the speed with which the initiative was implemented. There was little time to figure out how best to spend the money that was available in a given budget year. This coordinator had taught at the university and worked in the community and so had an established network within her municipality. She confirmed that there had been little to no consultation at the regional or local level about the policy plans prior to implementation of the AEI (SU, May 5, 2003).

The *komvux* system in 1967 had removed institutional barriers to adult learning and the AEI sought to remove situational barriers such as scheduling. Neither initiative ensured that the least educated took advantage of the new system as planners hoped. The question of how to determine dispositional barriers still remains unanswered but when asked whether potential learners had been consulted during the policy development process, Rubenson questioned the point of doing so (personal communication, September 20, 2002). Policy development seemed more to be directed by experts and government leaders.

Within a year of the end of the AEI, local governments were to develop new adult literacy strategies at the municipal level. The impact of this recent decentralization and diversification of formal adult education is still unknown (Lundahl, 2002). Politicians at the local level will now make decisions about adult education and youth education. Recent outcomes of the AEI in two communities, discussed later in this chapter, suggested that in future there may be a greater diversity in delivery of adult education throughout Sweden possibly at the expense of equity.

With respect to the idea of a policy network, the labour movement in Sweden had served to promote adult education as a vehicle for the “highest standard” of equality in contrast to the “equality of minimal needs approach of liberal welfare states (Rubenson, 2001a, p. 96) such as Canada. The trade union movement played an effective role in establishment of study leave and subsidies in Sweden. Since 80% of the workforce was unionized in Sweden, compared to under 30% in Canada (Rothstein, 1992), unions could more easily play an effective role in the policy community, to the benefit of workers. As for adult educators themselves, something of an informal network of support had developed as a result of coordinators at the municipal level meeting their colleagues from other parts of the country through conferences and information sessions during the course of the AEI (SU 1). This served an important role for the coordinators given the speed with which the AEI was implemented. Although Sweden has an extensive policy community with interest in adult education, I found little evidence of the working relationship that would typify a policy network on the issue.

### *Canada*

Canadian policymaking is representative of Lindquist’s Clientele Pluralism, where organized interest groups try to influence government policy. This includes the

possibility that some groups have more influence than others. According to Lindquist (1992), "when officials attempt to build consensus and involve outside groups...values and beliefs held by groups, as well as lack of trust (often) constitute important barriers to developing new strategies" (p. 129). This is borne out by responses of literacy advocates to the 2003 Canadian federal budget which saw "hundreds of millions of dollars in new funding [for] higher education [but] "literacy and adult basic education received virtually nothing" (Movement for Canadian Literacy, *Federal Literacy Facts*, March 2003, p. 2).

Because Canada has a highly decentralized government structure, the policy making process for adult literacy and education has not been so clear cut. The federal government in Canada has no education mandate and this necessitated a bi-level consideration of policymaking in Canada. The Canadian Constitution states that education is a matter of provincial jurisdiction and the "interplay between constitutional jurisdiction and government initiative [means that] matters of adult education policy just happens to fall right in the middle between the provinces and the federal government" (Selman et al., 1998, p. 210). This is especially true for adult education. Municipal school boards are responsible for students up to age 21 and there is no municipal authority responsible for adult education.

Both the provincial and federal governments have traditionally considered labour market training as their primary role in adult education. As long as the federal government was involved in labour market training, "there was continuing tension between federal and provincial authorities in matters pertaining to education beyond primary and secondary schooling [and] it was left to the individual provinces and territories to introduce the legislation" (Gallagher & Day, 2001, p. 648).

The federal government established the National Literacy Secretariat (NLS) in 1988 as a result of consultations with “provincial governments, groups from the voluntary, education, labour, and private sectors and other federal government departments (Selman et al., 1998, p. 224) but “there is no legislation which outlines the government’s policy towards literacy” (p. 227). The leadership role of the federal government in adult education is now limited to its own form of lobbying through the NLS, with its staff of 22 in a department of about 20,000 employees. (Human Resources Development Canada, 2003; National Literacy Secretariat, 2003). When HRDC was split into departments in December 2003, the National Literacy Secretariat was assigned to the Human Resource and Skills Development section rather becoming part of the new Social Development Department.

*The policy network.* In Canada, the basic level of adult education is provided largely by volunteer agencies. These are numerous and fragmented and they rarely have core funding for operations, more typically relying on private donations and short term project grants. In part, this is because of the sheer physical size of the country but it is also reflects the jurisdictional division between federal and provincial governments. The NLS encouraged the formation of the literacy coalitions as a way to decentralize its work and to facilitate communication between literacy programs both within and between provinces.

The mandate of the National Literacy Secretariat is to share information and coordinate activities at the national level. The NLS provides funding to six national literacy organizations in Canada. Table 4.2 lists the national organizations along with their mandate and founding date. One of these, The Movement for Canadian Literacy, is a coalition of the thirteen provincial and territories. The Fédération canadienne pour

l'alphabétisation en français is a parallel organization that works on behalf of French language literacy organizations in Canada. In some provinces there is more than one coalition. For example, the Saskatchewan Aboriginal Literacy Network was formed in March 2003 (Saskatchewan Literacy Network, 2003). The organization shares office space with the SLN and the mandate of this organization is to promote aboriginal literacy.

The national and provincial literacy organizations and their affiliates can be considered a policy network. The Movement for Canadian Literacy, in conjunction with the five other national organizations, produces information about literacy. The MCL coordinates a major lobbying effort, Literacy Action Day. The goal is to influence public policy through annual presentations to the federal politicians in a one-day visitation to Ottawa politicians. In this way the national organizations and their affiliates can act as a policy network that lobbies the federal government about literacy issues.

The national organizations and the literacy coalitions that are funded by the NLS seek to increase public awareness about the importance of literacy, coordinate literacy activities, disseminate information, develop learning materials and provide training for literacy programs within their jurisdiction, activities that fall within the National Literacy Secretariat guidelines.

The NLS continues to support these organizations through project funding for activities that fall within its mandate. The coalitions have evolved differently in each province because of the differing demographics and provincial delivery system for adult education. The existence of these literacy coalitions enables the dissemination of information between literacy groups both within and between provinces.

The most overt example of efforts of policy network activity is the political lobbying conducted around Literacy Action Day. This event has brought literacy advocates from across Canada together for meetings with politicians and civil servants on one day each year since 1993 (Movement for Canadian Literacy, 2003). Coalition representatives and learners travel to Ottawa from each province and there are briefed to tell members of parliament (MPs) about the importance of literacy. These teams meet those individual MPs who are willing to meet them. Press events are scheduled and questions are raised in parliament. The intended goal has been to increase government support and funding for adult literacy.

In 2003, three, and in some cases four, representatives from each of the 13 Canadian provinces and territories, traveled to Ottawa and spent up to five days there. The cost of air travel, accommodation and meals for over sixty individuals over a four to five day period could easily approach \$70,000 CDN. A total costing of the event would include several months of staff time needed to arrange the meetings, printing of information, mailings and other related costs. "On October 23, 2003, 75 literacy learners, teachers and administrators met with over 80 federal politicians and bureaucrats" (Movement for Canadian Literacy, Federal Literacy Facts, 2003). To date, the desired outcome of more learning opportunities for adults has not been realized.

***Federal policy development.*** In the past, the federal role in labour market development and unemployment insurance meant that the retraining of unemployed adults fell to the federal government. According to the Canadian Constitution, the federal government's role in education is limited. The decentralized policymaking resulting from the jurisdictional division of responsibility between federal and provincial governments contrasts with the unitary, national policy that has existed in Sweden.

According to Selman, Cooke, Selman, and Dampier (1998), this “interplay between constitutional jurisdiction and government initiative, [meant that] matters of adult education policy just happen to fall right in the middle of their two realities” (p. 210). The authors stated that no clear policy defines the government’s understanding of literacy and “the partnership arrangement of the strategy distributes decision making among numerous partners and thereby reduces the policy’s cohesiveness” (p. 227).

A challenge in a country as large as Canada is how to bring forward the views of people from across the country. A strategy used by both government and non-governmental agencies is regional consultations either in person or electronically. The Public Policy Forum (PPF) is an example of one non-governmental agency that seeks to foster dialogue on public issues. The PPF brings together business, government, labour and the voluntary sector to discuss topics of public interest. In 2001, a series of seven workshops were held across the country to discuss learning and skill development under the auspices of the PPF (*Public Policy Forum, 2003*).

Attendance at the workshops depended on awareness they were being held, and on having adequate personal or agency resources to be able to attend. Between 20 and 30 people participated in each workshop and the recommendations from the regional workshops were discussed at a national workshop of 28 people, one of whom was the Minister of Human Resources Development Canada (HRDC). Recommendations from this national workshop were forwarded to the government and published on the PPF website (see <http://www.ppforum.com>). As the senior staff person in a small non-profit organization at the time, I often found it very difficult to spend the time and money needed to attend the regional workshops. Many consultations occurred in the summer

when many adult education programs were closed and staff laid-off when project funding for the year ended.

The national literacy organizations themselves held their own national discussion, *Best Practices National Workshop on Literacy* in October 2002. Out of this workshop, a Pan-Canadian Literacy Strategy consisting of twelve recommendations was developed and forwarded to the minister of Human Resources Development in Canada in December 2002, the minister responsible for literacy (Movement for Canadian Literacy, 2002). The next step was the release of the government's Green Discussion Paper on the *Knowledge Matters Skills Initiative* in February 2002 (HRDC, 2002). The primary vehicle for public response was the Internet and the time allowed for discussion and feedback was very limited.

The recommendations included in the Pan Canadian Literacy Strategy were reflected in neither the government's green papers nor the March 2003 federal budget. Several observers in Ottawa, including Senator Fairbairn, commented that the few literacy advocates at the October 2002 meeting had had a disproportionate influence on the recommendations coming out of the meeting (J. Fairbairn, personal communication, October 23, 2003). Literacy practitioners observed that the discussion papers did not reflect the recommendations they had developed and an Ottawa based consultant described "government consultations under the guise of 'citizen engagement' [as] more of a public relations exercise than a legitimate process" (Anonymity requested, personal communication, Sept. 20, 2002).

Observers from the social justice community further commented that "the tidal wave of public consultations [over the past decade] lend false 'legitimacy' to narrow...fiscally conservative policy announcements...literacy remains marginalized in

the budget and at HRDC, despite a 'consultative' process that tagged it as a 'Canadian priority' "(Anonymous, personal communication, Feb. 19, 2003). It is unclear in any case what policy the federal government could develop related to adult education, because education is a provincial responsibility. Literacy advocates had argued that a pan-Canadian literacy strategy was possible given the federal positions taken on health and children's issues. I now turn to a consideration of an example of literacy policymaking at the provincial level.

*A provincial example.* Beginning in April 2001, the Saskatchewan Literacy Network (SLN) conducted a series of workshops and consultations across the province under the guidance of a provincial steering committee with representation from the provincial government and the SLN. Over the next year, 600 individuals participated in the consultations, usually two to three hour meetings. These consultations, open to the public, some sought to involve specific target populations such as adult learners (Saskatchewan Literacy Network, 2001). In May 2002, consultations were held in the provincial department responsible for literacy. According to the IALS (IALS, 1995) findings, individuals functioning at Level Two rate their reading and writing skills as good to excellent. It therefore may be assumed that most of the adult learners who participated in these consultations had more limited literacy skills, whether because of learning disabilities or second language issues.

The Saskatchewan Department of Post-Secondary Education and Skills Training (PSEST) (now Department of Learning as of March 2003) had conducted a similar consultation process in the development of the provincial training strategy in 1999 (Saskatchewan Literacy Network, 2001). Participation in these consultations usually involved travel time and expense and, at the minimum, time away from the work

responsibilities. Larger organizations usually had the resources to fund their staff participation and reassign job responsibilities, whereas smaller organizations did not have the resources to do this.

The recent consultations held by the SLN strove to be more inclusive than those of PSEST in that subsidies were available to defray travel expenses for those who attended the workshops. Nevertheless, there was no way to compensate those who took time from their jobs to attend. In addition, a special set of meetings was held to involve adult learners (*Join the voices for literacy-Phase II*, 2002). In February 2003, a draft provincial literacy policy statement was released. In November 2003, an official announcement about a literacy strategy was still forthcoming, further delayed by the provincial election held on November 5, 2003.

According to Selman et al. (1998), “the absence of explicit public policy [may explain policy on an issue]” (p. 211). Based on the above observations, it is fair to say that Sweden has explicit policy that was developed with little to no local consultation. The AEI was drafted quickly within tight timelines for implementation. In Canada, there is no explicit policy on adult education or literacy at either the federal or provincial level. Nearly a decade after the release of the IALS reports, there has been a lot of talk but little concrete action. There is no clear priority in any Canadian jurisdiction to address the educational needs of the least educated. Program implementation rather suggests that those most likely to succeed in terms of employment or postsecondary education are given priority in adult education.

In summary, although human capital development and the importance of global competitiveness figure in political discourse in both countries, there is a considerable difference in explicit and implicit goals for adult education/literacy in the two countries.

In Sweden, where adult education is an integral part of *folkbildning* and, more recently, *kunskapslyftet*, adult education remains a right of individuals and the responsibility of both individuals and the state. In Canada, adult literacy is a charitable cause with responsibility falling to individuals and the volunteer sector.

In Canadian policymaking, the challenge is how to ensure public input in a large and diverse country and still get things done. In Sweden, the challenge is the reverse: how to broaden input and still ensure equity across the country. Once policy goals are set and policy has been developed, a number of factors can encourage or impede achievement of policy goals. Policy tools may be directly connected to the policy itself or may be broader social policies that bear influence on policy implementation. I next compare policy tools and policy considerations for populations with special learning challenges.

### **Policy Tools**

Rist (2000) listed resource intensiveness, targeting, and institutional capacity as key considerations in the achievement of policy goals. According to Rist's typology resource intensiveness includes the amount of funding directly related to a policy initiative. In the case of specific adult education policies such as the AEI, resource intensiveness is revealed by the amount of funding for programs and support for individuals while they study. Institutional capacity is also related to funding in that it is a reflection of prior funding invested in adult education infrastructure such as *komvux* but it also includes governance structures.

The level of public spending also affects related social policies which can bear an important influence on adult education policy outcomes. Examples are universal childcare, school lunches and public transportation. Targeting refers to the way that

policy relates to the intended recipients, for example, older industrial workers, immigrants or aboriginal populations. Governments use public awareness as a policy tool to try to increase public support for policies.

Through this research, I found significant differences between Canada and Sweden in the policy tools related directly to adult education such as funding and public awareness. Funding was one of the major areas of manifest differences related to adult education policy and it played out in institutional capacity, and support for programs and individuals. As well, the barriers to participation such as childcare and transportation that are often cited in Canadian studies were not issues in Sweden because other social policies addressed these issues in a universally accessible way. In Sweden, policy sought to increase supply of learning opportunities through diversification of programming whereas in Canada, a lack of public policy meant efforts to increase demand for adult education through public awareness campaigns. For purposes of this discussion, I compare resource intensiveness and institutional capacity under the broader heading of funding.

### ***Funding***

The question of funding relates both to the financing of adult education programs and living expenses of individuals while they study. The issue of funding must therefore be considered both from an individual and a program perspective. Social democracy would have adult education programs funded by the government and universally available; according to the neoliberal position, the private sector would best provide literacy and adult education, based on market demand. Between these extremes, lies a combination that relies on the volunteer sector to provide part of the programming, and state funded programming to serve the needs of targeted groups. In addition to funding

designated for a specific policy initiative, there is also the question of funding that establishes prior and ongoing institutional capacity.

When I sought to compare the relative levels of expenditure on adult education, Rubenson informed me that this information was difficult to obtain (personal communication, January 20, 2003). In Sweden, national funding supported the formal education system, tripartite nonformal education, the informal system of study circles, and provided subsidies for newspapers and media. Since it was dispersed in various ways, it was difficult to assign a per capita figure. Likewise, in Saskatchewan, provincial funding for adult education was included in global budgets to the regional college and technical institute and so no per capita figure was available (Pawliw, personal communication, January 27, 2003). A similar situation exists across the country because a national study of adult basic education found that “in the overwhelming majority of cases, there is no clear accounting of expenditures on [Literacy and Adult Basic Education] (Hoddinott, 1998, p. 166).

*Sweden.* Education at all levels was free in Sweden. For individuals, there were no fees for education at any level up to and including post-secondary technical or university education. In addition, the national student funding body (CSN) provided grants and loans to offset living expenses for studies at any level from adult basic education to post-secondary education for adults. There were age restrictions however, described in Chapter Four.

Adult education in Sweden has been the subject of many studies and reports in the academic literature (Abrahamsson, 2001; Doray & Rubenson, 1997; Rubenson, 1994a, 2001b, 2002). Institutional capacity for the delivery of adult education is well established. National funding and municipal taxation have provided adult education

programs in every municipality in Sweden since 1967 through the Municipal Adult Education or *komvux* system. This essentially was a replica of the school curriculum for youth and the system is so well established that recent high school graduates considered it as a “second chance” to improve their grades so they could enter post-secondary education. The social democrat who chaired the board of education in Umeå described this as a “waste of public resources” (SU 12) because such students already had had the chance to get the credits they needed while in high school. He went on to say that adult education still should be available as a second, third and even fourth chance but not directly after high school.

One of the goals of the AEI was to shake up the *komvux* system but *komvux* provided a base for the establishment of the AEI. There was a core of experienced teachers and facilities in each municipality. The funding allocated to the AEI by the national government, \$56 CDN annually for every adult Swede, was in addition to the existing funding for *komvux*. This demonstrated a public intent to do something about unemployment that was broadly acceptable, hence more limited political risk.

The formula for the initial distribution of the new AEI funding was based on the relative level of unemployment in the municipality. The formula changed during the term of the AEI so that it later was based on the number of course completions in adult education and then finally to the population of the municipality. Adult educators cautioned that the AEI funding was an abnormal allocation and should not be used as a comparison to other countries (Faculty and graduate students, personal communication, Göteborg University, 2003).

In addition to funding for formal education, there has been a strong tradition of joint collaboration between the Swedish state and trade unions for provision of

nonformal education. Under the AEI, some funding was allocated to the trade unions, which then paid replacement salary to workers who took one day off per week to study. This provided an opportunity that was welcomed by workers, Volvo being one of the major employers who did so as evidenced by Volvo workers themselves heard from in Chapter Four.

To understand the process of approving individual study grants for adult education, I spoke with a counselor at the CSN office in Umeå. CSN, a national agency with branches in each municipality, is responsible for allocation of grants and student loans for all levels of adult education from basic to post-secondary. The counsellor had recently completed a master's degree in political science and joined the CSN office in Umeå a year earlier. This counselor said:

Anyone who has completed high school and had not previous funding can get a grant and loan to attend post-secondary education. Grants of 572 SEK per week were increased to 582 SEK in 2003; loans of 1091 SEK per week were available in 2002. Priority is given to those with the least education in that they can receive a higher grant whereas those with more education may receive a loan. Anyone who seeks funding can get it and, there is never a shortage of funding but those who have not completed high school could receive a higher grant and there was a sometimes a shortage of funding for these students. The main limitation in Umeå seemed to be admission to programs. No one who wants to study is unable to access funding, particularly if they have limited education. (SU7, p. 1)

The example of the 50-year-old woman presented in Chapter Four does however reveal age-based limitations on the availability of the funding. Loans were repayable by a small percentage deduction off payroll. The single mother of four teenagers who taught English at the Mimer Centre in Umeå was still paying off a small amount each month of the student loan she had taken out over twenty years earlier (EJ, personal communication, May 14, 2003).

Despite the availability of study grants, leave and space in classrooms, it still

proved difficult to recruit middle-aged men and older workers (Rubenson, 2001; SU 5, p. 5). This suggests that the AEI policy was not well targeted because new technologies threatened the jobs of these older industrial workers. One educator commented that the AEI seemed to be based on the assumption if the supply and diversity of learning opportunities were increased, more people would participate. Personal perspectives on why this did not happen were discussed in Chapter Four.

*Canada.* The National Literacy Secretariat does not fund direct service delivery. Over the years 1999-2002, the federal allocation literacy represented approximately \$1 for each Canadian, in comparison to the AEI initiative of \$56 per Swede, an amount on top of the existing infrastructure funding for municipal adult education. Government funding for literacy programs has been largely project based and only new projects were eligible for funding. This suggests a regressive funding strategy because projects that were positively evaluated had less chance of being funded for subsequent years than did new projects. It also meant that a lot of precious staff time was used in fund-raising, writing funding proposals and year-end reports rather than teaching adults. In the wake of the recent patronage scandals (Globe and Mail, April 2002), auditing requirements have become even more stringent and time-consuming (L. Shohet, personal communication, October 23, 2003).

The federal government also provided funding for the development of innovative learning technologies through the Office of Learning Technologies (OLT). The OLT provided project funding for new technologically based learning projects such as distance education (Human Resources Development). The Community Access Program was an effort to “bridge the Digital Divide” by providing “Canadians with affordable public access to the Internet and the skills [needed] to use it effectively” (Industry

Canada, 2003). In 1994, it began with a focus on communities with populations under 50,000 and in 1999, it extended to include larger communities.

Subsidies for individuals, in Canada, were paid out through Employment Insurance benefits. This allowed unemployed workers to retrain but benefits were available only to those who had worked a certain number of weeks in the previous year. Loans on Retirement Savings Plans for education purposes were only available to those who had enough income to set up such plans in the first place. Immigrants who needed language training did not fit into literacy funding although, in Saskatchewan, English as Second Language learners made up a significant portion of the programs. One fifty year old woman, a long time literacy advocate, herself learning disabled, said that she “didn’t think it was right that immigrants with university degrees were taking places from people who had not had this chance” (L. Magerl, December 17, 2003). Aboriginal learners often entered programs without English as their first language and with limited formal schooling and faced problems with literacy as a result.

*A provincial example.* In Saskatchewan, literacy funding was provided annually to seven regional colleges and two community groups at \$45,000 per region; a total of \$140,000 is allocated for the four urban SIAST campuses (R. Pawliw, personal communication, January 29, 2003, and February 20, 2003). In her study of volunteer literacy programs in the province, Hindle (1990) reported striking differences in levels of educational attainment and variations in immigration patterns in different regions of the province suggesting differing literacy levels. The level of regional literacy funding allotment does not vary according to the educational level or program achievements in each region and remains unchanged since it was established during the Literacy Campaign in 1990. Funding for adult education above the basic literacy level (Adult 12,

Adult 10 and other related programs) was also allocated to SIAST, Dumont Technical Institute, and regional colleges (R. Pawliw, personal communication, Feb. 22, 2003).

The province began providing Provincial Training Allowances (PTA) in 1997 for low income individuals studying adult basic education (Saskatchewan, 1997). This meant that people receiving social assistance were taken off assistance rolls and put on to PTAs if they chose to attend adult education programs. This funding encouraged people to study who otherwise could not or would not. It also reduced provincial service statistics, a politically positive move for the provincial government. Funds were oversubscribed well before the end of each fiscal year and were not available for some prospective students (CM 1, p.3). The importance of financial support for adults who are studying was discussed in Chapter Four.

Clearly Sweden spent a greater amount of its national budget on adult education and the institutional capacity to deliver adult education both formally and informally has been established for some time. In Canada, there was no comparable capacity for the delivery of adult education and the basic level has been considered a charity relying on volunteers. Moreover, Saskatchewan with 1.5 times the surface area of Sweden and a population 12 % that of Sweden was divided in a variety of ways for delivery of social programs. The regional boundaries for health, libraries, social services, municipal government and education were all different. This limited the institutional capacity for collaboration across human service sectors.

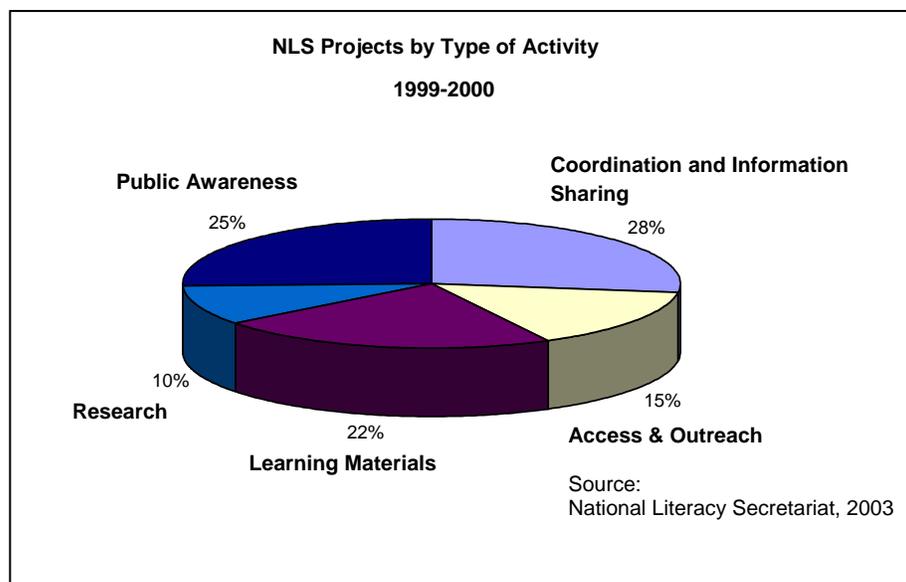
### ***Public Awareness***

Public awareness was another tool used by governments to encourage participation in adult education and literacy programs. As discussed in Chapter Two, literacy campaigns have been a common strategy of various governments historically.

The International Literacy Day and Adult Learners' Week (National Adult Literacy Database, 2002) are current international examples of efforts to encourage participation in and support for adult literacy programs.

*Sweden.* There was no evidence of a public campaign to encourage individuals to participate in adult education during the course of this study. Advertising for adult education courses was done locally by the providers through brochures and local media. Even during the AEI, there was no mass media campaign or advertising although there had been a lot of media coverage about it because it was such a major national initiative and expenditure (SU 8). One year after the end of the AEI, counsellors reported that people were still coming in to “study at *kunskapslyftet*” (SU 5, p. 4). General public awareness of *komvux* has meant that youth “see it as fallback system” (SU 12, p. 2). Politicians and administrators alike consider this a waste of public resources, and strategies for resolving the issues are taking place (SU 1, SU 12).

*Canada.* Figure 5.1 provides an example of the allocation of federal funds for literacy. One quarter of NLS funds in the fiscal year 1999 – 2000 were used for promotion and 10-15% of the funds were used for research (L. Gosselin, personal communication, February 24, 2003).



*Figure 5.1.* National Literacy Secretariat Project by Type of Activity (1999-2000)

The National Literacy Secretariat's website indicates that the funding allocation for project activities remained relatively unchanged over the period 1987 to 2003 (<http://www.nald.ca/nls/nlsfund/projects.htm>).

In addition to funds for public awareness activities, literacy organizations relied on annual NLS project funding to publish resource materials, newsletters, and provide training events for literacy tutors and practitioners. The websites of coalitions can be found on the National Adult Literacy Database (<http://www.nald.ca>) and the National Literacy Secretariat website (see <http://www.nald.ca/nls/nlsfund/projects.htm>).

The intent seemed to be to increase demand for learning through public awareness campaigns without concomitant consideration of ways to meet any resulting demand. In other words, the onus was on individuals to find a way to improve their skills once they were convinced of their need to do so. For those with limited education, the most likely option would be a volunteer tutor program, an uncertain option at best.

One of the significant impacts of the public awareness campaigns has been the recruitment of individuals with significant learning problems. The IALS self-rating scale showed that individuals at Level Two rated their skills as high as did many people who tested out at higher levels. Such individuals would not respond to calls to improve their literacy skills because they thought their skills were good or excellent already (IALS, 1995, Table 3.10). It should not be surprising, then, that public awareness campaigns tend to interest and attract individuals with more limited literacy levels. For a variety of reasons these individuals required more instruction time and specialized instruction than volunteers are unlikely to have (J. Baker, personal communication, November 26, 2002).

There has been much discussion since the recession of the 1990s about the merits of privatization as a way to increase responsiveness and decrease public expense in the fields of education and health care. This thinking has had an impact on adult education delivery as well (Selman et al., 1998). One strategy was to consider shifting services from public private delivery.

### **Private or Public Providers?**

According to the neoliberal perspective, private delivery of public services with the ensuing competition is a more efficient way of allocating resources. Public services may offer greater continuity of service but at higher costs due to union contracts and long term leases. This idea has figured in discussions about adult education delivery in both Canada and Sweden.

#### ***Sweden***

The AEI sought to diversify adult learning opportunities by allowing for private providers. Until 1992, formal adult education was provided by the public sector with nonformal education provided through labour market training and by the voluntary

sector. The introduction of private education with AEI was intended to diversify programming. In smaller centres, such as Kungsör, no private providers had shown any interest (SK 4, p. 2; SK 6, p. 2) but in larger centres, changes ranged from measured in Umeå to radical in Göteborg.

In Göteborg, the social democratic municipal government issued tenders for adult education and *komvux*, an old well-established program, lost all its funding and closed down because it had higher overhead costs, including unionized workers with seniority and experience (Beach & Carlson, 2003). This had significant budget implications because the *komvux* system was an established system with experienced, unionized staff. Although it offered a quality and reliable product, it might have been less flexible and seemed more costly than a privatized system.

In Umeå, a portion of the municipal funding for adult education in 2003 went to three private providers in addition to the municipal providers; a portion of the budget was reserved for municipal adult education (SU 1). The director of one private program said that “students that go into *komvux* must be more driven and individually motivated” whereas a residential school could offer classes and more support for students who had previously had problems in the regular school system (SU 13, p. 2). In May 2003, Lernia offered vocationally related courses to day care workers who wanted to improve their skills and knowledge about personal health. It also offered the European Computer Driving License (see <http://www.lernia.se>; <http://www.ecdl.com>).

The ABF union sponsored agency offered a wide range of courses, including the day school and the computer study circle which were described earlier. A private school offered an intense version of the compulsory high school courses, allowing participants to do their course work in the mornings and receive individual help during the

afternoons. The Umeå *folkuniversitetet* (folk university) focused on foreign languages. The ABF also offered foreign languages courses and when asked how an individual would choose between these options, a coordinator observed that people “who don’t have higher education feel more comfortable coming to our circles” (SU 11, p. 2)

A challenge for both public and private providers was uncertainty about what courses would be needed as the applications reviewed in the spring determined the demand for particular courses. There was a drop out rate of “20% before starting... if [applicants] can enter [university] without a course they were planning to take, they get a plan for traveling...they get a job. There are a lot of different reasons” (SU 1, p. 2). A *komvux* administrator commented that classes begin the term with “about 30 students...and at the end [of term] about 20. The dropout is a common problem [because] they take on too many classes, family problems, jobs” (SU 9, p. 3).

The issue of dropouts was a problem for budgeting and staffing because contracts committed the agency to the employees but there might not be classes for all of them to teach. In one suburb of Stockholm, teachers moved back and forth between the private and public providers because there were not enough students in one or other system for a full course. The doubling of student numbers that occurred during *kunskapslyftet* resulted in an ongoing staffing problem; after *kunskapslyftet*, “younger teachers went to other schools in the regular system” leaving adult education with only older teachers (SU 9 p. 1). In general, public providers have more fixed costs for infrastructure and staff contracts and so were not competitive with the private sector on a strictly economic basis. At the same time they offered job security, stability and a known entity for students, staff and the public.

### *Canada*

In Canada, private provision of adult education has been more in the vocational area because adult basic education would not generate profit. In Saskatchewan, within the last year, two private vocational schools went bankrupt mid-year leaving students with debt and no credentials. The one academic readiness course offered by a private company in Saskatoon prepared social assistance recipients for further study or employment. This was a very important, even essential program for some clients “who need to do some literacy and life skills before they start an academic program” (CS 4, p. 3). When the government decided it would no longer fund private companies to provide such programs, this agency closed.

#### **Policy in Urban and Rural Areas**

The development of comprehensive policies that suit diverse regions was a difficult challenge in both Canada and Sweden. A recent federal initiative by the Canadian Department of Agriculture was set up to retrain older farm workers (Saskatchewan Department of Post Secondary Education and Skills Training, 2002). It required a minimum of forty participants between ages of 40 and 55. This number of participants could not be found within the strict boundary of the college that obtained the project funding. What seemed a reasonable number from more densely populated eastern Canada was unrealistic in sparsely populated northeastern Saskatchewan.

In Sweden, one educator commented that the requirements for the AEI changed from one year to the next and that it was often hard to find enough of the specified target groups in smaller communities.

In 2001, now when you apply for your money you should think about all the disabled, you should go out to the villages and find all the women who haven't been educated. How is that possible if it is a kommun like (xx) where all of them

have been educated? They are farmers and, secondly, most of them who were interested had already studied. They [that municipality] have been losing a lot of students there and a lot of money. (SU 6, p. 3)

Generally, there was less demand for courses in smaller centres. This meant that courses might not be offered, or that adults might be incorporated in the regular high school programs. This happened in both Umeå and Kungsör, but to a greater extent in Kungsör. In some cases, students in Kungsör could travel daily by train to nearby centres to attend courses that were not offered locally; Kungsör kommun would pay the host municipality for this. Teachers moved back and forth between the high school program and the adult program and often they had both youth and adults in the same class.

The view from the centre was different from the view from the periphery and the options for individuals differed between rural and urban locations. Generally there were more demands and more resources in larger centres. Well-intentioned policymakers could not easily develop policies from a detached central position that served diverse contexts equally well. The options and problems facing immigrants were clearly very different in urban and rural areas. English as Second Language courses ranged anywhere from limited to unavailable in rural areas. *Swedish for immigrants* courses were offered in both Kungsör and Umeå but differed markedly in the numbers participating.

### **Childcare and Transportation – Barriers or Social Benefits?**

My findings suggested that social factors beyond adult education policy itself may have a significant impact on participation in learning opportunities. Beyond the issue of institutional barriers, situational factors such as childcare and transportation were often cited as factors that restrict a Canadian adult's learning possibilities (Hoddinott, 1998). In Sweden, social policies relating to childcare and transportation were not part of the adult education discussion and they seemed to be taken for granted.

These very factors may influence the relative numbers of men and women participating in adult education in the two countries. Next I give an overview of childcare and transportation in the two countries, while in Chapter Four I discuss their impact on individuals who participate in adult education.

### *Sweden*

Sweden provided maternity leave for one and a half years and universal childcare for children 18 months old they started school at age seven. The cost of childcare was based on salary of the parents: for students, in 2003 the minimum charge was 300 SEK (<\$60 CDN per month). Fifteen hours childcare of childcare per week was also available at no cost to the unemployed and for the older preschool children of mothers of newborns (SU 5). An elementary school that I visited in northern Sweden provided before and after school care for children from the elementary school and from three nearby preschools. The 15 teachers for the 100 children in the school divided responsibility for the before and after school programs. At noon, lunch was prepared everyday by the school kitchen and all children ate spaghetti and salad there along with staff and visitors on the day I was at the school.

Transportation was not a barrier for adult students in this study. Bus and train service was extensive in both Swedish sites and bicycles were a common mode of transportation. In Umeå, bike paths were clearly demarcated throughout the centre of the city, and even reportedly plowed in the winter, and the speed limit in the centre zone is 30 kilometres per hour, thereby giving pedestrians and bicycles the right of way.

### *Canada*

As mentioned in Chapter Four, childcare was not universally available and typically would be unavailable for children under the age of three years (Galloway,

2003). Preschool programs offered half-day programs for a few days per week for some targeted groups in inner city or aboriginal communities while others are operated as parent cooperatives.

The difference in availability of childcare in Canada and Sweden may be a significant factor in the relative difference in gender balance in adult education programs in the two countries. Access to reliable and affordable childcare is a key factor that can facilitate the return of many individuals to school. This factor may influence the relative percentages of men and women in adult education classes.

### **Policy and Informal Learning**

Kapsalis (2001) suggested that “at least half of the explanation for the...literacy gap between Canada and Sweden could be explained by Swedish participation in informal learning such as reading newspapers, volunteer activities, and using the library” (pp. 33-34). This raises questions about the premises of a second Canadian study that sought to find out why adults did not participate in adult upgrading and literacy programs (Long, 2002). Was this study asking the wrong question? In what ways were non-participants already learning and how might public policy support or detract from their informal learning and nonformal learning? What are effective ways of ensuring that skills are sustained?

#### ***Sweden***

The history of nonformal and informal learning outside of the school system dates back to the 1700s in Sweden (see Chapter Two). First the church promoted literacy in the home and, given the importance of the Lutheran church at that time, this was of great significance in the promotion of literacy. At the beginning of the twentieth century,

Folk High Schools and study circles were established to provide education for workers who did not have access to formal schooling.

State subsidies for popular education were first introduced in 1947 (Sohlman, 1998) and Rubenson (1997) stated that about two-thirds of Folk High School expenditures still came from the state (p. 76). Until the late 1960s, the popular movements through folk high schools and study circles played a key role in promoting self-education (Abrahamsson, 2001, p. 339) with the “aim [of] fostering democratic values and [stimulating] the participation in education of disadvantaged groups” (Sohlman, 1998, p. 169).

Study circles continued to play a very important part in the lives of certain sectors of the Swedish population. Public funding continued although, recently, guidelines about what constitutes a study circle were becoming stricter (SK 5, p. 3). One study circle participant commented that the organizations (voluntary organizations that offer study circles) were spending too much on administration and not enough on programming. The discussion of the pros and cons of Sweden’s proposed membership in the European Monetary Union by a group of seniors on a sunny spring afternoon four months in advance of the vote was a striking example of an effort to engage citizens in dialogue on public policy issues. I am unaware of any comparable recent government initiative in Canada to stimulate broad public discourse on a public issue.

Newspapers were available complimentary on buses and subways, and given that public transportation was major mode of transportation this provided an important opportunity for sustaining literacy skills. Milner stated that “daily newspaper circulation is four times higher in Sweden than it is in Canada” (Milner, 2002, p. 99) and that “reading daily newspapers remains an unquestioned part of everyday life [in Sweden]”

(p.109). Free newspapers in Canada tended to be limited to community tabloids or the complimentary newspapers given to air travelers, a select segment of the population.

The ratio of commercial television watching is reversed, with nearly 80% of Canadians dependent on television compared to less than 50% of Swedes (Milner, 2002, p. 100). Also in 2003, there were two there were two national public TV channels without advertising. Swedish adult education initiatives in 1967 had established an infrastructure for educational TV and radio (Rubenson, 1994a, pp. 370-371). As mentioned in Chapter Four subtitled television may provide an important way for immigrants and Swedes to gain and sustain literacy skills. They also are exposed to spoken English in this way, a second important language in Sweden.

Libraries can play an important outreach function delivering books to shut-ins and books for babies, projects that give childrens' books and information on the importance of reading to young children to new mothers in hospital. The Umeå library was centrally located, adjacent to the main public transit stop. Close to the entry was a large reading room with racks that displayed newspapers in languages ranging from the usual European languages to Eritrean, Arabic and others. The library "subscribes to more than one thousand magazines and newspapers in forty different languages" (Milner, 2002, p. 129). This seemed to be a very welcoming place for immigrants to Sweden and I observed many there who were reading newspapers in languages other than Swedish. I was able to obtain a library card immediately upon showing photo identification and giving a temporary address in the city. There also were computer terminals for the use of patrons.

*Canada*

Government support for the media is limited. It would be politically impossible for the government to consider subsidization either of the national newspapers given the recent very public competition between them. “The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation [which] was created in 1936...to educate Canadians about their country, their fellow citizens and the issues facing Canadian society” (Selman, Cooke, Selman & Dampier, 1998, p. 46), “in 1995 and 1996...suffered devastating [funding] cutbacks which significantly diminished the scope of its “unique role” in adult education (Selman et al., p. 290-291). In contrast to the Swedish situation, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, Canada’s one public TV and radio station, relies increasingly on advertising to fund the television network. Saskatchewan has one educational television channel without advertising.

A negative policy factor in Canada has been the imposition of 7% Goods and Services Tax on reading materials. This is a clear and highly symbolic contradiction of the government’s espoused endorsement of learning. The federal government has taxed reading materials since the introduction of the GST in 1991. Literacy organizations such as the Movement for Canadian Literacy lobbied largely unsuccessfully to have reading materials exempted from the tax. In 1997 schools, libraries and community based organizations were allowed an exemption on book purchases demonstrating the government’s support for formal learning. They first paid the tax and then claim a rebate on these taxes, a laborious administrative process that was difficult for small organizations to carry out in my personal experience. In addition, the tax on reading remains a negative factor for informal learning of greater significance for lower income people.

In Canada, library services for shut-ins and books for children are dependent on service clubs and non-profit organizations. Saskatchewan has an extensive library system that is available free of charge to taxpayers and municipal residents. There are 589 libraries organized into seven regional districts (*Saskatchewan libraries*, 2003). Libraries are supported by a municipal tax levy per resident and most First Nations reserves pay this tax as well. There is no charge for library usage and borrowing privileges although residents of one reservation near Melfort are not allowed to borrow books because James Smith band council has not paid taxes to support the library (P. Markland, personal interview, November 20, 2002). The Saskatoon Public Library, in a city twice the size of Umeå, has newspapers in five languages (Saskatoon Public Library, 2003). Many libraries are Community Access Program centres and so provide free Internet access. The federal government has made such access a priority.

### **Policy Evaluation and Research**

In times of fiscal restraint, there are understandable demands for public accountability. Evaluation of projects and activities that are publicly funded is mandatory. It might be hoped that evaluation would influence current and future policy development. In Sweden, a lot of resources were committed to evaluation both at a national level and at the municipal level. What does this look like from the program level? A project coordinator with many years of experience teaching in an elementary school was working for a small municipality during the AEI. She commented that the AEI required that,

Every year you had to apply for money and that was a huge report. It wasn't just like sending one piece of paper. You had to send in statistics and write an essay about why you should have that money. Then they would send you less than you had applied for or more than you had applied for. A lot of reporting and then you

had to report back about what you actually had achieved what you said you were going to and where the money went. (SU 6, p. 3)

When asked about the policy impact of an evaluation study she had completed, one researcher said she had offered to visit every school that had been part of the comprehensive study she had done but “so far no one [had] asked her to come” to discuss the findings. She thought that “the project coordinator [in the local municipality had] read the ...report and...picked up some things...and talked to the politicians” but she went on to say that “it is not always common for the commission members to read the reports” (SU 8, p. 1). Another project coordinator remarked that she did not see how the evaluation reports could have influenced the policy development because the policy directions and guidelines were changing so quickly (SU 1). Evaluation reports for the current period would barely be submitted by the time the next set of guidelines arrived.

Finally, a member of the AEI commission itself observed that,

The original commission continued to monitor and evaluate AEI; this involved contracting a lot of people and there was extra funding for this evaluation. The commission also led the task of paying special attention to the needs of disabled people to develop recommendations about what to do for this group. When the commission ended in 2000, there was no one left in charge of evaluation and follow-up. The researchers who had been contracted reported directly to the ministry. In Umeå, they are following three different cohorts for example. In Göteborg, they studied the evolution of AEI at the local level. For example, should AIE evolve separately from or within *komvux*? (A. Sohlman, personal communication, April 14, 2003)

Rubenson (1994 b) observed that adult education research in North America has been more focused on the individual than it has been in Europe where it has focused “on the political and societal realities and their implications for adult education practice” (p. 162). In Canada, there has not been a comparable policy initiative in adult education and therefore no broad evaluation. Each literacy project funded by the National Literacy

Secretariat is required to submit a summative evaluation. Ironically, this funding process seemed to be regressive because project-funding stipulations in Canada stated that the same activity could not be funded in consecutive years. If a project were successful and thorough in meeting its reporting requirements, it would not be eligible for refunding as a project in the next year. There seemed to be a presumption that successful projects would be able to attract funds from other levels of government or private sources.

The recent establishment of the Learning Institute as part of the federal government's innovation strategy is continuation in this research focus. "The institute will collect information about how people learn at all stages of their lives [beginning with] training in the workplace" (Scofield, 2003). It would be many years, if ever, that this institute with its focus on pedagogy could benefit those who are on adult education waiting lists now.

### **Summary**

Policy goals, guidelines, and tools as defined by policymakers in documents and public statements comprise Guba's policy-in-intent (1994). Because both Canada and Sweden sought to address the challenges of the knowledge economy, policy was made by those who accept the importance of learning as defined in the formal system and have benefited from that system. The term adult education as understood in Sweden allowed for a more inclusive asset-based approach while the term literacy in Canada led to a deficit perspective on limited adult literacy skills. Adult education in Sweden was valued as an entitlement of all Swedes either as compensatory or recurrent leading to both greater competitiveness as well as social equity. In Canada, the goal of adult education has been remedial to address a deficit. Although competitiveness in the world economy was a larger part of the rhetoric, the concept of *folkbildning* still seemed to underlie the

Swedish goals for adult education because priority continued to be given to those with the least education.

The Swedish state has had tacit responsibility for adult education within the construct of *folkbildning*. The state provided an infrastructure for adult education through local levels of government and enabled adult participation through grants, loans and study leave with priority given to the least educated age 50 and under. In Canada, priority in federal and provincial funding seemed to be given to those most likely to succeed in meeting academic or employment goals. For those who are not within specified target groups or who can not meet entrance requirements, either academic, ethnic or employment status, the onus typically falls on individuals to increase their skills with the help of the volunteer sector. Table 5.2 is a summary of similarities and differences in adult education policy in Canada and Sweden from this macro perspective.

Table 5.2  
*Comparing Policy-in-Intent*

	SWEDEN	CANADA
Terminology	Adult education (both compulsory and upper secondary education)	Adult literacy
Goal	Human Capital/ <i>folkbildning</i>	Human Capital
Public Philosophy	Education as a tool to build social equity and the society	Education as a tool to build the economy
Responsibility	The State, and the Individual	The individual, volunteer agencies, and the provinces
Process	Central planning	Public consultation; regional planning
Policy Network	Trade unions (quasi)	Business, unions, literacy groups
Timelines	1 year to implement AEI	no policy after ten years of discussion
Priority	The least educated	The most likely to complete the course or get a job
Tools – Funding	Study grants, study leave available nationwide	Provincial Training allowance (SK), Employment Insurance benefits
Tools - Public Awareness	No evidence of any national publicity campaigns	Learn campaign, family literacy day, national Literacy Action Day
Related social policy	Universal childcare and school lunches; public transportation	Childcare and school lunches for target populations
Informal learning	Subtitles on TV, newspaper subsidies	Greater commercial television, less newspaper reading, tax on reading materials

The process of policymaking in Sweden has been very centralized although over the 1990s there has been an increasing devolution of authority to municipal levels of government. In Canada, policymaking regarding adult education over the 1990s has consisted of extensive consultations at both the provincial and federal levels without

substantive policy outcomes to date. In neither country have policy discussions extended to ways to enhance informal learning, presumably because it could not be quantified.

A by-product of the centralized and decentralized systems of government in the two countries has been the policy networks that have developed. In Sweden, the trade unions have had a significant impact of national policy and given the high level of unionization in the country, this has served a substantive percentage of the population. On the other hand, it seemed that adult educators within the Swedish policy community had neither the need nor the avenue to develop an effective policy network to advocate for their programs and students at the national level. Consequently, no cohesive group monitored and gave voice to concerns about current decentralization outcomes.

In Canada, the policy network related to adult education has developed an extensive policy network but this lobby effort has yet to yield significant sustainable support for adult education and literacy programs in spite of a considerable investment of time and money.

Swedish policy developed quickly from within a centralized system; the major changes in adult education policy encompassed in the Adult Education Initiative were effected within one year in Sweden. In Canada, no policy had been articulated a decade after the release of the IALS report. In Saskatchewan, the provincial literacy strategy had not been released over two years after policy discussions began. Although the centralized system of decision making in Sweden enabled rapid policy development and change, it did not facilitate public consultation on this issue. The decentralized system in Canada depended on varying levels of public consultation at the risk of delaying or negating the possibility of policymaking. The result was a lot of consultation but to date no policy, and no increase in learning opportunities for adults.

There was also a significant difference in the policy tools used in the two countries. In seeking to increase adult education/literacy levels, public resources were allocated in different ways in Canada and Sweden. In Sweden, a very substantial increase in public expenditures on adult education sought to increase and diversify the adult learning opportunities. The Swedish goal was to better meet the needs of individual learners by increasing the supply of learning options.

In Canada, substantial resources went into publicity and public awareness at the same time as the tax on reading through the GST was maintained, giving a conflicting message about government priorities. These efforts created some demand for literacy but there was not an increase in funding for program delivery for groups who self-identified such as the learning disabled, aboriginal people and English as Second Language. Instead volunteers and community based organizations provided a patchwork of literacy instruction. At the same time, there was a significant increase in the reporting requirements for literacy grant recipients, thereby further eroding program delivery. The impact of policy changes on policy-in-experience, the implementation of policy, deserves further study beyond the scope of this research.

Among the greatest differences in policy related to adult education was with respect to childcare, transportation, and funding for informal education. In Sweden, public funding provided for other universal social programs such as childcare, school lunches, and transportation. These universal social benefits facilitate participation by adults who decide to return to school, often when and because they are parents, but these policies did not seem to be part of the discussion around adult education. In Canada, childcare and transportation were often cited as barriers for adults who wanted to study (Hoddinott, 1998).

The public/private debate in education occurred in both countries but in Canada the debate was about cost effectiveness, while in Sweden, it hinged more on diversity and flexibility of programming. Adults in rural and urban centres had differing needs and opportunities in both countries. Centrally planned policy often did not take into account the limited numbers of people and limited resources in smaller centres.

The marketplace metaphor of supply and demand provides a useful perspective for critiquing the outcomes of government policy in the two countries. During the Adult Education Initiative, Sweden focused on expanding the supply of adult education options. Not only did adult education trains continue to run on schedule, but, in addition, new modes of transportation were introduced and more people could get “tickets to ride” in the form of study grants and loans. In Canada, in the absence of specific policy, the focus seemed to be on raising public awareness about the importance of literacy in an effort to increase interest and demand. The response to an increased demand was left to the volunteer sector and the provinces, such as they were willing and able to fund adult education. In the Swedish case, the paradox of meeting labour market needs through personally motivated learning has yet to be resolved. In addition, the question of how well politicians at the municipal level understood adult education and how, in future, they would value it against other municipal priorities remains to be seen.

## Chapter Six

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUDING REMARKS

*Adult education is like a train. You can get on and off when you want. But trains need to run on a track and have a schedule.* (L. Johannesson, Göteborg, June 6, 2003)

This chapter is a summary of a qualitative study of adult learning in Canada and Sweden that was conducted over an 18-month period beginning January 2002. The goal of the study was to inform policy and practice in Canada by identifying similarities and differences in adult education and related social policy in the two countries. The basis for this applied policy analysis was a conceptual framework of policy as intention, practice, and experience based on Guba's (1984) model and the New Literacy Studies scholars' perspective on situated adult learning. At the micro level, I sought to determine who was learning and why, and how and where they were learning. At the macro level, I compared policy goals, the process of policy development and policy tools.

Johannesson's (above) metaphor of adult education as a train was useful in comparing the data about adult education in the two countries. Train schedules, ticket prices, and destinations were analogous to the availability of adult learning opportunities, access to them, and goals.

Sweden had many more scheduled and unscheduled learning opportunities than did Canada. Although there were similarities in the political rhetoric about human capital investment in Canada and Sweden, significant differences occurred between the two countries in the implicit public philosophy, the policy development process and policy tools related to adult learning. In Sweden, adult education was an investment in both social capital and human capital.

In this chapter, I discuss my findings and summarize my analysis of adult learning in the two countries. I conclude with a consideration of some implications for theory, further research and for public policy and my own critical reflections.

### **Background and Purpose of the Study**

Since the 1995 release of the International Adult Literacy Study, literacy advocates in Canada have used the findings to promote public support for literacy programs. This publicity generated questions about what was behind the difference between the Canadian and Swedish results. My own interest in this question arose from many years of experience in the field of adult education through which I came to understand the importance of literacy skills in contemporary Canadian society. I had come to feel that literacy programs at present were not able to address the needs of many adult learners and, furthermore, that public awareness campaigns for literacy were not relevant to many of the Canadians who might benefit from improving their literacy skills.

### **Policy-in-Experience and Adult Learning**

While valuable in other ways, quantitative studies do not demonstrate why adults might choose to improve their skills or ways in which they might do so because individuals may not see the need for the dominant literacy skills within the context of their everyday lives. For example, they may already have a good job or realize that more education will not guarantee a better job (Livingstone, 2003). Potential adult students may have unpleasant memories of their schooling and be reluctant to repeat the experience. Are there enough trains running and are they going where adults want to go? Can adults get a ticket to ride on the train they want? Just as effective transportation must serve public needs, so also effective adult education policy requires an

understanding of individual perspectives on literacy. This section compares motivations and experiences of those in the study who were participating in formal or nonformal adult learning.

### ***Who was Learning and Why?***

Adults learn when they both want to learn and have the opportunity to do so (Langer, 1987). Swedish and Canadian adults shared similar motives for going back to school. They had not completed school for a variety of reasons including poverty, family problems, or lack of interest. In this study, some of the reasons individuals gave for studying were:

- improving job prospects;
- helping their children with schoolwork;
- meeting new people, “doing coffee” (Assarsson & Sipos-Zackrisson, 2001);
- learning specific skills, or
- simply learning something new.

The development of specific skill and knowledge and social contact were both important. Often adults realized the importance of getting further education and were “more focused” once they were older and had children.

Nevertheless adults who had been out of school for some time often said they had forgotten what they had learned in school, lacked confidence in a formal learning context, and had trouble adjusting to the learning environment. Orientation courses could help prepare adults for the routine of study and improve their chances of success, yet adults frequently felt they were not learning anything in such courses. In both

countries, older workers particularly men were less likely to participate in adult education programs.

In the two Canadian sites, both men and women participated and the majority of adult learners were of aboriginal origin. Discrimination in mainstream schooling may also have been a factor in the case of aboriginal adults in Saskatchewan (Miller, 2001). Many immigrants could not pass the pretest entrance requirement for basic education after completing the funded English as Second Language training. Canada did not provide universal compensatory education as a second chance for adults who had for some reason not completed their education as youth.

In Sweden, more women than men were enrolled in adult upgrading programs in both Kungsör and Umeå; Sweden's compensatory system of education had long since provided for those who had been excluded from high school education by the hierarchical education system that existed prior to 1957 school reforms. As a result, many students currently studying were recent high school graduates who needed to improve their grades for acceptance into post-secondary programs.

Immigrants remained in *Swedish for immigrants* classes until they met national standards for the Swedish language and as mentioned earlier, the majority of students in basic adult upgrading were foreign-born (Boström et al., 2001) indicating that they could get into adult basic education programs if they needed Swedish credentials.

When I compared the overall experience of adult learners in the two countries, I saw that the biggest difference between Canada and Sweden was not in the classroom experience itself, but rather in how adults got in to the classroom. In Sweden, there were many scheduled trains available, as well as other modes of transportation; everyone (under age 50) could get on a train without a ticket and could receive funding and other

support, such as childcare, to do so. In Canada, the train schedule was irregular and only certain groups of people could get tickets.

In Canada, adult upgrading was a prerequisite to higher education and, often, to employment. There were long waiting lists for adult basic education programs in both Saskatoon and Melfort and the budget for training allowances was often spent before the academic year end, so that some who wanted to study might not get funding; they could not “get a ticket to ride.” Canadians who wanted to upgrade basic skills often had to travel some distance to study or had to arrange childcare in an ad hoc manner every day, making it difficult to attend and focus on their studies. Funding for transportation and living expenses, affordable and reliable childcare, access to a course of study, all of these were barriers to be overcome in Canada, but were widely accepted and universal social benefits in Sweden. English as a Second Language training was time-limited, resulting in very different outcomes for adults who entered classes with a variety of educational and language backgrounds. Typically immigrants completed their allowed ESL classes without enough English to pass the pretest for entrance into adult upgrading. The school lunch program and neighbourhood childcare, both before and after school, removed a major worry for Swedish parents who wanted to study.

### ***Where and How were Adults Learning?***

Adult learning can take place in formal, nonformal and informal ways; the Swedish state supported adult education in all three ways. With respect to formal learning, there were no fees charged for education from kindergarten through to post-secondary education. Swedes throughout the country have had access to formal education through the municipal adult education system since 1967. Tri-partite agreements provided workplace education for unionized workers. In addition, study

circles offered by the national voluntary organizations provided nonformal learning that could be more responsive to individual interests. Adults could choose the circles where they felt comfortable, where they were comfortable with the discourse.

In Sweden, adults usually did not have to wait to enter formal adult education programs and they had the opportunity of learning in a variety of ways ranging from the formal *komvux* system to the study circles offered by a variety of agencies. Varying levels of counselling and mentoring support were also available. Moreover, learning at any level seemed to be accepted and valued.

With regard to adults with special learning needs, Sweden provided language training for immigrants and refugees until they achieved competency. The more quickly an immigrant gained the language skills to get a job and be self-supporting, the greater the chances of acceptance and integration into the mainstream society. This makes more sense for both the individuals and the communities they are moving into than the time-limited language courses with uncertain outcomes provided for immigrants in Canada. Professional teachers with extensive experience and in-service training about dyslexia taught dyslexic adults in classrooms in the Swedish sites in this study. Both Swedish for immigrants and the dyslexia classes were part of the formal municipal adult education system, a more dependable and systematic approach than the volunteer tutoring available to learning disabled adults and second language learners (after they have completed their language training allotment) in Canada.

In Canada, there was no universally available publicly funded system of adult basic education to provide compensatory education for adults in any jurisdiction during the time frame of this study. Instead, adults functioning at a low literacy level usually had to avail themselves of a patchwork of volunteer programs or projects offered by

community based organizations. There was no reliable schedule of adult learning opportunities, nor did all Canadians have the financial means to study.

The recourse for those who did not meet entrance requirements was to seek out volunteer tutors or drop-in learning centres, if these existed. The recruiting and training of volunteers was laborious and time-consuming and could not ensure experienced instruction for adults, particularly those with special needs.

The charity nature of this provision could be a disincentive, and often a disservice, to adults who might lack self-confidence or need special help in addressing learning needs. Reliance on project funding rather than more secure operational funding meant that many staff hours were spent writing proposals and reports at the expense of service delivery. In addition, there was the uncertainty of relying on the volunteer sector to help adults who might have had difficulties learning in the regular school system when they had professional teachers. Furthermore, how do the hours spent training volunteers compare to the hours those same volunteers actually spend tutoring learners? The “adult education train” was not frequent or reliable, and travel on it was limited to certain categories of people.

Adult education presents a similar hope and promise to undereducated adults in Canada and Sweden. Adults in both countries participated in adult upgrading and literacy programs if they had the necessary financial and other social supports to do so but only if they saw the learning as positively “situated” in their lives and communities, a benefiting themselves or their families. The difference in the number and variety of learning opportunities and the access of adults to them in Canada and Sweden reflected differences in policy-in-intent.

### **Policy-in-Intent and Adult Learning**

Literacy has become a commodity with emphasis put on the product, its packaging and marketing, but not often on what the consumer wants to buy. To use the train metaphor, the importance of traveling is advertised, but limited opportunities to do so are often restricted. An empirical study such as IALS (1995) can not adequately explain the causes or nature of differences in adult literacy levels between countries, or even within countries, and is therefore not a sufficient basis for policy development. As Husén (1999) stated “policymakers, planners, and administrators want generalizations and rules which apply... to a whole system... [such as the IALS data but] teaching and learning happens at the individual level” (p. 37). Policy-in-experience, the micro view of policy, comprises the impact of policy on individuals (Guba, 1984), in this case adult learners.

Policy-in-intent, the macro view, includes the goals, strategies, regulations and policy development process policymakers used to address a problem (Guba, 1984, p. 64). At this level, I compared explicit and implicit policy goals, the policy development process, and policy tools in Sweden and Canada drawing on public documents and interviews at national and local levels. Centralized policy development and an underlying public philosophy that considered education as an entitlement and second chance for Swedish adults contrasted with decentralized policy development where low literacy was thought a deficit and adult basic education was seen as remedial. This was implied by one of my initial observations. There was a difference in terms used to discuss literacy, adult education and adult learning in the two countries.

### *Comparing Terminology*

A major challenge I faced throughout this study and in describing the findings resulted from the different terminology used in the two countries. The term “literacy” was not used in Sweden in discussing adult education and there was no subcategory such as “learner” to differentiate those who had a basic literacy skill level. As the study progressed, I became increasingly uncomfortable using the term ‘learner’ for adults studying at the basic adult education level. This term did not have meaning for key informants in Sweden who used the term ‘student’ to refer to adults regardless of whether they were in the primary or upper secondary education.

In Sweden, adult education was a comprehensive term that ranged from *grundskolan* to upper secondary and post-secondary education for adults. Literacy programming in Canada was distinct from adult education and the term ‘practitioner’ distinguished volunteer tutors and instructors who instructed adults at the basic level. In Sweden, I did not observe a comparable volunteer component in the delivery of adult education and the term ‘teacher’ was used regardless of the level of instruction.

The terminology used in Canada implied a deficit perspective. Despite efforts to destigmatize the term ‘literacy’ and to celebrate the accomplishments of ‘learners’ in events like Literacy Action Day and International Adult Learners’ Week, these terms continued to differentiate adults at the basic level from adults in higher levels of the Canadian education system. In contrast, the Swedish terminology reflected an understanding that adults were entitled to education whatever their starting point. The adult educators I spoke with in Sweden were typically unaware of the IALS (1995) results and, notably, I did not see evidence of Swedish participation in International

Literacy Day, International Adult Learners' Week (OECD, 2003) or the follow-up study to IALS.

### ***Goals and Beneficiaries of Adult Education Policy***

Historically, government campaigns to improve adult literacy levels within countries were most successful when there was symmetry between national goals and individual aspirations. This was revealed in the historical review of literacy strategies presented by Arnove and Graff (1987). Governments and religious bodies since the time of the Protestant Reformation generally followed their own objectives in promoting literacy for the masses. When personal fears of evil encouraged individuals to follow closely the teachings of the church, or when citizens supported a national uprising against anti-colonialism, large scale government campaigns promoted by church and/or state enjoyed some success.

In the case of Scotland, Sweden, Germany, Cuba, Nicaragua, and Tanzania literacy was promoted by the dominant state religion or as part of a revolutionary process, and was embraced by the population (Houston, 1987; Johansson, 1987; Gawthrop, 1987; Leiner, 1987; Arnove, 1987; Unsicker, 1987). In China (Hayford, 1987) and the Soviet Union (Eklof, 1987), education was imposed as a mechanism of state control. In the Experimental World Literacy Program (Gillette, 1987) and UNESCO's (2003) current International Decade for Literacy, the lack of resources and sustaining contexts for literacy compromised goal achievement. Regardless of context, the best intentions of politicians are unlikely to bear fruit unless the social context encourages and supports reading.

In both Canada and Sweden, government documents emphasized the need for a skilled workforce to compete in the knowledge economy of today's global marketplace.

Nevertheless, the understanding of adult education as a tool for raising the educational levels of the population and thereby increasing social equity seemed deeply rooted and still widely accepted in Swedish society. Education then was considered a means of *folkbildning*, building the society, and therefore a social rather than solely individual responsibility. Top priority in spending of public funds for adult education continued to be given to the least educated in the society, as it had been since the establishment of *komvux* in 1967. This policy guided funding allocations in the municipalities in this study.

Swedish politicians, from both ends of the political spectrum, believed that adult education would remain a priority in future years. The understanding of adult education as a second, third, or even fourth chance was expressed by the chairman of the Umeå board of education. Although the importance of retraining workers is considered as critical within the Human Capital paradigm, it is nevertheless based within Social Capital enhancement. Is this policy grounded in a well-educated population, as suggested by Milner (2002), and supported by an extensive network of learning opportunities beyond the formal sector? A public philosophy that endorses adult learning underlies a large public expenditure on adult education in Sweden, and those with limited education have not been stigmatized by policy or in terminology. The state demonstrates its responsibility for education by giving priority to the least educated as a second chance of completing a formal education.

In Canada, adult education and literacy programming seem solidly situated in the Human Capital paradigm. Government responsibility for literacy at the federal level fell within the ministry of Human Resources Development, now Human Resources and Skill Development. There is a stigma attached to low literacy and, as all Canadians are

consider to have had a chance in school, those with low literacy skills were responsible for their own situation. The assignment of recent literacy hearings to the Ministerial Committee for the Status of Persons with Disabilities underscored this deficit definition of the literacy issue.

In Saskatchewan, cancellation of an over-subscribed adult education and General Equivalency Diploma (GED) program in inner city Saskatoon exemplified the predominant value placed on employment as a goal of adult education policy. Public funds for adult education were commonly allocated to those most likely to succeed, with adult basic literacy relegated to the charitable and volunteer sector. How might the social equity and adult literacy profile of Canada change if adults with the least education were given priority in the allocation of public funds?

### ***Policy Development***

At the time this study was conducted, the Swedish government supported adult learning in a spectrum of formal and informal ways. Sweden had a centralized process of government decision-making and a “capacity for radical policy innovation, but with widespread consultation and great efforts to wear down and convert opposing interest” (Heidenheimer, Hecllo, & Adams, 1983, p. 317). The Adult Education Initiative was established throughout the country within a one year time frame, notwithstanding some difficulties in implementation at the local level, a reflection of this strong centralized policymaking.

The central policy guidelines resulted in an effort to achieve overall equality throughout the country in programs and services. The understanding of adult education as an entitlement of all Swedes resulted in significant allocation of state funding to various types of adult education. Some nonformal learning opportunities, such as study

circles and labour market training, were so established that they seemed to be taken for granted and did not figure in public policy discussions.

A decade after the release of IALS (1995), there was no national literacy policy in Canada, despite policymakers and business leaders promoting the need to increase adult literacy levels (Canada, 2003). The decentralized policymaking process led to a lengthy and ineffectual process of policymaking where regional consultations took place at the expense of decision-making and program delivery. The process of consultative policymaking was labeled “policy churning” (Tuijnman, personal interview, April 15, 2003), a way of delaying, deferring or even denying the possibility of policy interventions. The decentralized decision-making and authority for education has resulted in no clear or standard access or increased learning opportunities for Canadian adults.

### ***Policy Tools***

Sweden has had a national infrastructure for the delivery of adult education since 1967. The Adult Education Initiative (Sohlman, 1999) invested additional funding into the system, at a level surprising even to Swedes, as it sought to increase participation in adult education by extending grants and loans to individuals in adult basic education programs; educational leave was also extended to those who wanted to participate in adult basic education. The AEI sought to diversify learning opportunities so they would be more reflective of regional and individual needs. Policy was interpreted and implemented differently at the community level in Swedish communities in the years following the AEI. The introduction of private provision has had mixed results depending on the context and implementation strategies in various municipalities.

In Canada, public relations campaigns at the national and provincial levels strove to stimulate public and individual support for literacy and learning. Events such as Family Literacy Day and Literacy Action Day expended considerable resources in this promotion of literacy. Public resources were also spent on an extensive policy network comprised of literacy coalitions at the provincial level and national organization. A policy network of literacy advocates and adult learners from across Canada had spent considerable expense and effort in organizing Literacy Action Day over the ten years since 1993. Provincial representatives in this year's event said that, on the whole, they were received well by the parliamentarians and government officials they met with (Movement for Canadian Literacy, meeting, October 24, 2003) but it might be assumed that those who agreed to meetings were favourably predisposed to the message. The question is what actual impact this policy network has had over the past ten years on literacy policy and programming. In concrete terms has Literacy Action Day resulted in more learning opportunities at the adult basic education level?

The improvement of literacy skills was considered an individual responsibility and delivery of skill development at a basic level fell largely to the volunteer sector. In 1997, Saskatchewan introduced a Provincial Training Allowance to support individuals who wanted to study at adult basic education levels (Saskatchewan Post Secondary Education and Skills Training). This made study possible for some individuals who could not have participated without the funding. It also shifted clients from social services onto training files that served a political purpose for the provincial government. Waiting lists for formal adult education programs rose and fell in response to the availability of funds.

### ***Private versus Public Provision***

The introduction of private provision of adult education in Sweden provided for greater variety of programming in Umeå, but had no impact in Kungsör where private businesses showed no interest in providing adult education. In the Canadian sites, there was no equivalent private provision of basic adult education. In contrast to Sweden, the volunteer sector in Canada provided most of the basic entry level of literacy tutoring through community-based organizations and public institutions. Considerable staff time was often allocated to administration responsibilities of grant writing and reporting at the expense of program delivery.

### ***The Role of Informal Learning***

Although Livingstone (2000) reported that the informal sector was where most adults were already learning and other studies have shown the importance of situated learning, policy discussions focused almost exclusively on formal and nonformal learning. Public policy in Sweden encouraged informal learning through subsidies to newspapers and publicly funded television and other media, and libraries.

In Canada, by contrast, the federal government continued to apply the Goods and Services Tax to reading materials. The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, established in the 1930s for nation-building purposes, suffered serious funding cutbacks during the 1990s as discussed in Chapter Five (Selman et al., 1998, pp. 290-291). Given that adults with low literacy skills are less likely to participate in adult education activities (IALS, 1995), and the many barriers that were discussed earlier, public policy should concern itself more with supporting, encouraging, and extending the situated learning that is already happening.

### ***Evaluating Policy***

In Sweden, the tradition of research and centralized data collection meant that a lot of effort went into evaluation with a macro focus. In Canada, evaluation seemed more directed at summative evaluation as a vehicle for public accountability.

“Instructors and administrators are seen as the main beneficiaries” (Rubenson, 1994 b, p. 156) of research focusing on the micro level; there has not been a tradition of macro focus in research. The current research-in-practice initiative is an effort to encourage practitioners to conduct research (Research in Practice, 2002) but it will necessarily have a continuing focus on pedagogy rather than broad policy issues. As valuable as this could be, programs are rarely given the funding that would practitioners to take on yet another task.

In both countries, the link between policy evaluation and policy formulation remained tenuous at best. In Sweden, program administrators collected a lot of summative data on an annual basis, but policy changes seemed to be implemented before the data could have been collated and interpreted at the national level. In Canada, research focused on the implementation level rather than on a broad policy level, as implied by the recently established Canadian Council on Learning which is charged with finding out “how Canadians learn, what the outcomes are, what good learning practices are” (former Minister Jane Stewart as cited by Scoffield, 2003).

### ***Policy and People***

What is the experience of adults with respect to adult education policy? What is the relationship between policy-in-intent and policy as experienced? Individual motivation in the two countries was similar: better jobs, self-improvement and a better life for families. The difference between the two countries at the time of this study was

in the number and variety of learning opportunities and the access to them. There were clear differences in the extent to which each country was providing for the learning needs and interests of adults.

In Sweden, current policy goals to build human capital were based on the culturally accepted goals of *folkbildning*. Formal adult education was considered a second chance and an entitlement and the state supported formal, nonformal, and informal learning in a variety of ways.

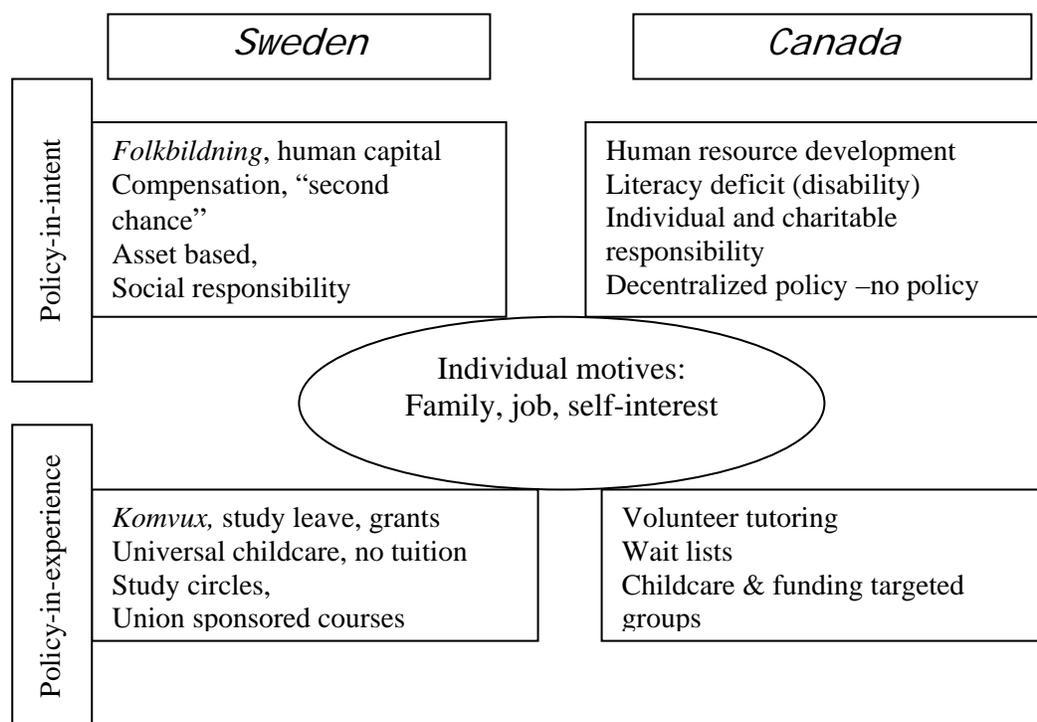


Figure 6.1. Comparing Adult Learning in Sweden and Canada

In Canada, adult education emphasized economic goals with priority given to those most likely to succeed in jobs or higher education. That the National Literacy Secretariat remains part of Human Resources Development rather than the new Department of Social Development suggests that policymakers consider literacy as primarily a part of a Human Capital agenda rather than as instrumental in building social cohesion. Adult

basic education was remedial rather than compensatory, and literacy was a charity rather than an entitlement. Targeted programs that served certain client groups in place of universal programs tended to stigmatize those considered in need. Project grants, rather than sustainable program funding, expended resources for program maintenance that could otherwise go to delivery of learning opportunities thereby enabling more adults to access formal adult education.

Though Swedish politicians and administrators in this study spoke of the role of adult education in ensuring that Sweden remained competitive in a global economy, the infrastructure for provision of adult education continued to ensure that the least educated had access to programs provided by professional teachers. Adult education was considered as foundational to building of the society, albeit recently couched in terms of economic competitiveness. State support for a variety of informal learning opportunities further helped to build social capital. Up to and including the time frame of this research, public resources were spent on delivery of adult education rather than publicizing its importance. Whether this will remain true once decision-making devolves to politicians at the municipal level is yet to be seen. The Göteborg example has been disconcerting in that privatization resulted in a loss of professional expertise and growing waiting lists for adult education programs (Beach & Carlson, 2003).

In Canada, though the rhetoric of politicians and business leaders argued for increased literacy levels, it was largely left up to individuals, with help from the charitable sector, to improve their own literacy levels. The original positioning of the National Literacy Secretariat within the Secretary of State indicated that literacy had a part to play in building social capital. The shift of this agency away from the Secretary of State to Human Resources Development Canada indicated the primacy of Human

Capital development as the rationale for improving literacy levels. Provincial programs revealed this philosophy by their focus on employment as the measure of program outcomes. The “adult education trains” were irregular with many changes in schedules and destinations over time. Adults often could not “get a ticket to ride.”

### ***Supply and Demand - Challenges for Policymakers***

The Swedish response to high unemployment in the face of the knowledge economy and globalization was to increase the number and variety of “adult education trains” and the number of passes available. These efforts to increase the supply and diversity of adult education learning opportunities did not result in participation by the prototypic “Mannfried,” an older industrial worker, who was happy with his lot in life. Post AEI, there was an effort to move even further toward demand-driven learning opportunities through the establishment of learning centres. An additional challenge is how to deal with over-capacity in the formal adult education system.

More than thirty years after the introduction of the municipal adult education system, an ever smaller number of adults needed or sought compensatory education, particularly in smaller centres. How can municipalities ensure regular and scheduled trains when there is little interest in traveling on them? What are the challenges of staffing and programming in continuous intake? Can learning centres address this? What of public accountability when learning is self-directed? And finally, will individually motivated learning provide the skills needed in the workplace?

In Canada, considerable resources were spent on public awareness campaigns, with little consideration about how to respond to the resulting demand. The importance of traveling was reinforced in the public mind but the number of “adult education trains” has not increased. In fact, the resulting demand, not surprisingly, often came from

individuals with very limited education, learning disabilities, or second language issues. These individuals could benefit from the personal support that volunteers provide, but they also deserved to have professional and experienced help to achieve their educational goals. Why should people have to wait for up to two years to get into an upgrading course if this is so important to the economy and society?

The Canadian government appeared to want adult literacy levels to improve but rather than establishing public policy and funding to support adult learning, seemed to make the assumption that the volunteer sector or the provinces would respond to the demand resulting from increased public awareness about the importance of literacy. There was more rhetoric than policy or funding for literacy.

### **Do Policymakers Forget the People?**

*“Water is invisible to fish”* Marshall McLuhan (Globe and Mail, 2003)

Adult educators and policymakers are themselves firmly entrenched in the existing educational system. They have succeeded in the system and benefited from it and are likely to make assumptions about how it relates to others. To extend the travel analogy, policymakers typically can travel by air and do not use the “adult basic education train.” How can policymakers and educators move beyond their own world view to design policy that better suits the learning needs and daily realities of individuals at the experience end of the policy spectrum?

The IALS (1995) provided a large-scale picture of literacy against a set international standard that placed a focus on the skills, and lack of them, of countries and individuals. The IALS revealed that many individuals may be disadvantaged in contemporary society, but it also positioned literacy as a technical skill. When skills are measured against a standard, a deficit is quantified if standards are not met. The

resulting implication is that literacy levels will improve if the right methods and opportunities are made available through the formal education system.

A recent newspaper column urged business people to “focus on what clients want – not on what you want to sell them” (Babcock, 2003). This seems only common sense and a relevant message for policymakers and adult educators as well. Adults learn when they are motivated to learn and have the opportunity to do so. Are there enough “adult education trains,” are they going where people want to go, and do people have the resources to get on them?

In the words of the Swedish administrator quoted at the beginning of the chapter, adult education should be like a train where people can get on and off when they want to. As she cautioned, however, trains needed to run on a schedule. Adults need to know the destination and schedule of the trains and have the resources needed to get on board. In Sweden, people know when the trains run; they are not kept waiting and most have the resources they need to get on. As Sweden strives to diversify the types of trains running, policymakers and adults do not necessarily have the same preferred destinations in mind.

### **Implications for Theory, Research, Practice and Policy**

My goal in this research was to understand policy factors that might contribute to differences in adult literacy levels in Canada and Sweden and, thereby, find options for improving adult literacy strategies in Canada. My approach was one of comparative and applied policy research. At the same time, I am ever cognizant of the need to understand why things are the way they are from a social science perspective as a basis for sound policy. There are significant questions to be answered with respect to literacy and social inclusion/exclusion and current social problems such as family violence, gangs, and

even terrorism. I therefore agree with Ozga's (2000) call for a critical theory approach to studies in education.

Some theoretical questions that could be addressed include:

- Why does the human capital perspective enjoy ascendancy in policymaking circles?
- What role does literacy have, if any, in building social cohesion?
- What might Canadian society look like if priority in access to adult education were given to the least educated over the next thirty years?
- What is the role of informal learning in sustaining adult literacy levels?

My concern is to find solutions that can have more immediate benefit to individuals. My focus in this study was primarily on the policy-in-intent and policy-in-experience phases of the policy cycle with policy-in-practice providing a perspective on each. There is a need for much more research at the policy-in-practice phase, particularly in a time when the accountability demands on literacy programs are increasing. If learning is most effective when individually motivated, how can adult education policy, whether driven by Human Capital or Social Capital Theory, best realize public policy goals? Could policy provide preferential support for those with the least education while at the same time nurturing independent, self-sustaining learning that will extend beyond credentialing? If students, young or old, are to retain skills beyond the point when they complete their schooling, they must become lifelong learners. What strategies best enable that breakthrough experience of "getting into it and it's very interesting what I'm learning" (CM 9, p. 1) for all students? This type of learning transcends the concepts of social and human capital while contributing to both.

From an applied policy perspective there are a number of specific research questions that relate directly to practice and policy:

- What are the relative expenditures on formal, nonformal and informal adult education in the two countries? (As indicated, this is not an easy task).
- How much is expended annually on promoting literacy in Canada? Has the demand for formal adult learning changed as a result?
- How many learning opportunities could occur in Canada if the funds currently spent on consultations and public awareness were spent on providing programs and the related supports, such as childcare, and actual programs, for the least educated?
- What are the relative costs and benefits of the volunteer model and project funding for literacy programs compared to ongoing programs?
- What is the social impact of time-limited rather than outcome-determined provision of language and literacy training for immigrants?
- Does the demographic profile of participants in various forms of adult learning differ in the two countries?
- How will decentralization affect adult education outcomes in Sweden?
- Do participants in the trade union supported courses go on to further education?
- What is the relative cost-effectiveness of targeted versus universal programs?
- What is the impact on delivery of frequent changes in mandate for adult education?
- How effective is the policy network with respect to adult literacy?

The findings of this study can have direct relevance for adult literacy policy and practice. The research was part of a larger Valuing Literacy in Canada project funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council. I look forward to discussing these issues with literacy advocates and policymakers in regional consultations across Canada during the final phase of this project. The goal of these consultations is to identify ways in which the findings inform adult education policy and practice in this country.

### **Critical Reflections of an Adult Educator**

The past thirty months have afforded me a unique opportunity to step back from adult literacy, a field in which I worked for many years. As Brookfield (1995) commented, one way to improve practice is to view it through a new lens. I have really valued the chance to read and think about adult literacy in a way I did not have time for as a practitioner. I confirmed my understanding that language in an academic setting tends to be about establishing credibility, rank, and hierarchy, while in the literacy field language is about communication. The study of adult learning and education policy in Sweden enabled me to think critically about adult education and literacy policy, as I knew them.

With respect to methodology, I have learned the importance of allowing enough time for qualitative research to unfold. Ideally, this study would have been conducted over a longer time period. This would require living in a context and being open to learning opportunities as they arise. I found it a challenge to balance the participant and observer roles as my natural inclination was to be a participant. I realized that every meeting and every encounter had the potential to shed light on the research, and I have therefore recognized the importance of always being prepared to record data accurately and thoroughly. I realize that not only is literacy situated, but also policy is situated in a

cultural and political context, meaning that while a study such as this can cast critical light on existing policy and practice, it is not possible to make direct policy transfers from one place to another. Thus while I have a better understanding of policy differences underlying the differences in adult literacy levels between Canada and Sweden, it remains to be seen how the findings can best inform Canadian policy.

On a personal level, I now evaluate policy initiatives and projects in terms of whether or not they increase effective learning opportunities and access to them for adults. I question the expenditure of public resources on public awareness campaigns and yet more studies of how adults learn at the expense of making learning opportunities more accessible to a greater number of adults, particularly those with limited education. I am also concerned about growing social disparities in Canada.

I believe that all Canadians should have the opportunity to acquire the literacy skills they need and want; I concur that this equity of opportunity is foundational to both the social and economic health of communities and the society as a whole (Etzioni, 1996). I would like to see a pan-Canadian strategy that would guarantee all Canadians the right and access to adult basic education and support for informal, situated learning through study circles such as the Reflect model (Archer & Cottingham, 1996) -literacy through community development rather than literacy for community development. The resources now committed to raising public awareness about the importance of literacy could be assigned to providing these learning opportunities. This would lead to greater social cohesion than the current system that tells people it is important to take a train but leaves people waiting on the platform with no new trains scheduled and tickets (and resources) issued only select groups of people. I hope that Swedish educators and policymakers will learn to recognize the value of their adult education system.

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APPENDIX A  
Approval of Ethical Guidelines

UNIVERSITY OF SASKATCHEWAN  
BEHAVIOURAL RESEARCH ETHICS BOARD

**NAME:** K. D. Walker, Educational Administration  
Nayda Veeman

**BSC:** 02-478

**CO-APPLICANT(S):** Angela Ward

**DATE:** 03-Jun-2002

The University of Saskatchewan Behavioural Science Research Ethics Board has reviewed the Application for Ethics Approval for your study "Learning from the Swedes: Community Perspectives on Literacy" (02-478).

1. Your study has been APPROVED.
2. Any significant changes to your proposed study should be reported to the Chair for Committee consideration in advance of its implementation.
3. The term of this approval is for 5 years.
4. This approval is valid for five years on the condition that a status report form is submitted annually to the Chair of the Committee. This certificate will automatically be invalidated if a status report form is not received within one month of the anniversary date.

I wish you a successful and informative study.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "V. Thompson", written over a horizontal line.

Dr. Valerie Thompson, Chair  
Behavioural Research Ethics Board

## APPENDIX B –Ethical Guidelines and Consent Forms

UNIVERSITY OF SASKATCHEWAN ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON ETHICS IN  
BEHAVIORAL SCIENCE RESEARCH**Application for Approval of Research Protocol**

ORS USE ONLY

File Number

02-478

Date Received

## RESEARCHERS' SUMMARY

**Principal Investigator:** Keith Walker, Professor in Educational Administration**Co-Investigator:** Angela Ward, Professor in Curriculum Studies**Doctoral Student and Research Collaborator:** Nayda Veeman, Graduate Student,  
Educational Administration (Advisor: Keith Walker)

Please note: As Nayda's doctoral work will fall completely within the proposed study it is our intention that this application provide approval for the SSHRC funded larger project, as defined by this application, and for any students, including and especially Nayda, who work within the delimitations and research protocol of this application and under the supervision of Drs. Ward and/or Walker.

**1. a. Anticipated Start Date:** July 2002      **b. Anticipated Completion Date:** June 2005

**2. Title: Learning from the Swedes: Community Perspectives on Literacy**

**Abstract**

This purpose of this study is to determine the policy and practice factors that account for the differences in adult literacy levels between Canada and Sweden. Literacy advocates are anxious to understand why Swedish adults have demonstrated literacy levels at consistently higher levels than those of Canadian adults in the International Adult Literacy Survey [IALS] (1995).

The development and implementation of adult literacy policy will be explored through document review and ethnographic studies. A rich set of contextual data such as history, demographics, sociological trends and economics will be compiled for each country through a literature and document review. "Situated literacy" or literacy policy-in-practice will be studied through parallel ethnographic studies in the two countries. The researchers will seek to answer the following questions:

1. What are the governments' adult literacy strategies? How were these developed and implemented?
2. What economic and social factors influence adult literacy in Sweden and Canada?
3. How are adult education programs delivered? Who attends? What support do they receive?

Further we propose to examine the following questions:

1. What explains the better literacy record of public schools in Sweden as compared to the Canadian record?
2. What explains Sweden's relatively high participation in adult learning?
3. What accounts for the highly developed volunteer sector and widespread use of public libraries in Sweden?

At the community level the following questions are of importance:

1. Why have individuals chosen to enter a literacy program in each of these countries?
2. What support do participants in literacy programs receive? Are there special supports for those with disabilities?
3. What literacy-related activities do adults with lower skill levels practice?
4. How are minority groups accommodated?
5. What is the significance of literacy for community leaders?
6. What is the response of Canadian literacy stakeholders to descriptions and analysis of best practice from first phases of literacy study? What relevance to they attach to the findings?

The research will include ongoing reviews of the literature about national literacy campaigns, the history of literacy in Sweden and Canada, and a comparison of government documents related to the recent adult education initiatives. A critical review of the International Adult Literacy Survey data will provide a profile of the populations that comprise literacy Levels 1 and 2 in the two countries, i.e., those deemed to have inadequate skills for today's global economy and society.

The policy analysis frame will study policy in development and implementation using data collected through document review, interviews, and focus group discussions. The methodology of Barton and Hamilton (2000) will provide the guidelines for the community-based ethnographic research. Analysis of this policy-in-experience data and interpretations will be discussed with participants. This "policy-in-reflection" phase will entail pan-Canadian consultations with literacy organizations and stakeholders (thus focus group work and interviews). Obviously some of our research questions do not require interactions with human subjects but those indicated in the community level section require this application because of the interviews and focus groups, we intend to conduct with subjects in Sweden and Canada.

### **3. Statement of Research Question:**

What factors account for the difference in literacy levels of adults in Canada and Sweden?

**4. Funding:** SSHRC strategic research grant, 3 years (approved April 2002)

### **5. Description of Participants:**

This study will involve two communities in Western Canada. One community will be in a mid-sized city with a high Aboriginal population. The second will be a small town in the rural area of the province. Participants will be adults who frequent a community centre, individuals who attend GED/upgrading classes in the community, volunteers at the centres, stakeholders in the community such as community leaders, school principal, health workers, librarians, civic officials, and religious leaders.

Similar communities will be studied in Sweden. Selection of these sites will be made through consultation with the University of Stockholm and Advisory Committee. Participants will be adults who use community libraries and participate in the Adult Education Initiative. Stakeholders in the community such as the priest, mayor, librarians and teachers will also be interviewed. **The researchers will apply for whatever ethics approvals are required by the Swedish or Canadian institutions with whom potential interviewees are associated.**

Since the interviewer will be from an “outside” position, the participants will have the opportunity to read the transcripts and field observations to clarify, add or delete their thoughts, recollections, descriptions, and feelings so as to accurately represent them in their own words. Participants will then sign a transcripts release form (*Appendix A*). The emphasis on the analysis will be on respectfully understanding the literacy practices and learning which take place in the community context. Historical background, socio-economic class, and cultural ways will be respected. By including the voices of the participants in the analysis, the study will remain true to the participants’ culture and ways of knowing. All three researchers have extensive experience in participatory research with Indigenous peoples in Canada and internationally.

Where necessary, the study instruments will be translated into the language of the participants to ensure their understanding of it. To be true to an Aboriginal voice, the historical, political, spiritual, and cultural framework of the findings will be presented. The Principles and Guidelines for the Protection of Indigenous Heritage adopted by the United Nations Subcommission on Human Rights will be adhered to. **Further, regardless of local requirements, we will comply with the Tri-Council Policy Statement which requires us to apply for prospective approval from the relevant Swedish or provincial jurisdictions prior to conducting study in those jurisdictions.**

## **6. Informed Consent/Assent:**

Participants will be adults and community leaders who consent to participate in the project. In Canada, coordinators of the community centres will help to identify potential participants. The researchers will contact each participant to inform them about the research study, explain the consent protocol in detail, assure them that confidentiality will be maintained throughout the study if that is the wish of participants. Informed consent will be obtained from the all people interviewed and participating in focus groups (*Appendix A, B, and C*). If necessary, consent forms will be translated into the participant’s home language and, in cases of limited literacy, the consent form will be read aloud.

**7. Description of the research methods:** This is an ethnographic study over a three-year duration.

**The first phase of the research** will see the investigators conducting the preliminary stage by mapping the communities with visits to community centre, local health clinic, recreational facilities, community association meetings, and churches to document community literacy. In addition, the interviewers will use semi-structured interviews to ask selected community participants about literacy practices and learning in their daily lives (reading and writing practices). Interviews will be tape-recorded with consent. The taped transcriptions will be reviewed by participants for editing and revision and then consent for release will be signed. Questions to guide the initial data collection are:

*-What kinds of literacy learning takes place through community activities?*

*-How do community members transmit knowledge to one another?*

*-How do people decide to become involved in adult upgrading or GED preparation?*

Results of the study will be discussed with the participants, the Research Team and the Advisory Committee to extend understanding and clarify outstanding questions.

**Second Phase: Community Perspectives on Literacy in Sweden:**

The results will be analyzed and discussed with participants and the advisory committee to identify any questions arising. A second on-site visit to Sweden will fill in the gaps as determined by discussions with participants and advisory committee (consisting of six members from the academic, institutional and practitioner sectors of literacy network in Canada). The study requires an emergent design with respect to content of interviews and consultations.

**8. Storage of Data**

During the study, all data (field notes, transcripts, tapes, and artefacts) will be securely stored with the Principal Investigator (and/or Supervisor) in the Department of Educational Administration. At the completion of the study, all data will be retained for a minimum of five years at the University of Saskatchewan in accordance with the University of Saskatchewan guidelines.

**9. Dissemination of Results:**

Participants will be informed that the results of the study will be published as a report and later in scholar journals or conference presentations.

**10. Risk or Deception.**

There is no anticipated risk or deception in the study. Participants will be made aware of the purpose of the study and why they are participants. Participants are free to withdraw at any time without penalty. If this occurs, the tape recordings and other data from their contributions will not be used.

**11. Confidentiality:**

Confidentiality will be maintained throughout the study. Confidentiality will be maintained by using pseudonyms for the real names of the participants on the tapes, transcripts, analysis and any documents which result from this study other than the consent form.

**12 Data Transcript Release:**

Since the interview records opinions, feelings, recollections, and descriptions the participants will have the opportunity to read the transcripts to clarify, add or delete information so it will accurately represent them and their intellectual property.

**NON-ENGLISH SPEAKING PARTICIPANTS:**

Interviews will be conducted with a translator, tape recorded and later transcribed by the translator. The tape will be immediately played back for participants. The respective participants will be asked to sign a transcript release form if they feel that the recording is an accurate reflection of what was said and what they meant to say during the interview. In Sweden, translators will be hired in consultation with the University of Stockholm, if necessary.

**13. Debriefing and Feedback:**

Feedback will be given to participants during the entire course of the study. Findings will also appear on the research project website. Information gained from interviews will be returned to the participants through the sharing of written transcripts. Executive summaries of “findings to date” will be available to participants upon request.

**14. The Research Proposal has been reviewed by:**

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Dr. Larry Sackney, Acting Department Head

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

-----  
Dr. Keith Walker, Professor and Advisor

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Dr. Angela Ward, Professor and Committee Member

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Nayda Veeman, Research Collaborator and Doctoral Candidate

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

This research project has been reviewed and approved (June 2002) by the University of Saskatchewan Advisory Committee on Ethics in Behavioural Science Research

## LETTER OF INTERVIEW CONSENT

We appreciate your participation in this research study: Community Perspectives on Literacy. This is one phase of a comparative study of adult literacy programs and delivery in Canada and Sweden. We are studying how literacy is delivered, improved and developed in community settings. The anticipated benefits of this study include a more robust understanding of the strategies, factors, policies, implementation processes and experiences of adult literacy initiatives in Sweden and Canada. We anticipate mutual learning and networking between and amongst policy makers and practitioners from both countries. We adhere to the following guidelines which are designed to protect the interest of everyone taking part in the study.

1. You will be interviewed for approximately one hours per session (whatever you have agreed to) to help us understand literacy programs and policy, in general and in your experience, your role, the type of services provides and the people who participate. Interviewer will be tape-recorded.
2. After each interview, the tape will be transcribed and analyzed for major themes. You may add, delete or change the transcription so that it reflects what you wish to share. Afterwards you will be asked to sign a **Transcript Release Form**.
3. The data, including audio-tapes and transcriptions, collected during this study will be kept in a secure place for a minimum of five years at the University of Saskatchewan in Saskatoon Canada with the principal investigator (Dr. Keith D. Walker) in accordance with the University of Saskatchewan guidelines.
4. Your confidentiality will be protected through the use of pseudonyms in any written report or oral presentation of the study if you so wish.
5. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time without repercussion. If you withdraw from the study, the tape recordings and interview data will be destroyed.
6. The results and interpretations of the study will be published in the form of scholarly papers and books. Your name or that your community or organization will not be used in any reports or presentations if you do not wish it to be used.

As a participant in this research study, you have the right to contact Nayda Veeman, Research Collaborator, College of Educational Administration, (<[nayda.veeman@usask.ca](mailto:nayda.veeman@usask.ca)>), the Office of Research Services at the University of Saskatchewan (1-306-966-4053) or Dr. Keith Walker, Department of Educational Administration, U of Saskatchewan (1-306-966-7623 or [Keith.Walker@Usask.ca](mailto:Keith.Walker@Usask.ca)) or Dr. Angela Ward, Co-Investigator, Department of Curriculum Studies, U of Saskatchewan (1-306-966-7585 or [angela.ward@usask.ca](mailto:angela.ward@usask.ca)) at any time if you have questions about the study.

I, \_\_\_\_\_ have read the above guidelines as described to me and agree to participate. I understand the procedure and its possible risks which were explained to me by the interviewer. A copy of this form has been given to me for my records and at the end of the study, I will have access to an executive summary of the findings if I request one.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Researcher

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

I do not wish to see the transcript of my interview \_\_\_\_\_

Participant

The proposed research project was reviewed and approved by the University of Saskatchewan Advisory Committee on Ethics in Behavioural Science Research (June 2002)

*LETTER OF CONSENT FOR RELEASE OF TRANSCRIPTS (Appendix B)*

We appreciate your participation in our research project: **Community Perspectives on Literacy**. We are returning the transcripts of the audio-taped interview(s) for your perusal and the release of confidential information. **As previously indicated to you, the anticipated benefits of this study include a more robust understanding of the strategies, factors, policies, implementation processes and experiences of adult literacy initiatives in Sweden and Canada. We anticipate mutual learning and networking between and amongst policy makers and practitioners from both countries.** We will adhere to the following guidelines which are designed to protect your confidentiality and interests in the study.

1. Would you please read and recheck the transcripts for accuracy of information. You may edit the transcripts to clarify what you intended to mean. You may add comments in your own words or delete information that you do not want to be quoted in the study.
2. The aggregated interpretations from this study will be used in scholarly publications. Except for the researchers in the study, your participation has remained and will remain confidential. Your name will not be used in the final report or in any presentations if you do not wish to have it used.
3. In accordance with the University of Saskatchewan Guidelines on Behavioural Ethics, the tape recordings and transcription made during the study will be kept with Dr. Keith Walker, the Principal Investigator associated with this project (1-306-966-7623) in a locked file until the study is finished. After completion of the study, the tapes and other data will be kept for five years at the University of Saskatchewan and then destroyed.
4. Participation in the study is voluntary, and you may withdraw at any time without penalty. If this happens, the tape recordings and interview data will be destroyed.

I, \_\_\_\_\_ understand the guidelines above and agree to release the revised transcripts to the researcher.

A copy of the transcript release form is provided for your records.

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Participant's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Researcher's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

**As a participant in this research study, you have the right to contact Nayda Veeman, Research Collaborator, College of Educational Administration, (244-0034, home), the Office of Research Services at the University of Saskatchewan (1-306-966-4053) or Principal Researcher, Dr. Keith Walker, Department of Educational Administration, U of Saskatchewan (1-306-966-7623) or Dr. Angela Ward, Co-Investigator, Department of Curriculum Studies, U of Saskatchewan (1-306-966-7585) at any time if you have questions about the study.** Local telephone numbers for researchers will be inserted here for researchers and graduate students.

The proposed research project was reviewed and approved by the University of Saskatchewan Advisory Committee on Ethics in Behavioural Science Research (June 2002)

### Letter of Consent for Focus Group Participants

We appreciate your willingness to participate in this project: **Community Perspectives on Literacy**. This aspect of the study will explore the ways that findings from a previous phase of the study apply to Canadian literacy initiatives, according to key stakeholders. As a participant you will gain knowledge from your peers about successful literacy experiences and practices from both Canada and Sweden. We hope to ascertain from you how you feel the description of best practices from other locations might, or might not, assist in the ongoing improvement of literacy initiatives, implementations, and experiences for your community. **The anticipated overall benefits of this study include a more robust understanding of the strategies, factors, policies, implementation processes and experiences of adult literacy initiatives in Sweden and Canada. We anticipate mutual learning and networking between and amongst policy makers and practitioners from both countries.** The total time commitment for you will be no more than four hours. We will adhere to the following guidelines to protect your confidentiality and interests.

1. You will be a part of a forum of up to 20 colleagues and you will be responding (if you so choose) within a focus group to consider a number of semi-structured questions related to findings from our previous work on adult literacy in Sweden and Canada.
2. After sharing, focus groups will look for and record common ideas, patterns, or themes from the session and record these.
3. Finally, you will be involved in defining and recording what literacy practices might maximize opportunities for adults in language and literacy development.
4. At any time, you will be able to add, delete or change any of your information and to reflect what you want to say.
5. The data collected from you and the group will be kept in a secure place and will be held at the University of Saskatchewan for five years according to the University of Saskatchewan guidelines.
6. You can withdraw at any time during the study without penalty or loss of services from the University of Saskatchewan. If you withdraw, the data collected from you will not be used.
7. The findings of the study will be used for dissemination in published form. The confidentiality of information gathered through the focus groups will be protected.
8. The focus groups will include other participants who are involved in literacy programs and initiatives. The focus group will participate in discussions that will be used to add to, clarify and enrich the data collected through prior phases of the research project. We, as a researchers, cannot be held responsible for the unrecorded material that is shared in the focus groups. As a participant it is your responsibility and agreement to protect the integrity and confidentiality of what others in the group have said during these group sessions. We would ask that you choose to quote only yourself and leave others to speak for themselves. There are no other risks associated with this study.

The University of Saskatchewan Advisory Committee on Ethics in Behavioural Sciences Research has approved this research on June 2002. As a participant in this research study, you have the right to contact Nayda Veeman, Research Collaborator, College of Educational Administration, (1-306-244-0034 (h); 1-306-966-7613 (office)), the Office of Research Services at the University of Saskatchewan (1-306-966-4053) or Principal Researcher, Dr. Keith Walker, Department of Educational Administration, U of Saskatchewan (1-306-966-7623) or Dr. Angela Ward, Co-Investigator, Department of Curriculum Studies, U of Saskatchewan (1-306-966-7585) at any time if you have questions about the study. **Local telephone numbers for researchers will be inserted here for researchers and graduate students.**

I \_\_\_\_\_, agree to participate in the above study. I am aware of the nature of the study and understand what is expected of me and I also understand that I am free to withdraw at any time throughout the study. I have retained a copy of this form for my records.

Participant's Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher's Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX C – Swedish National Voluntary Organizations

Adult education associations affiliated to different popular movements receive state grants for purchase of books, materials, cost of circle leaders and administration.

Source: The Adult Education Associations in Sweden. **The National Swedish Federation of Adult Education (FBF)** is an umbrella organization.

- **Arbetarnas Bildningsförbundet (ABF)**

The largest adult education association in Sweden, labour movement affiliated; organizes cultural events and a wide variety of study circles.

- **Frikyrkliga studieförbundet (FS)**

Comprised of free churches, and their youth, immigrant and ecumenical organizations affiliates. Focuses on international affairs and social issues

- **Folkuniversitetet**

The Folk University of Sweden is an adult education association based at Stockholm, Uppsala, Göteborg, Lund and Umeå universities. Provides adult education using the knowledge available in the universities.

- **KFUK-KFUM Studieförbund**

The YWCA/YMCA focuses on moral and ethical questions.

- **Medborgarskolan (The Citizen's Adult Education Association)**

Art, literature and music are biggest subject areas with conviction that society must build on democratic participation of free individuals.

- **Nykterhetsrörelsens bildningsverksamhet (NBV)**

The Temperance Movement's Education Association focuses on social issues.

- **Studieförbundet Study Promotion Association**

Greater awareness of nature and the environment.

- **Svenska idrottsrörelsens studieförbund**

Training in sports ideology and democracy for active sportsmen and women and coaches, training of coaches

- **Swedish Christian Educational Association**

Focus on moral and ethical subjects, music and handicrafts

- **Studieförbundet vuxenskolan**

Adult Education Association of Swedish Farmers' Union and the Centre and Liberal Parties  
Social affairs and the environment

- **Tjänstemännens bildningsverksamhet TBV The Salaried Employees' Educational Association**

Personal and professional development

## APPENDIX D – Primary and Secondary Sources for Literacy Strategies

*2001 Yukon Literacy Strategy*. (1999). Whitehorse, YT: Government of Yukon.

*Community-Based Literacy in New Brunswick*. (CNB 92068)(1992). Fredericton, NB: Government of New Brunswick.

*Join the voices for literacy!* (2001). Saskatoon, SK: Saskatchewan Literacy Network.

*Join the voices for literacy! Phase II*. (2001). Saskatoon, SK: Saskatchewan Literacy Network.

*Kunskapslyftet [Knowledge Lift/Leap]*. (1997). National Board of Adult Education. Retrieved, August 2001, from <http://www.kunskapslyftet.gov.se/english/>

*Like a great wave, literacy is sweeping over New Brunswick*. (1995). Fredericton, NB: Literacy Inc.

*Revisiting...Tough challenges: Great rewards*. (1999). Charlottetown, PEI: Department of Education.

Human Resources Development Canada. (Feb. 12, 2002). *Skills Initiative* Ottawa, ON Retrieved Feb 15, 2002 from [www.innovationstrategy.gc.ca/cmb/innovation.nsf](http://www.innovationstrategy.gc.ca/cmb/innovation.nsf)

*Tough challenges: Great rewards*. (1998). Charlottetown PEI: Department of Education.

*Towards literacy: A strategy framework - 2001 - 2005*. (2001). Yellowknife NWT: Government of Northwest Territories.

*Words to Live By*. (1998). St. John's NF: Government of Newfoundland and Labrador.

## APPENDIX E – List of key sources (academic, government and databases)

Government personnel:

Judy Baker, Provincial Coordinator of Adult and Family Literacy, Province of Manitoba

Chris Broten, Regional Director, Career and Employment Services, Saskatoon Saskatchewan.

Wendy Desbrisay, Executive Director, Movement for Canadian Literacy, Ottawa, Ontario

Senator Joyce Fairbairn, Government of Canada, Ottawa, Canada

Bruce Gall, Manager, Career & Employment Services, Melfort, Saskatchewan

Lucie Gosselin, National Literacy Secretariat, Ottawa, Canada

Lynne Lalonde, National Literacy Secretariat, Ottawa, Canada

Rick Pawliw, Executive Director, Programs Branch, Department of Learning, Province of Saskatchewan

Lily Stonehouse, Assistant Deputy Minister, Department of Learning, Province of Saskatchewan

Leanne Vardy, Director General, National Literacy Secretariat, Ottawa, Canada

Key Informants in Sweden:

Jon Avenäs, Rektor, Ulvesundsgymnasiet, Kungsör

Lena Johannesson, Adult Education, Göteborg

Lena Kaev, Rektor, Vuxenutbildning, Umeå

Göran Tevell, *Skolverket*, National Agency for Education, Stockholm, Sweden

Albert Tuijnman, Institute for International Education, University of Stockholm

Graduate students and faculty, Department of Pedagogy, University of Göteborg

Graduate students and Faculty, Department of Behavioural Sciences University of Linköping,

Database links:

National Adult Literacy Database: <http://www.nald.ca/nls/nlsild/ILDNLS.htm>  
<http://www.nald.ca/whatnew/hnews/2002/kitcan.htm/kitcan.htm>

National Literacy Secretariat: <http://www.nald.ca/nls.htm>

Swedish Education: <http://www.skolverket.se/english/index.shtml>

## APPENDIX F – Interview Guideline for practitioners

1. What is your role and how long have you worked here?
2. What adult education programs do you offer through the college?  
  
Do you have wait lists?  
  
Who takes part in them?  
  
What are their goals?  
  
Completion/Drop out rates? Training of instructors?  
  
Are there other programs you would like to offer?  
  
What issues/concerns do you have about your programs? What are highlights?
3. Learning Centre? Who attends?
4. Other learning opportunities for adults in this community? What is the relation of your organization to these?
5. Are there other people that I should talk to?
6. What input have you/your organization had into policy discussions?

NOTE: These guidelines served as a starting point for the interviews. I chose to ask about program related issues and personal experiences that were governed by policy rather than asking directly about policy since, in my previous experience, the focus of most practitioners and learners was on their own experience rather than larger governing policy issues.

Both guidelines were reviewed by members of the project advisory committee.

## APPENDIX F – Interview Guideline for Adult Learners

1. Introductions – tell me about yourself, why you decided to come back to school.
2. What were you doing before you came into Adult Basic Education?
3. Did you have to wait to get in? How long?
4. How is it similar/different from what you expected?
5. How are you funding your program? Where does it come from/? Is it adequate?
6. What do you like about being in school? What would make it better?
7. What has changed for you as a result of being at school? Effect on family? How do your family and friends feel about you being in school?
8. Can you describe a time/place when you felt good about learning something (interviewer give an example – could be informal or formal learning)? How were you learning – and was it different from your school experiences? Does it match your current learning experiences?
9. How do you use reading and writing outside of school? Do use the library (school or public), write letters and cards, read newspaper and newsletters?
10. How do you help your children with homework? Do your children like to read?
11. What kinds of activities do you do with your children?
12. What do you want to do when you've completed the program? Do you have a particular job in mind? If so, what do you think you need to get this job?
13. What do you see yourself doing 2 years (and then 5 years) from now?
14. How do you think the ways you use reading and writing in your life might be different two years from now?

NOTE: Follow interviewee's leads whenever possible

## APPENDIX G - Letter of Introduction to request authorization

October 15, 2002

To Whom It May Concern: Letter of Introduction re: comparative study

We are writing to seek your help and involvement in a comparative study we are conducting. The goal of the research is to compare adult education and literacy in Canada and Sweden to gain practical information for literacy providers and policymakers.

Nayda Veeman, who has been carrying out fieldwork in Sweden and Canada, has been involved in adult education since 1979 in a variety of capacities ranging from governance to adult upgrading to international consulting. During her eleven years as executive director of the Saskatchewan Literacy Network, she learned about the results of the International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS). According to the IALS results, Swedish adults demonstrated literacy levels that were consistently higher than those of Canadian. Moreover, nearly twice as many Swedes as Canadians with limited education demonstrated the highest literacy levels. What is behind these differences? Why was the Swedish government the first to launch a new adult education initiative in 1997? A comparison of adult education and literacy in the two countries may reveal better ways of addressing the recruitment and retention problems faced by many adult literacy programs in Canada.

Most of the adult education/literacy research in Canada to date has focused on methodology and barriers. This research will focus on adult education as social policy through a qualitative approach. The process and purpose of policy development will be studied through document analysis and interviews at the government level; at the community level, policy as experienced by the individual will be studied through observation and interviews. The research will be conducted through a comparative case study approach. The Swedish sites are Umeå and Kungsör and the proposed Canadian sites are Saskatoon and Melfort.

The research is funded by a *Valuing Literacy in Canada* strategic initiative grant and a national advisory committee has been established. In September 2002, the research team traveled to Sweden to establish a base for the field work and gather preliminary data. Nayda will complete most of the field work in Canada by March 2003 and spend April and May in Sweden. The team continues to contact practitioners and policymakers in each of the research sites as the findings are being finalized. We are providing the addresses of the research team and a list of the advisory committee for your information. Nayda may be reached at 306-966-7613 or email: [nayda.veeman@usask.ca](mailto:nayda.veeman@usask.ca)

Sincerely

Nayda Veeman. Research Collaborator  
on behalf of the research team

Attachment

*COMPARING ADULT LITERACY/EDUCATION IN CANADA AND SWEDEN*

## RESEARCH TEAM

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Learners Advisory Network

## SPONSORING ORGANIZATION

University of Saskatchewan Website: [www.usask.ca](http://www.usask.ca)

## PARTNER ORGANIZATION

Movement for Canadian Literacy Website: [www.literacy.ca](http://www.literacy.ca)

START DATE: September 2002

END DATE: September 2004

*COMPARING ADULT LITERACY/EDUCATION IN CANADA AND SWEDEN*

## RESEARCH TEAM

## APPENDIX H – Pilot Study Guidelines

1. How is the problem defined?
2. Who was involved in developing the Adult Education Initiative in Sweden? Was there congruence between how adults define their learning needs and how authorities define them? What were the evaluation findings?
3. What role did literacy groups play in the consultations that led to development of the green paper by the federal government in Canada? How were stakeholders identified by Public Policy Forum? What role can the federal government play in education given the constitutional authority?
4. Who was involved in developing the initial strategy in each province? How were sessions publicized? Who participated? How were sessions conducted? (language issues)
5. What do literacy groups think about the process and the strategy?
6. What process and criteria were used for monitoring and evaluation?
7. Have new options or recommended improvements been identified?
8. What is the budget allocation?
9. How did the strategy address the needs of minority groups (e.g. aboriginal, immigrant, special needs)?

*COMPARING ADULT LITERACY/EDUCATION IN CANADA AND SWEDEN*

## RESEARCH TEAM

## APPENDIX I – Categories of Informants

	<b>SWEDEN</b>	<b>CANADA</b>
Administrators, coordinators	11 (2)	12 (2)
Counsellors	8	2 (1)
Government officials	2 (3)	2 (7)
Politicians	2	(1)
Researchers/academics	3 (2) (1 group discussion)	–
Students/learners	(1) (4 group discussions)	4 (2) 1 focus group
Teachers/instructors	7	2
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>33 (8)</b>	<b>22 (16)</b>

## NOTE:

1. Interviews taped and transcribed (interviews not recorded)
2. Total figures do not include participants in group discussions or focus groups

*COMPARING ADULT LITERACY/EDUCATION IN CANADA AND SWEDEN*

## RESEARCH TEAM

## APPENDIX J – Timelines for data collection

	DOCUMENT REVIEW	SITE SELECTION	INTERVIEWS	ANALYSIS
Jan/March 2002	X		X	X
April/June 2002	X			
July – Sept/2002	X	X		
Oct-Dec 2002		X	X	
Jan /March 2003	X		X	X
April/June 2003			X	
July/Sept 2003			X	X
Oct/Dec 2003				X