



Adult Literacy Work in Canada

by Richard Darville

Canadian Association for Adult Education

Centre for Policy Studies in Education - UBC

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Appreciation

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Preface

The issue of adult literacy rose on the Canadian public agenda in the months preceding the 1988 federal general election with an announcement by the Prime Minister of a five year federal literacy initiative. For the first time, the platforms of the political parties included substantial plans to mobilize governmental programs to respond to the literacy issue.

As Canada enters its next pre-electoral period, we may expect a similar increase in public attention to adult literacy, as the parties jockey for attention and public support. Similar interest is visible at a policy level in various provinces.

In this climate, the Canadian Association for Adult Education and the Centre for Policy Studies in Education at the University of British Columbia are pleased to release *Adult Literacy Work in Canada*, a map of the state of literacy work in the country, which identifies key issues in literacy for the 1990's. This study is offered as a stimulus to informed discussion and debate on literacy questions in various Canadian jurisdictions. It is also intended as a contribution to maintain the level of public awareness developed during 1990, International Literacy Year.

Adult Literacy Work in Canada is part of a larger project to enhance public understanding of the stake of Canadians in a literate society - a collaborative effort of the Canadian Association for Adult Education and the Centre for Policy Studies in Education at the University of British Columbia, with financial assistance from the National Literacy Secretariat, in the federal Department of Multiculturalism and Citizenship.

Other products of this collaboration include a forthcoming book, also authored by Richard Darville, offering critical analysis of literacy issues, as well as an in-depth analysis of data from the Statistics Canada Survey of Literacy Skills Used in: Daily Activities, to be published at a later date.

CAAE and CPSE express appreciation to Richard Darville for his valuable contribution to our collaborative work - and to the Minister of Multiculturalism and Citizenship, Canada and his National Literacy Secretariat for their support. The opinions expressed in this publication are those of the author.

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Introduction

Looking Back, Looking Ahead

Adult literacy work, and the understanding of literacy issues, have been developing in Canada for over a quarter century. International Literacy Year, 1990, promoted that development and gave it a new visibility. As we begin to move through the 1990s, it is timely to take stock of adult literacy work in Canada. This report attempts to do just that — to give an account of the state of literacy work and to identify key issues for the future. It is written for literacy advocates, researchers and policy-makers.

New people are continually entering the literacy field, and regional differences in literacy work are great. All this strengthens the movement and enriches it with novel perspectives. But it also makes it difficult to preserve the sense of moving forwards from a commonly understood situation and history. One major purpose of this report is to provide a common store of background knowledge for literacy advocates, researchers, and policy-makers, who have entered the field at different times, or in different parts of Canada. This report is of course selective; others who have been involved in or studied adult literacy would provide different accounts. But an attempt is made here to be judicious, neither writing on behalf of a single tendency nor pretending that differences and disagreements do not exist.

The report is divided into two chapters. The first chapter provides an overview of the state of literacy work in Canada. This chapter has three sections. The first is concerned with the nature and scope of restricted literacy, and what the statistics on literacy can tell us. A second section deals with aspects of the history of literacy work and the literacy issue since the 1960s; it draws attention to the social and economic forces underlying literacy policy. The third section outlines the the literacy activities and policies of federal, provincial and territorial governments. Thus history is dealt with first in a broad overview; then in terms of the particulars of governments and departments.

The second chapter identifies some prominent issues in literacy for the 1990s. These include the nature and degree of political will for the development of literacy in Canada; efforts to develop a range of learner-centred and community-specific literacy programming, and their relationships to moves towards co-ordination and accountability in programming activity; the uncertain future relations of community, institutional and workplace programs; and the capacity of the literacy policy process to absorb the lessons being learned in practice.

Ideas in the report have developed in many discussions among literacy practitioners and advocates.¹ Many governmental policy documents and reports, and a number of civil servants, have been consulted. Some information has been drawn from a survey

¹ A number of literacy practitioners, advocates and researchers have read various drafts of the report, and added clarity, and removed errors. I am indebted for improvements to Behnaz Behnia, Richard Bonokoski, Susan Hoddinott, Nancy Jennings, Stan Jones, John MacDonald, Robin Millar, Ian Morrison, Brad Munro, Kjell Rubenson, Audrey Thomas, Aisla Thompson, Serge Wagner, Tom Walker, and Cathy Wright. Thanks are also due to numerous civil servants who have provided information and reviewed specific sections of the manuscript. The final responsibility of course is my own.

conducted by the Canadian Alliance for Literacy, a coalition of national organizations that seek to promote a more literate Canada. Reports of provincial and territorial representatives to the Movement for Canadian Literacy Board have been very helpful.

Although the report includes substantial information on the literacy issue and literacy work in francophone milieux, it must be said that it predominantly expresses activities and issues in anglophone Canada. An encompassing account of literacy work across Canada is yet to be written.

Chapter 1

An Overview of the State of Literacy Work

I

What can the statistics tell us about restricted literacy?

The numbers question continually comes up, when advocates make the case for literacy in public presentations, or talk with the media, or deal with governments. Many literacy practitioners are skeptical about literacy statistics, because the statistics do not seem to measure what literacy programs actually deal with. Furthermore, many programs have more potential students than spaces available, and asking how many more doesn't immediately solve the problem. Nevertheless, practitioners and advocates should know how to use the numbers as sensibly as possible, and to be clear about their limitations. This section looks first at what the statistics on literacy can tell us; then at what they do not and can not tell us.

Creating literacy statistics

In looking at the scope of the problem, media reports, government publications, and scholarly studies have usually seen the task as one of counting illiterates. Usually illiterates are taken to come in two kinds — illiterates or "basic illiterates," and "functional illiterates."

Creating literacy statistics usually involves either a proxy index for literacy, or a direct test. (Several decades ago, however, census questions did include a self-assessment of literacy). It has long been a convention to use census data on the highest level of schooling attained as a proxy measure of basic illiteracy (0-4 years of schooling) and functional illiteracy (5-8 years of schooling). Thus using 1986 census data it is said that 3% of Canadians 15 years and older are illiterate (have attained fewer than 5 years of schooling), and that 17%, or 3.4 million, are functionally illiterate (have attained fewer than 9 years of schooling).

This convention assumes that five years of schooling are necessary and sufficient to enable people to gain and retain basic literacy skills, and that nine years are necessary and sufficient to enable people to develop skills of sufficient variety and complexity to deal with the pervasive forms of print in society. In general, schooling levels *are* associated with literacy skills. However, for some individuals, these designated levels of

schooling are not necessary for literacy, and for other individuals they are not sufficient. Elementary school curricula and assessments are not standard over time and across localities, and different individuals learn differently during any given number of years in school, so that one person's grade four or nine is not the same as another's. Some people have many opportunities to use literacy outside of school, and so develop their skills; others have few opportunities, and their skills atrophy.

Partly because the use of school attainment as a proxy index for literacy is dubious, literacy tests have been developed over the last 20 years, relying on increasingly sophisticated "simulations" of everyday uses of literacy. A literacy test sponsored by Southam News in 1987 identified 4.5 million Canadian adults as "functionally illiterate."² The 1989 Survey of Literacy Skills Used in Daily Activities, from Statistics Canada, aims to portray several levels of reading, writing and numeracy "information processing ability," and not to draw a single line separating the literate from the illiterate.³

For the Southam test, a range of "everyday tasks" with literacy were simulated. To assess literacy levels, a subset of relatively simple tasks was used. These tasks primarily involved using administrative documents — for example, finding the expiry date on a driver's license, making out a cheque, filling out a job application. Cut-off points were defined that allowed some of those tested to be classified basic illiterates (8%), and these and others to be classified as functional illiterates (24%). The Southam test has been widely criticized for its limited sample size, unrealistic or poorly formulated test items, an uncertain correspondence between English and French items, reporting immigrants not fluent in either official language as illiterate, and arbitrary criterion levels.⁴ In spite of criticisms, statistics from the census and the Southam survey have been widely repeated in descriptions of the literacy problem by journalists, politicians, civil servants and literacy advocates.

There are also problems with the usual statistics from the viewpoint of literacy work. People's school attainment shows how much opportunity and stamina for schooling they had, not how much at ease they are with literacy. Tests of literacy ability, especially when designed to produce a count of illiterates, are often wide of the mark, missing the wide variety of people's actual difficulties with reading, writing and arithmetic. Even to come close to the actual experience of literacy work, literacy statistics need to say something about the kinds and levels of difficulties with reading and writing that students and teachers may identify. Fortunately, some sources are available to *begin* on a statistical account that makes sense from the standpoint of practice. Some census and labour force survey data can be used. Individual items from the Southam test — not bundled together to classify people — can be used. The Statistics Canada survey is very useful.

Levels of literacy

So what can we say about the kinds and levels of difficulty with reading and writing that people have?

² Creative Research Group, *Literacy in Canada: A Research Report*, Prepared for Southam News, Ottawa, 1987.

³ Statistics Canada, *Adult Literacy in Canada: Results of a National Study*, Ottawa, Minister of Industry, Science and Technology, 1991 (Cat. 89-525E).

⁴ One review of criticisms of the Southam report is provided in K. Kelly, S. Murray and A. Satin, "A National Literacy Skill Assessment: Planning Report," Statistics Canada Special Surveys Group, April 1988.

About 1 or 2% of Canadian adults have no literacy skills, or only extremely limited skills. The 1986 census shows that 1% of adults have no schooling, or kindergarten only. In a 1985 Statistics Canada Labour Force Survey, .5% of adults identified themselves as unable to read in any language. The 1989 Statistics Canada survey found 2% of adults said they had no reading skills in English or French and could not take the test.

About 5% of Canadian adults have difficulty reading signs, labels, and simple advertisements. In the Southam survey, 4% of people said they needed help reading product names in stores; 6% could not find the expiry date on a driver's license. The Statistics Canada survey found that 7% of people (including the 2% with no reading skills in English or French) were at "level 1" of reading ability: they had difficulty picking out familiar words in simple texts, for example looking over a supermarket ad to find the items on a grocery shopping list, or finding the long distance charges on a telephone bill.

About 15% of Canadian adults have difficulty using texts or documents to find simple information. In one part of the Southam survey, people were given a human interest news story to read, and asked two simple school-type ("locating information") questions; 13% answered one question incorrectly, and 20% the other. The Statistics Canada survey found 16% (including the 7% at level 1) were at "level 2" of reading ability: they had difficulty using a text to find what action to take, for example, seeing when a form is to be returned to a child's school, or finding the dosage for a seven-year old child on a box of pain medication.

Between 25% and 50% of Canadian adults have difficulty using texts and documents that are commonly used in organizational processes, depending on how complex, and how commonly used, those texts and documents are. In the Southam test, about 25% had trouble making out a cheque to pay a charge account statement; about 50% could not find a certain bit of information in a bus schedule. The Statistics Canada survey found 38% (including the 16% above) were at "level 3" of reading ability: they had difficulty performing relatively simple tasks with clearly laid out reading material, for example concluding from a brochure that to find out school hours, one must phone the local school.

Statistics that display the levels of difficulty that people have reading and writing show that schooling levels are an inexact but nevertheless important index for literacy. In the Statistics Canada survey, for example, only 12% of those with less than grade 9 were at level 4 of reading skill — able to deal with most print material — compared to 48% of those with some secondary school, and 70% of secondary graduates. Conversely, fully 60% of those with less than grade 9 were at one of the two lowest reading levels.

These statistics begin to display the range of literacy difficulties that people have, and the scope of these difficulties. The statistics show that programs and policies that aim to serve those with the most limited literacy would be concerned with about 15% of the adult population. Programs and policies that aim to make people generally able to use reading and writing even in unfamiliar or complex situations would be concerned with over a third of the adult population. A range of program activity is necessary to address different learning goals — for some who want help with simple words, for others who want to use documents in various organizational contexts, and for still others who want a general education.

Who is affected and how?

Limited literacy is concentrated in certain parts of society, and affects different groups differently. The statistics can show us something about these patterns, and thus something about how literacy programs might be focused.

Limited literacy is high among certain linguistic and cultural minorities — notably some immigrant groups, aboriginal people, and francophones. Rates (1986) of attaining less than nine years of schooling vary between immigrant and non-immigrant adults — 23% and 16% respectively. They also vary between groups of different ethnic origins. For example, rates for adults with northern European origins range from 5-12%, for Asian origins from 8-20%, and for southern European origins upwards from 30%. In the Statistics Canada survey, 28% of immigrants are at reading levels 1 and 2, compared to 15% of all adults. These figures (which do not include people who reported having no skills in either English or French), should be understood historically. Among immigrants in Canada 10 years or less, 40% are at levels 1 and 2. Most immigrants who came before 1960 — who were recruited to fill skilled jobs — are at level 3. Furthermore, immigration should not be seen as a long-run source of literacy problems, since children of immigrants generally do well in schooling and on literacy tests. In the Statistics Canada survey, the literacy levels of Canadian-born children of immigrants do not differ from the levels of people born to Canadian-born parents.

Rates of limited literacy for Indian, Inuit and Métis groups are high, although difficult to specify because of incomplete census coverage. In one estimate, at least 45% of on-reserve Indians, and over 50% of the Inuit population, are functionally illiterate.⁵

Rates of limited literacy are about twice as high for francophones as for anglophones in Canada. Rates of attaining less than nine years of schooling are, in 1986, for adults with French only as mother tongue, 24%; for adults with English only as mother tongue, 11%. In the Statistics Canada survey, among adults with French only as mother tongue, 17% are at reading levels 1 and 2, but among adults with English only as mother tongue, 9%.

Limited literacy is also high among people with disabilities, who are twice as likely as the non-disabled to have fewer than nine years of schooling (37%, compared to 14%).⁶ Experience also shows that basic schooling has often been particularly unproductive for people with disabilities, who have not experienced teaching sensitive to their ways of learning.

Finally, literacy is limited among older people. In the Statistics Canada survey, 6% of those 16-24 were at levels 1 and 2, compared to 9% of those 35-44, and 36% of those 55-69.

Although it is not a topic that can be elaborated in these pages, it should be understood that high rates of limited literacy among linguistic and cultural minorities, and people with disabilities, and older people, are related to restricted opportunities, including educational opportunities, for members of those groups. It is increasingly understood that the education of minorities is deeply affected particularly when minorities are also subordinated by dominant groups — viewed as inferior and denied economic and cultural resources.⁷ Older people's schooling was often limited because they grew up in a largely

⁵ Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs, *You Took My Talk: Aboriginal Literacy and Empowerment*, Ottawa, Queen's Printer, 1990.

⁶ Edward B. Harvey and Lorne Tepperman, *Selected Socio-economic Consequences of Disability for Women in Canada*, Ottawa, Statistics Canada Health and Activity Limitation Survey, Special Topic Series, 1990.

⁷ Serge Wagner, *Analphabétisme de Minorité et Alphabétisation d'Affirmation Nationale, Vol. I, Synthèse Théorique et Historique*, Toronto, Ministère de l'Éducation, 1991; Jim Cummins, "Literacy and Illiteracy: The Case of the Official Language Minorities in Canada," in *Papers for Consideration at the Workshops for the Special Meeting of the Sub-Commission on Education on "The Future Contributions to Literacy in Canada"*, Ottawa, Canadian Commission for Unesco, 1991.

rural society in which people often left school early to work, and because of Depression and war in the 1930s and 1940s.

Those with limited literacy are more likely than others to be or to become poor. Labour force participation rates are relatively low, and unemployment rates comparatively high, for those with limited literacy or education.⁸ The average income of adults with fewer than nine years of schooling is less than three-quarters that of the overall average. Among adults with fewer than nine years of schooling, in 1985, 61% had incomes less than \$10,000.⁹ This income level would place people in almost all parts of the country below official poverty lines.

It is especially significant that the employment situation of the undereducated is *worsening*, relative to other groups. This can be seen in shifts of overall ratios of employment to population in recent years. These have declined for adults with fewer than nine years of schooling even as they have increased for the adult population as a whole.¹⁰ Take for example people aged 25-44 — those most active in the labour force. Between 1981 and 1988, the overall employment-population ratio for this age group increased over 3 points, from 75.3% to 78.8%. For those in this age group with fewer than nine years of schooling, it decreased nearly 3 points, from 62.3% to 59.4%.

The same pattern shows up in another perspective on education and employment. Between 1981 and 1990, the labour force participation rate (the proportion of the adult population either working or seeking work) of those with fewer than 9 years of schooling decreased from 44.1% to 35.5%. This participation rate for the less educated has been decreasing since at least the mid-1970s. Also between 1981 and 1990, the unemployment rate of those with fewer than 9 years of schooling increased from 1.21 times the overall rate, to 1.54 times the overall rate. Of those who experienced long-term unemployment (over six months) in 1988-9, only 47% were at Statistics Canada's level 4 of reading ability; whereas of those who were unemployed but for shorter periods, 67% were at this top reading level.¹¹

Although literacy is related to poverty, it must also be said that getting literacy does not guarantee getting out of poverty. That possibility is also limited by minimum wage rates, vocational training policies, and the structure of the labour market. None of these are planned to help people escape poverty.

There is one other important set of observations to make about the literacy statistics. It concerns gender differences. There is very little difference between the sexes in educational attainment; in 1986, 16.9% of men, and 17.6% of women, had fewer than nine years of schooling. The reading levels of the sexes as measured in the Statistics Canada survey are also very similar; 15% of females and 14% of males are at levels 1 and 2 — excluding those who report no skills in either official language. (There are, however, significant differences when immigration is related to gender; while 12% of Canadian-born males and 24% of foreign-born males are at levels 1 and 2, the rates for

⁸ For example, 1986 Census, Cat. 93-III, Table 4; and Labour Force Annual Averages.

⁹ 1986 Census, Cat. 93-114, Table 6.

¹⁰ Labour Force Annual Averages, 1981-88.

¹¹ Tim O'Neill and Andrew Sharpe, "Functional Illiteracy: Economic Costs and Implications," in Statistics Canada, *Adult Literacy in Canada ...*, 69-78.

Canadian-born and foreign-born females are 11% and 32%).¹²

A more striking difference between men and women overall concerns not differences in literacy rates per se, but differences in the economic consequences of limited literacy. Income levels and employment-population ratios for women with fewer than nine years of schooling are only about half of men's.¹³ In general, the extent of women's economic disadvantage relative to men increases as education levels decrease. These statistics reflect a complex variety of patterns in women's lives. Some women leave school when they become pregnant, and are then confined to welfare or low-paid jobs. Women in the labour force have often required a higher level of schooling than men, given the generally higher educational requirements for clerical and health care occupations traditionally dominated by working class women, in comparison with the resource or manufacturing occupations traditionally dominated by working class men.¹⁴

All these statistics show in an abstract way what is concretely and profoundly visible in literacy programs. Many students and potential students are immigrants (often long-term immigrants who have oral but not literate skills in English or French), and literacy work often overlaps with teaching English or French as a second language. Many are aboriginal. Many are francophone. Many have disabilities. Literacy work often involves working with the poor, and women with limited literacy are especially likely to be poor.

What the statistics leave out

Although the statistics have their uses, and although measurements are becoming more adequate, the statistics *only begin* to display the realities that literacy programs work with. People's actual lives and needs are more complex than statistics can suggest. Literacy statistics are, so to speak, merely "facts" — that is, they enable us to define a problem, or to keep track of progress, administratively. But they do not tell us what is actually happening in people's lives.

Not only do the literacy statistics barely begin to describe the realities of people's lives, they also give a systematically selective version of literacy skill as "functional literacy." This selectiveness usually exists more in functional literacy tests than in definitions. Definitions of functional literacy are sometimes very broad. Most definitions trace their lineage back to a Unesco convention to define as functionally literate one "who can engage in all those activities in which literacy is required for effective functioning of his group and community and also for enabling him to continue to use reading, writing, and calculation for his own and the community's development." The Southam survey used a definition of literacy as "Using printed and written information to function in society, to achieve one's goals, and to develop one's knowledge and potential." Provincial government policy documents often define literacy informally, emphasizing self-defined needs. For example, Saskatchewan has adopted a definition of literacy as "the ability to read and write in order to improve one's living and working conditions."

¹² Data on gender and immigration - including data showing higher levels of individuals' dissatisfaction with their skills, and greater interest in literacy programs, among immigrants - are discussed by Monica Boyd, "Gender, Nativity and Literacy," in Canada, *Adult Literacy in Canada ...*, 85-94.

¹³ In 1985, average income for men with less than nine years of schooling was \$16,707; women it was \$8,799 (1986 Census, Cat. 93-114, Table 6). The 1988 employment-population for men with less than nine years of schooling was 46.3; for women it was 22.1 (Labour Annual Averages, 1981-88).

¹⁴ Dorothy MacKeracher, "Women and Literacy," in Maurice C. Taylor and James (eds.), *Adult Literacy Perspectives*, Toronto, Culture Concepts, Inc., 1989, 377-86.

The selection of test items is never as broad as such definitions. Test items are almost always tasks that are created where government, corporations and other institutions deal with the public through print and forms. These tasks involve written advertising and information, and bureaucratic record-keeping, regulations and procedures. They bring individual actions, and the "facts" about individual's lives, under government and corporate information and control. Functional literacy tasks are thus matters of what could be called "institutional inscription."

Other forms of literacy do not count in these tests. Two forms of literacy that are left out deserve particular attention. One involves people simply reading and writing stories of their lives — for its own sake, not on behalf of some institutional process. Skill at such reading and writing is ignored in tests. A second form of literacy left out of the usual statistics is "public discourse" —accounts of the society we have, and social, political and legal argument about the kind of society we ought to have — a necessary form of literacy if people are to relate their life conditions to the organization of society. In the Southam survey, *over* half of people had difficulty paraphrasing a newspaper editorial, or getting the precise legal significance of a statement from the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. But this did not figure in Southam's calculation of literacy rates. And there are only two such items (questions about a newspaper article on Canada's aging population) in the Statistics Canada survey.

To point out that these forms of literacy are ignored in literacy tests is not to fault the tests. The measurement problems involved in testing them would be difficult and perhaps insurmountable: we could not say what it is *in general* to write the story of one's life adequately; and the literacy of public discourse involves not just informational reading, but critical reading from diverse perspectives. But even if these forms of literacy are difficult to measure, they are important in literacy practice. People often come to study because they want to write their stories, and many programs find that learners' stories and other narratives, in fiction or history, are at the heart of literacy work. Other people come to study because they "want to know what's going on in the world." Literacy workers see this every day.

"Illiterate" is only a label

The most common use of literacy statistics is to assert that a certain proportion of people can't cope with everyday literacy demands. But such claims do not tell us how many people can avoid everyday literacy demands by using information sources other than print, or asking someone for help. They do not tell us how many people feel that limited literacy is a problem, feel a need or desire to improve their literacy. Neither do they tell us how much literacy programming we should provide.

In literacy programs, we see that many people strongly associate literacy with personal competence and satisfaction, and with social effectiveness. Media accounts often portray people who are "hungry for words." It is however clear from surveys, as from programming experience, that not all those identified as having limited literacy feel "hungry," or think they have a problem. For example, of those classified as functionally illiterate in the Southam study, only 4 in 10 said they needed help with written information from government or business; only 2 in 10 said they were held back in any way by limited reading and writing; only 1 in 10 said they might study in a program. The Statistics Canada survey shows that only 13% of adult Canadians feel their literacy skills are not adequate to work, job opportunities or job search, or some other area of life (compared to a total of 38% who have some level of difficulty dealing with everyday printed materials). Of those who reported inadequate skills in some area, 9% are now taking some course, 53% might someday take one, and 39% have no intention of taking

one. The data on levels of literacy ability and self-perceptions of literacy need is only beginning to be incorporated into the public discussion.¹⁵

Why do so many of those who are deemed "illiterate" not think they have a problem or want to study? It is commonly said that people are reluctant to admit literacy limitations. This is no doubt true for some. And many people with limited education feel fear or anger about schooling, or reject the ways of learning that schools offer. But furthermore, even the most credible literacy statistics only tell us how many people have difficulties *on a test* — in a bundle of literacy task simulations, all in a row, outside of any normal daily context. The statistics don't say how many people have difficulties *in life*. Many can deal adequately with everyday routines without having literate skills — substituting memory for reading, getting help filling out forms, and so on. Many who cope well in their lives neither identify themselves as "illiterate" or perceive themselves as likely to choose to study.¹⁶

It is well known that people with the least education participate least in adult education.¹⁷ The response to this unequal participation is unavoidably a political choice and a policy choice. It is not enough only to note the distance that people with limited literacy feel from education. It must also be noted that adult education programming generally caters to people who are better educated and economically advantaged. Even in circumstances where literacy program supply seems to exceed demand, attention should be directed to the design of programs and means of recruitment that respond to the felt needs of potential learners.¹⁸

II

Literacy work and the literacy issue — historical sketches

Literacy work, responding, within the context of societal attitudes and government policies, to the realities of limited literacy, develops over time. That development is the topic of this section. The nature of interests in the literacy issue and the forces driving it change over time. Sponsors and funders of programming change. The activities at the leading edge of literacy work change. A little history may help to clarify where we are by showing how we have got here.¹⁹

¹⁵ The implications of data on self-perceived need and programming preferences, are explored by Stan Jones, "Literacy Programming and the Survey of Literacy Skills Used in Daily Activities", in Statistics Canada, *Adult Literacy in Canada ...*, 95-101.

¹⁶ Audrey M. Thomas offers a useful discussion of these processes in *The Reluctant Learner*, British Columbia Ministry of Advanced Education, Training and Technology, and National Literacy Secretariat, Victoria, 1990.

¹⁷ Canadian Association for Adult Education and l'Institut canadien d'éducation des adultes, *From the Adult's Point of View*, Toronto and Montréal, 1982.

¹⁸ Cf. Jean-Paul Hauteceur, "Generous Supply, Barred Demand: The Current Paradox of Literacy," in Maurice C. Taylor and James A. Draper (eds.), *Adult Literacy Perspectives*, Toronto, Culture Concepts, Inc., 1989, 129-40.

¹⁹ A valuable critical treatment of literacy work and literacy policy in the 1970s is provided by Harold Alden, *Illiteracy and Poverty in Canada: Towards a Critical Perspective*, M.A. Thesis, University of Toronto, 1982; a more recent overview of activity sponsored by the federal and Ontario governments may be found in Wagner, *Analphabétisme de Minorité...*, 334-48.

Literacy work 1960-85

The oldest large-scale governmental effort to address literacy and basic education was organized by the federal government. In the 1960s the federal department then called Canada Manpower began a general program of labour force training called the Canada Manpower Training Program (CMTP), one component of which was a program in adult pre-vocational academic training, BTSD (Basic Training for Skill Development). Canada Manpower provided funding for adult basic education, up to a secondary equivalency certificate, through its system of "seat purchases" for BTSD in provincially-run community colleges and vocational schools, or school boards.

This Canada Manpower Training Program activity was developed in response to the high unemployment of the early 1960s, and the perceived need for a more highly trained labour force for an industrializing economy. It also showed the influence of "human capital" theory, which, stated roughly, understood education as both an individual investment (that would raise an individual's lifetime value on the labour market), and a societal investment (that would increase a society's capacity for economic growth). The Canada Manpower Training Program also had *de facto* social objectives, since it emphasized training in regions of high unemployment; it was even widely if unofficially understood as a remedy for high unemployment rates — as it made people "trainees" rather than "unemployed."

BTSD programs were never designated as literacy programs, although many students who came for upgrading needed such work, and programs were often considered at the ground level a general basic education rather than merely training. Both the social objectives of CMTP and the character of BTSD as basic education came under attack in the early 1970s, particularly with the recession of 1973-4.²⁰ The overall economic focus was tightened. In particular, Canada Manpower came to see that training at the literacy level did not reliably lead to people getting jobs or taking further training, and therefore did not serve the federal mandate for job training.²¹ There were also concerns about the number of young secondary school drop-outs involved in programs. As a result, BTSD programs were tied more closely to vocational training, overall seat purchases began to be reduced, and seat purchases below the grade 8 level dwindled through the decade, and were completely discontinued after 1981-2. After this time, the federal government did not have a focused involvement in adult literacy, which was seen as a responsibility of the provinces. Consequently, "by the end of the 1970s, program provision for the most undereducated adults had almost ceased to exist."²²

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, in part as a response to the end of federally-funded programs for the least educated, other organizers of adult literacy programs became increasingly active.²³ Educators in educational institutions, community organizers working in poor neighbourhoods, or charitably-minded community members, saw a need for programming and worked to see it started. Programs were organized, usually at a local level, in school boards, community colleges, libraries, and voluntary and community organizations.

²⁰ Wagner, *Analphabetisme de Minorité ...*, 337.

²¹ *Report of the Commission on Equality in Employment* (Judge Rosalie Silberman Abella, Commissioner), Ottawa, 1984, 150.

²² Audrey M. Thomas, *Adult Illiteracy — A Challenge*, Canadian Commission for Unesco, Ottawa, 1983, 64-7.

²³ Audrey M. Thomas, "Contribution of Non-governmental Literacy Groups in Canada," 1987.

Adult literacy work more nearly fit the provincial mandate for education than the federal mandate for job training. Although adult literacy was generally a low priority in child-centred education ministries, some provincially-funded programs were begun. School districts and community colleges developed or supported literacy programs in a number of provinces. Community colleges were generally more active in British Columbia, Alberta and Saskatchewan. School districts were more active in Ontario and Québec, although unevenly, without central policy. Educational institutions in the Atlantic provinces had only minimal involvement, often confined to the purchase of materials for volunteer groups.

Many literacy organizations were developed outside the educational system. "Community-based" programs were most numerous in Québec, as *groupes populaires en alphabétisation*. In Ontario cities, a number of literacy programs with autonomous boards were developed, sometimes in conjunction with settlement houses or libraries. In several other provinces, programs outside educational institutions were begun by volunteer bodies, libraries, and community centres. Laubach Literacy Councils were developed in the Maritime provinces (the first in Lunenburg in 1970), anglophone Quebec and Ontario; in 1981 Laubach Literacy of Canada was organized autonomously from its American parent. Frontier College, which had throughout the century placed "labourer-teachers" in the hinterlands, shifted its emphasis to the "urban frontier," and to programming — often literacy programming — with poor people and ex-offenders.

Program development up to the mid-1980s usually depended on committed individuals in government, educational institutions, and community organizations, as well as on local or provincial adult education traditions. Literacy programs could be characterized in 1983 as "marginal and experimental,"²⁴ and development was quite uneven across the country. Nevertheless, there were incremental gains in overall levels of programming. In a small number of provinces, beginning with British Columbia and Québec around 1980, explicit government policies were written that supported adult literacy and basic education.²⁵

Coalitions and associations were organized to develop networks among practitioners, to publish program resources, and to encourage government support for literacy. At a national conference in 1977, organized in part by World Literacy of Canada, the Movement for Canadian Literacy (MCL) was formed.²⁶ The momentum of this conference stimulated a follow-up conference the following year, and the formation, in the west, of provincial literacy and adult basic education associations in the late 1970s and early 1980s — the Adult Basic Education Association of British Columbia, the Alberta Association for Adult Literacy, and the Saskatchewan Adult Basic Education Association. Among francophones, l'Institut canadien d'éducation des adultes, and le Regroupement des groupes populaires en alphabétisation du Québec, and later la Fédération des francophones hors Québec, engaged in networking and advocacy activities. Among their affiliated programs, Frontier College and Laubach Literacy of Canada maintained links. Practitioner-produced journals, such as the Movement for Canadian Literacy's *Literacy/Alphabétisation*, British Columbia's *Groundwork*, and Québec's *Alpha-Liaison* and *Alpha-populaire* (now *Le monde alphabétique*), kept up a lively debate about issues in literacy when few other forums were available.

²⁴ Thomas, *Adult Illiteracy*

²⁵ British Columbia Ministry of Education, "A Ministerial Policy on the Provision of Adult Basic Education Programs Including English Language Training in the Public Education System of British Columbia," Victoria, 1982; Ministère de l'éducation du Québec, *L'école s'adapte à son milieu*, Montréal, 1980.

²⁶ Audrey M. Thomas, "Adult Literacy in the Seventies: Conference Report," The Movement for Canadian Literacy, Toronto, 1978; and Audrey M. Thomas, *Canadian Adult Basic Education and Literacy Activities: A Digest*, Toronto, World Literacy of Canada, 1976.

Much of the diverse programming and advocacy activity from the 1960s and on was inspired by perceptions of the personal pain and limitation often associated with illiteracy. In very general terms, literacy was seen as a right, and a means of participation in society. However, within this very general view, there were different tendencies. In one tendency, literacy was understood as a human right and a form of political assertiveness, and literacy work was seen as a form of community development and part of a struggle against poverty. Efforts were made to adapt to a Canadian context then current Third World discussions of "empowerment," or "literacy for liberation." Another tendency understood literacy efforts more in the traditions of philanthropic or benevolent action, and were more likely to view literacy as a technical skill.²⁷ Between these two tendencies, there was an alternation between heated dispute and a complete lack of communication, which hampered unified advocacy efforts, at least at a national level. However, MCL did organize a 1983 meeting that successfully brought together participants from a number of "camps" in literacy.²⁸

Media coverage in the 1970s and early 1980s was scant, and literacy advocates were often told, even by sympathetic reporters, that literacy was not newsworthy, that "there just isn't a story." Nevertheless, the extent of advocacy and public awareness activity should not be understated. There was some broadcast and print coverage. Public awareness television programming and videos were produced in the late 1970s by the CBC (a "Fifth Estate" program) and by the National Film Board ("J'ai pas mes lunettes"). In the early 1980s there were programs from T.V. Ontario ("Literacy: A Privilege or a Right," and several half-hour dramas) and Access Alberta ("Safer Than a Sock"). MCL joined with Frontier College and Laubach Literacy of Canada in the mid-1980s to encourage provincial governments to recognize officially International Literacy Day, September 8.

There were also literacy advocates, during this period, in governmental circles as well as in literacy programs. There were several calls for a renewed federal government attention to literacy, for example in a 1979 report for Labour Canada,²⁹ by the 1981 Parliamentary Commission on Employment,³⁰ by the 1983 Skill Development Leave Task Force,³¹ and by the 1984 Royal Commission on Equality in Employment.³² A few provincial reports also appeared, urging literacy activity in British Columbia, Québec, and Saskatchewan. The anglophone reports tended to elaborate arguments concerning illiteracy as a "cost" to society, literacy as means to improve individuals' employment possibilities and (as a subordinate theme) to increase social equity. In Québec, a "mission" for literacy was recommended as part of a global adult education strategy.

²⁷ See, e.g., articles in the special issue on "Volunteers in Literacy," *Literacy/Alphabétisation* 7:1, 1982; especially Gerald Bleser, "How Unimportant is Method?" and Sidney Pratt, "Volunteers in Literacy: Core or Enrichment."

²⁸ Movement for Canadian Literacy, Discussion Paper: Movement for Canadian Literacy Think-Camp, 1984.

²⁹ *Report of the Commission on Educational Leave and Productivity* (R.J. Adams, Chair), Labour Canada, Ottawa, 1979; and Roy J. Adams, "The Functionally Illiterate Worker and Public Policy," *TESL Talk* 13:4, 1982, 9-16.

³⁰ *Work for Tomorrow: Employment Opportunities in the '80s* (Warren Allmand, Chair), 1981.

³¹ *Learning a Living in Canada*, Employment and Immigration Canada, 1983.

³² *Report of the Commission on Equality in Employment* (Judge Rosalie Silberman Abella, Commissioner), Ottawa, 1984.

Putting literacy on the agenda - the late 1980s

Literacy has been relatively more prominent in public discussion and public policy since 1985. Public awareness has been built, and literacy has been "put on the Canadian agenda." It is clear that this prominence of literacy has not arisen because of decreases in literacy levels.³³ Rather public and political awareness has been built, and there have been certain key literacy-related changes in labour markets and the organization of work.

Awareness of the literacy issue has been built through a complex process of public discourse (as with any issue in a democratic industrialized society). The public discourse of literacy encompasses images and accounts of the literacy problem that circulate in leaflets and posters, the media, government reports, politicians' speeches, and the proposals of advocacy organizations. People in many locations contribute to this discourse. It expresses various and often conflicting conceptions of literacy and literacy work. It provides for a rough co-ordination of the thinking and activities of government ministries, labour market planners, politicians, and the like — especially as issues of literacy policy are articulated in relation to broader issues in economic and social policy. The public discourse about literacy also helps to co-ordinate the thinking and activity of literacy practitioners and advocates, individual students, employers, workers and unions, and community organizations. It merits close attention.

In part, the public discourse of literacy since 1985 has been developed through an intensification of earlier advocacy and public awareness efforts by literacy and other education organizations, whose advocacy efforts have become more co-ordinated and more focused. This public discourse of literacy has also been developed in an intensified concern for the economics of literacy and illiteracy. Let us consider here first the traditional advocacy efforts, and then the new economic interests.

In English Canada, by the late 1980s a coalition of more than ten non-governmental organizations concerned about literacy was formed, under the leadership of the MCL. Within this coalition, now known as the Canadian Alliance for Literacy, members have co-operated on specific activities. Most notably, the coalition in 1987 prepared "The Cedar Glen Declaration,"³⁴ proposing plans for the development of literacy work. This document was revised to form the basis of a "Call to Action on Literacy," printed in *Macleans* and *The Globe and Mail*. It significantly influenced early thinking within the federal Department of the Secretary of State. In English Canada, Frontier College has been particularly effective in involving business, through the Canadian Business Task Force on Literacy, and in attracting celebrities to literacy advocacy.

Among francophones, a parallel process of organization and advocacy has occurred, involving notably the research and writing of a report on literacy among francophones

³³We don't know what the results of a literacy survey would have been about 1960 when the federal government began *de facto* literacy work as a matter of labour force upgrading; or just before 1980, when the federal government decided it didn't work, and other people started taking up the slack; or about 1985, when a definition of literacy as economically important again came to centre stage. The only literacy statistics for which we have a time series are census figures on grade level attainment, and they show that a steadily declining proportion of the adult population has less than grade 9. Over the time when interest in literacy has increased, the proportion of the "undereducated" has decreased.

³⁴"Cedar Glen Declaration," *Literacy/Alphabétisation* 12:1, 1987.

across Canada, through l'Institut canadien d'éducation des adultes;³⁵ a large conference, "Alphabétisation en français," held in 1989 by the Association canadien d'éducation de langue française; and the establishment of La fédération canadienne pour l'alphabétisation en français, an offshoot of the Fédération des francophones hors Québec.

Every province and territory has one or more literacy, adult basic education, or adult education organizations that promote the literacy issue and build networks among practitioners. In recent years, with federal funding, existing organizations have been strengthened and new coalitions created. Many local organizations also promote literacy, including community centres, libraries, women's centres, native organizations, organizations for people with disabilities, organizations for ex-convicts, and educational institutions.

Most provincial governments have organized public awareness campaigns — to secure political support for literacy activities, and participation in them, and, one suspects, to advertise their own good works. Campaigns often use slogans, such as Alberta's "The Write Break" or Ontario's "Yes we can." Awareness activities may involve videotapes, radio and television spot announcements, print ads, posters, pamphlets, stickers, and so on. Local programs and national non-government organizations have also staged awareness events, ranging from shopping mall displays to events receiving national media coverage.

The advocacy and awareness efforts of literacy and other education organizations have been immensely strengthened — perhaps even overcome — by the rise of literacy as a media theme. Most notably, in 1987 the Southam newspaper chain's survey of everyday literacy skills formed the background for fifty influential stories and analyses on the issue in English Canadian newspapers.³⁶ Thousands of articles have appeared in local newspapers.³⁷ After years of being ignored, literacy workers are sometimes now interviewed and written up more than they want. Dramatizations and documentaries on the literacy issue have appeared in broadcast media, influenced in part by US programs. Specialist publications — for audiences as diverse as business people, adult educators, and feminist scholars - have featured articles and special editions focusing on the literacy issue.³⁸

Beyond traditional advocacy and public awareness efforts, and beyond media attention, a new economic discourse about literacy, from about 1985, has been very important. There has been a new policy attention to the economics of literacy, and a shift in the nature of the economic arguments. Earlier economic arguments for literacy had focused primarily on issues of access to the labour market, and unemployment and welfare costs. The

³⁵Andrée Boucher, *En toutes lettres et en français: L'analphabetisme et l'alphabétisation des francophones au Canada*, Montréal, Institut canadien d'éducation des adultes, 1989.

³⁶Peter Calamai, *Broken Words: Why Five Million Canadians are Illiterate*, Toronto, Southam Communications, 1988. Critiques of the survey conducted by Southam News, and of the public discussion that it supported, include William T. Fagan, "Literacy in Canada: A Critique of the Southam Report," *Alberta Journal of Educational Research*, 34:3, 1988, 224-231; David R. Olson, "Mythologizing Literacy," *English Quarterly* 21:2, 1988, 115-19; John Willinsky, "The Construction of a Crisis: Literacy in Canada," *Canadian Education Review* 15:1, 1989, 1-15.

³⁷Bill Maciejko, "Literacy in English Canadian Newspapers," MS, Centre for Policy Studies in Education, University of British Columbia, 1990.

³⁸"Women and Literacy," special issue of *Canadian Woman Studies/les cahiers de la femme* 9:3&4, 1988; "Literacy, Learning and Libraries," special issue of *Canadian Library Journal* 47:3, 1990.

central term of discussion had been "cost." It changed to "competitiveness." The "changing literacy demands of the workplace," as part of the "flexibility" and "adjustment" necessary for "productivity," are central themes of the new discussion. International and Canadian government reports called attention to literacy as a workforce training issue.³⁹ When the 1986 Speech from the Throne announced federal action for literacy, specific attention was drawn to "the literacy skills that are prerequisite to participation in an advanced economy." Employment and Immigration Canada, which had neglected to mention literacy in a policy overview at the beginning of the decade,⁴⁰ labelled it a significant issue in a policy overview at the end of the decade.⁴¹

Other processes must have supported the growing interest in literacy when this economic rationale took hold in the mid-1980s. Certain processes, for example, arise at the intersection of literacy and governmental safety regulations, and governmental provision of health services. Legal protections have been introduced for workers using hazardous materials, requiring that they understand hazards and safety measures. Rising costs of medical services have led to patient education and preventive medicine being seen as cost-effective for the health system.⁴² Both these processes — and likely others — have contributed to a governmental concern with people's capacity to use written information.⁴³ But a strong case can be made that a new policy attention to the economics of illiteracy in particular has been the central driving force behind governmental willingness to take adult literacy more seriously.

In retrospect, it now appears that the crucial years for putting literacy on the agenda were 1986-88. The Speech from the Throne that announced federal government literacy activity was made in 1986, and a funding commitment announced in 1987. The Cedar Glen Declaration and the Southam media coverage appeared in 1987. International and national conferences were held, back-to-back, in 1987, sponsored by the International Council for Adult Education, and by the Movement for Canadian Literacy. Key provincial reports appeared in these years as well: Ontario announced a government plan for literacy in 1986; the Nova Scotia government called a literacy advisory committee in 1987; a British Columbia report on access to advanced education and job training proposed making literacy a priority in 1988. It was after these years that the number and variety of other organizations taking up the issue increased dramatically.

³⁹ In 1986 a European Management Forum report on the competitiveness of the OECD economies ranked Canada low on the basic workforce skills needed to adjust to change, as well as on the quality of skilled labour. In 1987, the National Advisory Board on Science and Technology (advisory to the Prime Minister) recommended a major effort to eradicate illiteracy. See Leon Muszynski and David A. Wolfe, "New Technology and Training: Lessons from Abroad," *Canadian Public Policy/Analyse de Politiques* 15:3, 1989, 245-64; Lynn Burton, "Basic Job Retraining and Paid Educational Leave," in Maurice C. Taylor and James A. Draper (eds.), *Adult Literacy Perspectives*, Toronto, Culture Concepts, 1989, 325-35.

⁴⁰ *Labour Market Development in the 1980s*, Employment and Immigration Canada, 1981.

⁴¹ Employment and Immigration Canada, *Success in the Works: A Profile of Canada's Emerging Workforce; and Success in the Works: A Policy Paper*, Ottawa, 1989.

⁴² Cf. Health and Welfare Canada, *Achieving Health for All: A Framework for Health Promotion*, Ottawa, Ministry of Supply and Services, Canada, 1986. Health problems related to limited literacy, and literacy-conscious strategies for public health organizations, are discussed in Ontario Public Health Association and Frontier College, *The Literacy and Health Project: Making the World Healthier and Safer for People who Can't Read, Phase I*, Toronto, 1989.

⁴³ It is remarkable that, within policy discussions, the consequences of limited literacy for community and political participation have scarcely been developed at all, and official statistics have no method for accounting the "human costs" that are often mentioned in political rhetoric.

The public discourse through which literacy has come onto the public agenda has had mixed consequences. It has undoubtedly allowed literacy work to be extended and strengthened. Yet there are many difficult questions about how the public discourse about literacy shapes literacy work and how it affects people's lives. Consider just three. (1) Practitioners have often decried the tendency of media coverage and advertisements to depict people with low literacy skills as social outcasts and incompetents, unable to participate in work or in politics, living in a state of shame and terror. This distortion of "illiterates" in media coverage may do more harm than good. (In some awareness activities, it should be said, there is now conscious concern to design messages to elicit respect for the knowledge and determination of learners, rather than pity for their deficiencies). (2) It sometimes seems that the discussion of literacy and productivity is a way of blaming ordinary workers for economic difficulties, or blaming the schools, and not seeing economic troubles as the outcome of management decisions and government policies. (3) Literacy workers often have a profound practical understanding of the relations between illiteracy and poverty, and often understand literacy as a means of assertion against poverty. This understanding is very seldom carried forward into the media.

Such criticisms of the literacy discourse should be insistently raised. It is also clear that the combination of forces impelling the new discourse about literacy — advocacy organizations, media, and economic interests — has produced a new era of literacy activity. Although there has been no systematic tracking of levels of programming and funding, there have certainly been increases across the country. And, paradoxically, the new (economically inspired) interest in literacy has yielded additional support for programming and advocacy organizations that had already promoted literacy as a human right and an expression of social equity.

These forces and the gains they have produced suggest some coincidence of interests, between literacy work as an expression of social equity and democracy, and literacy as a means to economic productivity. Whether economic interests and interests in social equity remain aligned is one major question for the development of literacy work in the 1990s.

International Literacy Year - awareness and resources

International Literacy Year and the beginning of the last decade of the twentieth century have brought a new visibility to the literacy issue, and new kinds of infrastructure for literacy work.

Publicity from many sources increased massively before and during International Literacy Year. Provinces have made focused efforts in public awareness. Many other organizations have been involved. Some examples: A number of plays have been produced: World Literacy of Canada nationally toured "Reading the Signs;" students and tutors from the program *La magie des lettres* in Vanier, Ontario, developed "La clef;" "Elephant Shoes" was produced in Alberta, and "Square Eyes" in Manitoba; "Marks on Paper," first produced in the early 1980s, was revived by a group of student actors in British Columbia.⁴⁴ Canada Post designed a commemorative stamp for literacy, whose symbol, a stylized bird composed of characters from many languages, has also been used on

⁴⁴Cf. Tom Walker, "Theatre as Literacy," in James A. Draper, Maurice C. Taylor and Sheila Goldbrab (eds.), *Issues in Adult Literacy and Basic Education in Canada*, Toronto: Ontario Institute for Studies in Adult Education, 1991, 290-301.

lithographs and T-shirts. It also has sponsored TV programs ("Flight for Freedom"/"L'envoi vers la liberté"), a music video, educational video cassettes, and TV and radio spot announcements.

There have also been awareness efforts directed, not to the public, but to social service and community agencies whose clients or members may have limited literacy. The United Way has developed an information kit, on dealing with clients with limited literacy, that is available to 3500 community agencies.⁴⁵ The John Howard society has produced booklets on dealing with clients.⁴⁶

Coalitions of literacy programs and practitioners have been formed in every province for information-sharing and advocacy. There have been a wide variety of exchanges of information regarding programming development. Resource centres have been set up in many provinces. The Canadian Library Association has undertaken a Canadian Literacy Thesaurus project, aimed to facilitate the indexing and retrieval of literacy information. The Association of Canadian Community Colleges operates a National Adult Literacy Database, an on-line information source about literacy programs across the country.

At least a dozen and a half conferences focused on literacy were held in 1990, involving literacy and older people, literacy and vocational training; and programming in corrections, community colleges, libraries, and workplaces. The Circumpolar Conference on Literacy brought participants from northern countries to examine community based and aboriginal language literacy; the Literacy 2000 Conference, held in Vancouver, reviewed literacy developments in several countries; Une Société sans barrières brought together 3000 people in Montréal to examine issues of literacy and human rights.

Devolution and partnership

The devolution of responsibilities from federal government to the provinces is a central current in the development of literacy work over the last quarter century — as shown above. The provinces and territories of course have constitutional responsibility for education. Furthermore, it has become the dominant view that although the federal government can encourage and support literacy activity, and provide instruction in particular contexts, adult literacy education, even if it is a matter of labour force training, must be organized under provincial and territorial governments. Most literacy programming is under provincial and territorial auspices.⁴⁷

Just as there has been a devolution of responsibility from federal to provincial and territorial governments, we might similarly speak of a devolution of responsibilities from all governments to other providers of literacy programming outside government, and in general to other "partners" in society. There are strong currents within governments at all levels to reduce the scope of government activity wherever possible, often to "privatize" not only industries but also social and educational services. There are also shifting relationships between political, economic and community institutions. Government less frequently mediates between social forces, and more frequently joins with various other interests in common discussion. One consequence of these changes is

⁴⁵ United Way of Canada/Centraide Canada, "Litrasee? Put it on the List," and "Analphabètes? ... Analphabètes" (videos), "Literacy Support Work: An Integrated Approach," and "Intervénir para-alphabétisation," (booklets), Ottawa, 1991.

⁴⁶John Howard Society of Canada, *Taking Down the Wall of Words (Parts 1 and 2)*, Ottawa, 1990.

⁴⁷Cf. Council of Ministers of Education, Canada, *Adult Illiteracy in Canada*, 1988; and *Adult Illiteracy in Canada: Identifying and Addressing the Problem*, 1988.

that co-ordination among multiple program providers and interested sectors of society is a major concern of literacy planning. The term "partnership" is now in very common use.

Ordinarily literacy programming and supports for literacy students are not provided solely by ministries of education. Ministries concerned with advanced education, job training, culture, libraries, prisons, and social services, also are involved. Government plans often specify a "lead ministry" charged with overall co-ordination of a government's activities in support of literacy. Other ministries are then deemed to be its "partners." However, in spite of the definition of "lead ministries" for literacy, and intra-governmental "partnerships," it is unfortunately common experience that the workings of cabinet government and of departmental bureaucracies produce competitiveness at the governmental level and a lack of co-ordination at the program level. In the federal government, there is no co-ordinating mechanism between the National Literacy Secretariat and Employment and Immigration Canada. In several provinces there is a marked lack of co-ordination between different ministries involved in program provision and support.

Although the term "partnership" arises within government, its primary use is to identify organizational linkages that extend beyond governments and educational systems. Beyond government, schools and colleges, "partners" commonly identified include business, trade unions, prisons, community organizations, native organizations, and media. Funding arrangements often encourage and sometimes require involvements among such organizations.

Literacy for competitiveness, literacy as a right

Over the last quarter century, ideas articulated from various sectors of society have put adult literacy on the public agenda and produced a new era of literacy activity. Community, cultural and linguistic, and literacy advocacy organizations have promoted literacy as an aspect of community development and as a human right; media have portrayed illiteracy as an individual burden and a social cost; researchers and policy makers have clarified the meanings and scope of functional literacy; labour unions have sought educational opportunities for their members; and employers and government labour force managers have pressed for a literate and "flexible" or trainable labour force. There has of course been a public discussion of all these ideas, a discussion that extends from government and advocacy reports to café conversations among political party activists and ordinary voters.

The economic and functional arguments for literacy (supplemented at times by cultural and equity arguments) have generally driven government interest. There has been a steadily increasing interest in workplace literacy. Ideas on the economics of literacy have most recently been urged in the federal government's "Prosperity Initiative," which has begun with an effort to create a "dialogue" about competitiveness, and about the relationship of competitiveness and learning. A consultation paper observes that "Our prosperity depends on major improvements in the general level of skills held by all Canadians," but that "recent Canadian numeracy and literacy statistics paint a grim picture of a future work force without the basic skills to adjust quickly to a rapidly changing environment." The paper's possible targets for the end of the decade include cutting rates of adult illiteracy in half, and having 90% of people attain by age 25 the equivalent of a high school diploma.⁴⁸

⁴⁸Government of Canada Prosperity Secretariat, *Learning Well ... Living Well: Consultation Paper*, Ottawa, Minister of Supply and Services Canada, 1991, v, 14, 30. The discussion of a "learning

But the economic and functional arguments have not supplanted claims for literacy as a right and as a resource that should be available to communities. Indeed it is also remarkable that proponents of the broader claims have very often provided the terms of discussion about teaching and programming arrangements, with such ideas as community or learner involvement, program diversity, and learner-centredness. The relationship between the dominant interest in literacy and the nature of literacy work itself is sometimes paradoxical.

Recent literacy programming development

Once literacy is on the public agenda, what actually happens in literacy work depends largely on the governmental processes through which policies are drafted and programs are established and supported. These processes are defined in many documents — including not only so-called policy statements, but also legislation, funding formulas, application forms, reporting requirements, and so on. These documents define not only whether program support is available, but also in what forms it is available.

Since 1985, every province and territory has seen some increase in literacy activity.⁴⁹ However, literacy work in different provinces and territories is differently and unevenly developed. Governments have shaped their involvements in literacy with different adult education traditions, and with different financial resources. Although data is very scant, one might wonder if the extent of literacy programming isn't roughly in inverse relation to the numbers in any province or territory who have limited literacy. Indeed it not the number of people with limited literacy that determines the extent of programming. It is rather the financial resources that a government commands to address literacy, and the ways that these resources are claimed by political forces, and managed by parties in power and by civil servants. The devolution of financial responsibility to the provinces likely means that the uneven development of literacy programming across the country will increase, barring some off-setting renewal of regional equalization.

It is striking that Ontario and Québec have been distinctive in the high level of their expansions of programming.⁵⁰ Although detailed historical studies should be done, it is plausible to suggest that the distinctiveness of development in Ontario and Québec is due to unique social and economic forces. In Québec, strong currents of promotion of the French language, and of social democratic politics, continuing from the Quiet Revolution, informed government policy in the early 1980s. Even since then, governments have been committed to provincial control of human resources and the economy, and at the same time faced an historically undertrained labour force. Ontario in the late 1980s had a booming economy, in which many industries were adopting new forms of work organization and new technology, that brought out new forms of "functional illiteracy." There was at the same time a historically developed community model for literacy work, with its origins in ESL programming, and a fortuitous collection of "liberal" civil servants and Ministers who either actively promoted literacy or were receptive to proposals.

Most provinces and territories now have civil service positions or units concerned specifically with literacy, and most have, since the mid-1980s, established or revised plans, initiatives, policies or strategies for literacy; others are in process. In half the

culture" in Canada, and these tentative goals, appeared earlier in the "Speech from the Throne to Open the Third Session, Thirty-Fourth Parliament of Canada, May 13, 1991."

⁴⁹Some of these developments are summarized in Council of Ministers of Education, Canada, and Department of the Secretary of State of Canada, *Adult Literacy, Canada*, 1990, Report to the 42nd Session, International Conference on Education, Toronto and Ottawa, 1990.

⁵⁰By the mid-1980s, Alberta and British Columbia were already at relatively high levels of programming.

provinces, plans have been developed over the last three years through provincial literacy advisory committees, task forces or councils, whose membership includes not only educators but also representatives of business and other sectors of society — labour, native people, immigrant service organizations, libraries, and various government ministries. In a number of provinces there are interministerial committees to plan literacy activity.

Developments everywhere have occurred by expansion and consolidation of the traditional organization of adult education. However, patterns of development are not strictly determined: traditions are contradictory, and are always drawn on selectively.

There is great variety in the organization of teaching. The number of teaching hours per week ranges from two to thirty. In some programs, students enter and leave at any time; other programs schedule classes according to academic terms.

Literacy teaching is done by people in a wide variety of organizational forms. Some teaching takes place in educational institutions, and some in non-formal settings. At one extreme there are volunteers who devote a few hours a week to literacy, for a few months. Volunteer tutoring is the usual teaching arrangement in Laubach Literacy, Frontier College, and many English-Canadian community programs.⁵¹ As well, many school district programs and about one-fifth of community college programs use volunteer tutors. In some provinces, especially those with strong volunteer traditions, most teachers are volunteers. In francophone community programs in Québec, "militants" sometimes teach, and sometimes have active roles in recruitment and public awareness.

At the other extreme are career literacy workers, who can devote their time to literacy, and hone their skills, over a period of years. Both schools and community colleges are involved in literacy programming, through diverse arrangements, and recent program expansion has been quantitatively greatest within educational institutions. Different provincial and territorial traditions of adult education provision mean that the choice or the relationship between school board and college involvement varies widely. In many provinces, the continuing education divisions of school districts traditionally provide basic education. In a newer but common pattern, community colleges, organized through ministries of advanced education, are mandated to provide or to support adult literacy and basic education. Sometimes school boards and community colleges provide their own classes; and sometimes they are involved with, or administer program grants to, community or volunteer organizations.

Programming expansions outside educational institutions, in community settings and in workplaces, are likely less significant quantitatively (at least to date) but are more extensively discussed.

Community programs have proliferated since 1985. There are, for example, now about 80 autonomous literacy groups in Québec and over 150 in Ontario, 65 literacy tutoring programs in Alberta, and nearly 150 Laubach Literacy Councils across most provinces. In most provinces, scattered autonomous literacy organizations, or programs sponsored by community centres, ex-offenders' organizations, and the like — secure government funding for some or all of materials, teaching, and facilities. Many community programs

⁵¹Association of Canadian Community Colleges, *Literacy in the Colleges and Institutes: A Focus on Community Partnerships*, Fanshawe College, London, Ontario, 1989.

rely on one-to-one tutoring, with tutoring sessions occurring in literacy program offices, libraries, or learners' homes. Tutors are usually, but not always, volunteers, and the as distinct from general adult education or upgrading, understanding literacy learning in its immensely various social and cultural contexts, promoting student writing and publishing, involving students in program management, and promoting plain writing.⁵² Where they extent of teaching is usually limited by the extent of reasonable demands on a volunteer's time — two to four hours a week. Community programs have often been at the leading edge of developments in literacy work — developing a conception of literacy have played a leading role in literacy work and advocacy, in Ontario and Québec, it has taken governments five to ten years to recognize and promote their practices.

A very important development of the early 1990s has been the extension of literacy work with particular groups of learners, in ways that also address important issues of gender, race, class, age and ability. Discussion has been ongoing in several areas, and some have borne fruit in programming efforts. There has been extensive study, both across the country and within particular provinces, of issues of francophone literacy, often considering the intertwined issues of literacy and refrancisation. There is now a national coalition — Federation francophone pour l'alphabétisation en français — and there is some literacy programming conducted in French and often controlled by francophone organizations in all provinces and the Northwest Territories.⁵³ The movement for aboriginal control of education that has been under way for years is now being extended into adult literacy. There have been a number of important studies and reports of aboriginal literacy.⁵⁴ Programs now offered in aboriginal languages in Manitoba, Ontario and the Northwest Territories, and aboriginal literacy may, if jurisdictional bottlenecks can be eliminated, be an area of significant expansion. The prevalence of limited literacy among older Canadians, and their needs for literacy for health and social services, and for continuing community and political participation, have been asserted; a pilot project is

⁵² Toronto-area community programs are described in Betsy Alkenbrack, Tannis Atkinson, Brenda Duncombe, Sally McBeth and Marianne Williams, *Community-Based Literacy in an Urban Setting: A Model*, Toronto, Metro Toronto Movement for Literacy, 1984; and Elaine Gaber-Katz and Gladys M. Watson, *The Land that We Dream Of ...: A Participatory Study of Community-Based Literacy*, Toronto, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education Press, 1991.

⁵³ See André Boucher, *En toutes lettres et en français*; Serge Wagner, "Literacy and the Assimilation of Minorities: The Case of Francophones in Canada," in Jean-Paul Hauteceur (ed.), *Alpha 90*, Direction générale de l'éducation des adultes, ministère de l'Éducation du Québec, Montréal, 1990, 53-80; Carmelle d'Entremont, *The First Step: Adult Literacy, Basic Education and Academic Upgrading for Acadians in Nova Scotia*, Halifax, Nova Scotia Department of Advanced Education and Job Training, 1990; Bruno Ouellette, *L'analphabétisme chez les Franco-Albertains*, Éducation Permanente, Faculté Saint-Jean, Université de l'Alberta, Edmonton, 1990. Also see Réseau national d'action femmes, *L'alphabétisation des femmes francophones: Guide à l'intention des formatrices*, Ottawa, 1990.

⁵⁴ "You Took My Talk": *Aboriginal Literacy and Empowerment* (Fourth Report of the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs), Ottawa, House of Commons, 1990; *Aboriginal Literacy Action Plan*, Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technologies, Asimakaniseekan Askiy Reserve, Saskatoon, 1990; Carmen Rodriguez and Don Sawyer, *Native Literacy Research Report*, Salmon Arm, B.C., Native Adult Education Resource Centre, 1990.

underway.⁵⁵ Studies and proposals have been prepared regarding literacy for people with disabilities, and there are some special programming arrangements.⁵⁶ Some literacy programs emphasize the development of literacy as an articulation of women's voice, a process in which women can explore common experience and action as well as gaining skill.⁵⁷ The Canadian Congress on Learning Opportunities for Women has sponsored research into women's experiences in literacy programming, and has an ongoing action research project on woman-positive literacy work.⁵⁸ A feminist literacy network has been formed. The most extensive development of workplace literacy programming in Ontario has been organized by trade-unions, and union involvement is growing in a number of provinces. All these developments point to the importance of multiple and flexible definitions of the "community" at the centre of literacy programming — including but not limited to the sense of community as neighbourhood.

A growing intention to integrate literacy with work-related skills is evident in both policy and programming. Reports continue to appear, including a major recent study by the Hudson Institute.⁵⁹ Many meetings on workplace literacy have been held, including a large seminar in Vancouver and a particularly large conference in St. John's, organized by the Atlantic Provinces Economic Council. Business and labour often participate in literacy planning bodies. The Canadian Business Task Force on Literacy of the late 1980s has been succeeded by ABC Canada, a foundation that promotes literacy in the private sector; its board includes highly-placed figures from business, labour, education and government. Labour federations are now promoting discussion of literacy, and sometimes literacy programming, among their affiliates. Governments fund research, feasibility studies and pilot programs for workplace literacy. There are pilot programs in several provinces. In Ontario, a Workplace Literacy Strategy has sponsored five regional meetings, and offered incentive grants for the development of materials and program models. Interest in the economics of literacy means that the development of programming practices and of supportive policy arrangements will be continuing issues through the 1990s.

Some general programming tendencies can be observed. Workplace programs generally involve negotiated arrangements between an employer and a trade union. Employers often provide space for classes or tutoring sessions; time for the sessions is usually half provided by the employer and half the worker's own. Some of the programs involve worker-tutors. In other cases, teachers are employed by a local educational institution. Scheduling of workplace programs is sometimes extremely flexible, allowing workers,

⁵⁵Andrew Aitkens, *A National Literacy Strategy for Older Canadians*, One Voice: The Canadian Seniors Network, Ottawa, 1991.

⁵⁶TV Ontario, *Lifeline to Literacy: People with Disabilities Speak Out*, Toronto, 1989; G. Allan Roehrer Institute, *Literacy and Labels: A Look at Literacy Policy and People with a Mental Handicap*, Downsview, Ont., 1990; Roger J. Carver, *Deaf Illiteracy: A Genuine Educational Puzzle or an Instrument of Oppression? A Critical Review*, Canadian Association of the Deaf, [n.p.], 1989; Canadian National Institute for the Blind, *Literacy: an Issue for Blind and Visually Impaired Canadians*, Ottawa, 1991.

⁵⁷See "Women and Literacy," special issue of *Canadian Woman Studies/les cahiers de la femme* 9:3&4, 1988; Jennifer Horsman, *Something in My Mind Besides the Everyday: Women and Literacy*, Toronto, Women's Press, 1990.

⁵⁸Betty-Ann Lloyd, *Discovering the Strength of Our Voices: Women and Literacy Programs*, Toronto, Canadian Congress on Learning Opportunities for Women, 1991; Betty-Ann Lloyd, "Women and Literacy Research: Contradictions and Context," *Literacy/Alphabétisation* 15:4, 1992, 4-7.

⁵⁹Marie-José Drouin, *Workforce Literacy: An Economic Challenge for Canada*, Hudson Institute of Canada, Ottawa, 1990; this study is summarized in *Creating a Learning Culture: Work and Literacy in the Nineties*, National Literacy Secretariat, 1990.

even shift workers, to study at the beginning or end of their working day. Programs are most common in manufacturing industries and in the food and accommodation sector. An inventory of workplace programs and development projects identified over 100.⁶⁰ There are literacy programs in a number of individual companies, usually in co-operation with local school boards or community colleges. Both Frontier College and Laubach Literacy of Canada operate literacy training projects in several businesses, also using peer tutors, trained on the usual tutor-training models. Nova Scotia has supported a range of innovative and community-specific workplace programs. In Ontario, two-thirds of provincial workplace program funding has gone to provincial and metropolitan labour organizations.⁶¹ The largest effort — operating in over 100 sites — is provided by trade unions in Ontario, through the Ontario Federation of Labour (OFL), and the Labour Councils of Metropolitan Toronto and Hamilton, with funding from Ontario Basic Skills in the Workplace. The OFL programs, identified as "basic employment skills training" rather than "literacy," operate with worker tutors, in a model that originated with health and safety training programs. Tutors are given about three weeks' training before returning to their workplaces to recruit and teach their peers. This programming model is being used by the Saskatchewan Federation of Labour, and considered by labour bodies elsewhere.

A great deal of work has been done in developing literacy programming infrastructure — for example in training for practitioners. There has been funding for training events, resource centres, conferences, and the like.⁶² A variety of specialized resources have been developed for tutor training,⁶³ and initial training programs designed that range in length from only a few hours up to 30 or 40. Training based on reflection on practice is sometimes done through practitioners' networks,⁶⁴ and sometimes within programs as a part of their ongoing work. Efforts are under way to develop training programs tailored for adult literacy practitioners, separate from traditional teacher certification programs and their strong historical links to public schooling. Several universities have established courses addressing literacy, often involving practicum experience, reflection on practice, or practice-based research.⁶⁵ Some institutions offer one or two courses, and others offer certificate programs or graduate programs in which students may concentrate on adult literacy.⁶⁶

⁶⁰ Wendy Johnson, 1991 *Inventory of Workplace Literacy Programs*, ABC Canada, Halifax, 1991.

⁶¹ Ruth Asher, "Literacy Initiatives and Issues Across Canada," in *Launching the Literacy Decade: Awareness into Action, Second North American Conference on Adult and Adolescent Literacy, Conference Report, 1991*, International Reading Association, 1991.

⁶² For example, the Ontario Literacy Branch funds Alpha Ontario, a literacy and language training resource centre, Centre FORA to develop and distribute French materials, computer networks, resources and training for practitioners, and practitioner special interest groups.

⁶³ One noteworthy example is the video and print tutor training package, *Journeyworkers*, jointly produced by Alberta and Manitoba.

⁶⁴ For example, through the Literacy Co-ordinators of Alberta and the Alberta Language and Literacy Resource Centre, practitioners' organizations have assumed responsibility for various practitioner training activities, and more experienced practitioners spend part of their time assisting less experienced.

⁶⁵ For a discussion of issues in collaboration between academics and literacy practitioners and advocates, see Richard Darville, "Trends in North America," in Mary Louise Kearney and Leslie Limage (eds.), *Literacy and the Role of the University*, Unesco, Paris, 1991, 30-39.

⁶⁶ The most focused university programs are at the University of Québec at Montréal, and at Carleton University.

The next section of this report examines government literacy policies and activities. It recapitulates in greater detail some of the historical processes described generally above, and shows something of the great variety of forms of literacy work across Canada. The second chapter then returns to some general processes, raising issues to be resolved in future development.

III

Government activities in literacy

Most of this section provides detailed descriptions of the past and present literacy policies and activities first of federal government departments, and then of provincial and territorial governments. Some of these descriptions only summarize policy and administrative arrangements. Others are more elaborated, and indicate debates about developments that have taken place or should take place. These differences in this text reflect differences in the documentation produced and publicly available within various jurisdictions.

National Literacy Secretariat

Since 1986 the federal government has again given official attention to literacy. In 1987 the National Literacy Secretariat was formed, initially within the federal Department of the Secretary of State, and later within Multiculturalism and Citizenship. In 1988 a literacy initiative was launched, under which a five year, \$110 million allocation allows the National Literacy Secretariat to play a role as a "catalyst" — stimulating involvement by others. The National Literacy Secretariat both promotes and shapes the development of the field, through its own funding criteria and decisions, and through joint decision-making with provincial and territorial governments. The National Literacy Secretariat has entered into hundreds of joint projects. These projects have both strengthened existing efforts, and prodded involvement in literacy beyond educational institutions and grass-roots community groups.

Much National Literacy Secretariat funding is tied to provincial and territorial departments concerned with literacy, and their policies and priorities. Contributions to joint federal-provincial/territorial initiatives are usually on a cost-shared basis. These include public awareness, access and outreach activities, the development of learning materials, co-ordination and information-sharing among literacy practitioners, and research.⁶⁷ It funds a few innovative demonstration projects, and projects conducted by native, francophone and labour organizations.

Another category of National Literacy Secretariat funding is not tied to provincial policies and priorities. In a few circumstances, the National Literacy Secretariat has funded programming that provincial governments were then unwilling or unable to fund,

⁶⁷ Canada, Department of the Secretary of State, "Discussion Paper on Literacy," 1988.

including programs operated by labour or linguistic minority organizations. Funding has been provided for national and provincial literacy advocacy organizations. Coalitions of program providers are supported in all the provinces and territories. Some of these organizations have actively lobbied governments to expand their commitments in literacy. The National Literacy Secretariat also funds other non-governmental organizations to conduct literacy-related projects.

National Literacy Secretariat funding has helped develop the infrastructure for programming — materials, training, practitioners' conferences, learners' events, and the like. It has also been directed to building up what could be called the "literacy policy capacity" of organizations. This involves networking among programs and organizations. It also involves studies and reports which develop new knowledge or articulate and systematize the knowledge developing in practice. Such studies and reports are part of the practical work involved in building up a governmental commitment to, and a definition of governmental action for, literacy. National Literacy Secretariat funding has supported studies and reports from organizations of women, aboriginal people, trade unionists, seniors, people with intellectual disabilities, anti-poverty groups, lawyers, business people, and others.

People sometimes demand that the National Literacy Secretariat fund direct programming. The Secretariat is clear that its mandate as a "catalyst" is not to fund ongoing literacy education, and the consistent response is to divert demands to provincial governments. This response indicates that the federal government role in literacy remains substantially that defined in its withdrawal from program support in the early 1980s. Some critics observe that the formation of the National Literacy Secretariat has, at comparatively low cost, effectively deflected advocacy organizations' criticism of the failure of Employment and Immigration Canada to address literacy in any serious way.

Employment and Immigration Canada

For over a decade, as a matter of explicit policy, Employment and Immigration Canada (EIC, the successor to Canada Manpower, discussed above), has not supported training below the grade 7 level. The undereducated have been virtually the only group explicitly excluded from access to EIC-funded training programs, restricting their access not only to literacy training itself, but also to training for the many trades courses which require grade 10 or 12 for entry. However, EIC interest in literacy and basic skills has very gradually been renewed since the mid-1980s. In 1984, EIC established the Literacy Corps Program, to train volunteer tutors for youth; funding is now about \$1 million a year. Grants from the Innovations program have occasionally supported literacy projects. A literacy component has also proven to be necessary in other training projects. Since 1984, literacy has occasionally been an element in Canadian Jobs Strategy projects, run by employers, or by private or non-profit training agencies. Literacy has sometimes been added to workplace training projects. Experience has shown that in many of these projects, workers begin a literacy learning process but do not have the opportunity to carry it as far as they need.

These incremental changes are now being incorporated into EIC policy,⁶⁸ largely through modifications of existing program mechanisms. One change concerns Unemployment Insurance recipients, who, under the UI Act, must be ready and able to work; regulations, however, allow people to take certain types of training courses. Upgrading

⁶⁸ Employment and Immigration Canada, Employability Improvement Directorate, Employment Policies Branch, "Employment Policy on Worker Literacy," Ottawa, 1991.

courses, including literacy (called Preparation for Vocational Training, and Basic Skills Training) are now included in this category. This change removes a much lobbied-against irritant to the literacy community. UI recipients will be able to receive benefits throughout a training period that could be up to three years, although EIC expects that the training will be restricted on average to 24 weeks. In order to shift its resources from course purchase to income support (UI benefits or Canadian Jobs Strategy allowances), EIC prefers "fee-payer" arrangements, in which individuals or other government agencies pay course costs. However, there will once again be limited EIC purchases of upgrading seats at the lower levels of Adult Basic Education, perhaps used to balance regional disparities in program availability. Canadian Jobs Strategy projects which combine training with some work experience may include a literacy component. Employers will continue to have access to compensation for literacy training costs, and some wage subsidies for workers requiring literacy training.

Finally, still under consideration is what EIC calls Community Literacy Initiatives, relating to part-time programming offered by community groups, school boards or colleges. No income support is available to people who participate in these programs, but EIC is considering course purchases, in exceptional circumstances; an expansion of its support for youth tutoring; and research into recruitment, program and agency networking, and evaluation.

In considering the possible results of all these initiatives, three matters should be remembered. Specific arrangements are to be worked out at the local level. No expansion in overall funding for upgrading is expected. And all initiatives are subject to evaluation with reference to trainees' job search success, job training performance, or on-the-job effectiveness.

Correctional Services Canada

Other federal departments are involved in literacy, but less prominently. In 1987 the federal Solicitor General announced a literacy initiative in Canadian federal penitentiaries. Annually increasing targets were set, for numbers of students to reach a grade eight level, through 1990. This has recently been extended to include targets at the grade five and ten levels. There are increasing efforts to integrate education with other rehabilitative programs.

Indian Affairs and Northern Development

The mandate of the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development includes providing basic services to status Indian communities, and assisting native people to acquire employment skills. However, its adult literacy activity is limited.

Newfoundland

Scattered part-time literacy programs in Newfoundland were developed from 1969, and were sponsored after 1978 by the Division of Adult Education. Although in 1979 and 1980 there were memorable advocacy events, with extensive student involvement, programming did not expand. Even with some Laubach Literacy activity (after 1983), there were only about 300 students in 1987.⁶⁹ The 1986 Report of the Royal Commission

⁶⁹ Susan Hoddinott, "Literacy in Newfoundland: A History and Discussion," *Soundbone* 7:3-4, 1987, 5-10. Cf. Percy Barrett, "Provincial Overviews: Newfoundland, Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick," (n.d.).

on Employment and Unemployment recommended "a co-ordinated programme for improving literacy rates," starting with the elimination of urban-rural discrepancies. Real expansion occurred only after the deliberations of an Advisory Committee on Literacy Policy, struck in 1988, which drew attention to the decline of Newfoundland's resource-based economy.⁷⁰ There is now a provincial literacy policy co-ordinator; five new regional colleges offer literacy programming; and there is a strong emphasis on combining efforts with business, labour and voluntary organizations. There are literacy teachers throughout the college system, and in six community based programs and thirteen Laubach Literacy Councils. The 1990 report, *Literacy in an Achieving Society*,⁷¹ says it is government policy that "All citizens of Newfoundland and Labrador should have the opportunity to achieve literacy as a basic human right."

Prince Edward Island

The first Prince Edward Island Laubach Literacy Council started in Charlottetown in 1971, and there are now five Councils across the Island. Within the government, the Department of Industry is primarily responsible for literacy, and has provided small grants to the Councils, for tutor training and materials. These are now involved not only in communities at large but also in correctional and rehabilitation centres, and with the Canadian National Institute for the Blind. The Island's community college, Holland College, has been cautious about moving from higher levels of adult basic education into literacy, but has recently established computer-based learning centres, and developed an adult curriculum covering grades one to twelve.

Nova Scotia

Literacy programs in Nova Scotia have traditionally come from two sources. Some were sponsored by school boards, among which literacy involvement varies widely with local leadership and funding availability. Other programs were sponsored by Laubach Literacy. There are now 18 Laubach Literacy Councils; some have affiliations with school boards. School boards have often relied on the Councils to provide basic level tutoring.

Programs since the mid-1980s have continued to develop through school boards and Literacy Councils, but have also had other sources. Several community literacy projects developed (in conjunction with a community centre, a library, or other organization), although these have often experienced difficulty in finding funding. In 1989, following an extensive study of programming in the province,⁷² the Department of Advanced Education and Job Training announced the formation of Literacy Nova Scotia, an advisory board to the Minister. Literacy facilitator positions have been created for seven community college regions (one of which is a province-wide Acadie), and for black and aboriginal programming. Coordinators provide tutor training, materials development, program promotion, and aid to local networks. They also work to establish new programs, including a series of 10 varied and innovative workplace programs.⁷³ Regional resource centres include materials for tutors and students, and there are learner collections in local libraries. School board upgrading programs may also teach literacy students.

⁷⁰ *Literacy in a Changing Society: Policies, Perspectives and Strategies for Newfoundland and Labrador*, St. John's, 1989.

⁷¹ *Literacy in an Achieving Society: Report of the Interministerial Advisory Committee on Literacy*, St. John's, 1990.

⁷² Betty-Ann Lloyd, *Adult Literacy, Basic Education and Academic Upgrading in Nova Scotia: The Role of the Community College*, A research report prepared for Literacy Nova Scotia, 1989.

⁷³ *Workplace Upgrading in Nova Scotia*, Nova Scotia Department of Advanced Education and Job Training, Halifax, 1990.

New Brunswick

In New Brunswick, Laubach Literacy has a longstanding involvement. By 1983 there were 14 English Literacy Councils. There were also then two francophone community groups, involved not in tutoring but in promoting the development of programming. In that year, a government report, *A Second Chance*, called for "shared responsibility" between government and voluntary organizations. This led to college support for Literacy Councils in organization, administration, tutor training, and program promotion. Currently each college has a literacy co-ordinator, most of whose time is spent working to establish volunteer groups, and to train tutors and recruit students. There are also grants for materials, administration and conferences. Between 1983 and 1990 the number of volunteer and community groups increased 150%. By 1990 there were 23 English Laubach Councils (including programs on Indian Reserves and in prisons), and 22 francophone groups, organized in the Fédération d'alphabétisation du Nouveau-Brunswick, which works primarily to build community awareness and to bring learners to community colleges. Three Adult Basic Education Centres operate in the Acadian Peninsula. The Saint John Learning Exchange, opened in 1983 with EIC funding, in 1987 became the first (and only) independent literacy organization to receive provincial operating funds.

A number of extra-governmental and governmental committees have taken up the literacy issue for discussion. In 1988 an "Adult Literacy Consultation: Making Literacy a Priority in New Brunswick" was held. It has been followed up by the New Brunswick Committee on Literacy, involving business and labour as well as the literacy community; it has distributed information, organized community round tables, and encouraged the government to increase its activity. Since the late 1980s there has been increased governmental activity, organized through the Ministry of Advanced Education and Training.⁷⁴ Basic (grade level 0-3) literacy is still seen as the task of volunteer groups. But New Brunswick Community College programming now encompasses all nine college campuses, each with at least one full-time literacy (grades 3-7) instructor. There are also nine government-sponsored storefront Youth Access Centres, and college campuses offer programming through them. The New Brunswick Federation of Labour is organizing union-operated programs.

In a 1991 report,⁷⁵ the Premier's Advisory Council on Literacy states that the province has made "a formal commitment to reduce the functional illiteracy rate for New Brunswick by one percentage point (1%) each year for each of the next four years." The report also calls for an extension and systematization of existing programming, with further workplace-related efforts. Community literacy boards are to plan and co-ordinate local programming efforts. These are conceptualized in four categories, depending on whether students are working at a 0-6 level or a 7-12 level, and whether their goals are "individual" or "employment-related." For those with individual goals, programming is to be primarily the responsibility of the voluntary sector, with provincial funding for Literacy Councils, or "initial" funding for other groups. For those whose goals are employment-related, employers and employee groups are to be primarily responsible for programming, with assistance from the Department of Advanced Education and Training, and with funding possible. The Premier's Advisory Council has been succeeded by an Advisory Committee to the Ministry of Advanced Education and Training.

⁷⁴A useful overview of programming is included in New Brunswick Advanced Education and Training, *Literacy Awareness for the Province of New Brunswick*, Fredericton, 1991.

⁷⁵Premier's Advisory Council on Literacy, *Framework for Action*, New Brunswick Policy Secretariat, Fredericton, 1991.

Québec

Québec's literacy movement is rooted in the Quiet Revolution, and in a perception of its limitations — the persistence and even increase of poverty, the failure of opening access to schools to create educational equity, and the difficulty of protecting the French language with a significant portion of the population illiterate. Accordingly, the movement "insists strongly on the social and economic dimensions of the problem and on the failure of a democratization of education based solely on the school system."⁷⁶ Literacy work in Québec was organized after 1964 both in the adult education services of school boards, and in popular education groups. The school boards (commissions scolaires) operated federally funded upgrading programs, and from the mid-1960s some began work in literacy. The groupes populaires were active in working class and immigrant communities on tenant, health and other issues, and some took up literacy. In the late 1970s, a new wave of popular groups, concentrated in Montréal, began literacy work. Also at this time there was literacy work in the context of immigrant orientation and training.⁷⁷

By 1980, there was evidently a strong basis for literacy policy and programming. A number of meetings and reports had raised the profile of the literacy issue. Furthermore, the Québec government was keen to adopt an autonomous adult education and training policy, and to promote lifelong education. The popular groups held a key position in the early 1980s. Their number increased (from 13 in 1981, to 17 in 1982 and 30 in 1983). They developed diverse and experimental programming, including democratic structures; innovations in teaching materials, and practitioner training; and defence of the rights of illiterates.⁷⁸ A number of groups came together in 1981 to form le Regroupement des groupes populaires en alphabétisation du Québec (RGPAQ), which pushed for increased attention to literacy from all sectors of society, and for government policy. For some time it appeared — and many practitioners hoped — that literacy work would be an element of cultural development within the popular milieu.⁷⁹ This hope was encouraged by a 1980 government policy document that called for educational priority to the most disadvantaged areas, with responsibility and scope for experimentation given to local agencies.⁸⁰ Also the Commission d'étude sur la formation des adultes (CEFA), the "Jean Commission," which began work in 1980, was pushed to deal specifically with literacy, and its 1982 report⁸¹ called for basic education to be provided at no cost to adults, with a special campaign for "pure illiterates." In doing so, it highlighted Québec's history of "mutual education," organized without government intervention, and said,

The literacy campaign is specially designed to enable adults to take charge of and control their education. The campaign must therefore spring from organizations that have close ties with the adults affected. On the whole ... the Commission sees the campaign as an opportunity to develop independent alternatives that complement the existing school system.

⁷⁶ Andrée Boucher, *En toutes lettres et en français: L'analphabetisme et l'alphabétisation des francophones au Canada*, Montréal, Institut canadien d'éducation des adultes, 1989, 63.

⁷⁷ Québec literacy work at this time is characterized by Serge Wagner, "Pour une alphabétisation populaire," in *Dix éléments-clés pour une démocratisation de l'éducation des adultes*, Montréal, Institut canadien d'éducation des adultes, 1980.

⁷⁸ Louise Miller, "The Approach of Popular Literacy Groups in Québec," in Margaret Gayfer (ed.) *Literacy in Industrialized Countries: A Focus on Practice*, Toronto, International Council for Adult Education, 1988, 31-5.

⁷⁹ Wagner, "Pour une alphabétisation populaire."

⁸⁰ Ministère de l'éducation du Québec, *L'école s'adapte à son milieu*, 1980.

⁸¹ Gouvernement du Québec, Commission d'étude sur la formation des adultes, *Learning: A Voluntary and Responsible Action: Summary Report*, 1982.

However, the recession of the early 1980s, and a shift in political climate, arrived before government policy on literacy was pronounced. As a result, there has been over the 1980s in Québec an unusually clear articulation of different perspectives on the form that programming should take. The 1984 continuing education policy,⁸² the major policy document for the decade, has mixed implications. On the one hand, it makes the elimination of illiteracy a priority for action. It calls for "genuine access" to the schools by all groups, including explicitly "those most deprived of educational services." It resolves that basic education should be a right for all, regardless of age. Indeed, the 1989 Education Act made Québec the first jurisdiction in Canada to define in legislation the right of all residents to achieve a secondary diploma, and thus to literacy education. On the other hand, the 1984 policy shifts from a specific understanding of literacy to an integration of literacy into formal general education and training. Manpower training is the 1984 policy's explicit goal. The policy says that adult education should be "equivalent to the education of youth;" basic education is identified with a school diploma.⁸³

As a consequence of the 1984 policy, literacy funding nearly doubled in five years. However, the targeting of that funding — overwhelmingly favouring the formal system — has been contentious. In 1985-6, when school boards were granted open funding for literacy, their budget for literacy was \$13 million. By 1990, 80 of 82 school boards offered programs; they received \$24.1 million, over 90% of provincial literacy funding. The popular groups had increased in number to 70 in 1985-6, and their budget was \$1.2 million. But their funding has been nearly frozen since then, and by 1990, had increased to only \$1.9 million. (There were then 75 groups, with 35 RGPAQ members). The 1984 policy mandates schools to support what it called "independent" or "non-profit associations," saying, "The school network will continue its literacy programs using its own methods, and will support the activities of the independent sectors while respecting their originality." In practice this has meant that since funding does not cover all the expenses of popular groups, many now work sub-contractually with school boards, sometimes uneasily, to increase their resources.

Many organizations have continued to promote a broadly based literacy strategy. An RGPAQ document in 1986⁸⁴ deplored "the uneven development of the two literacy networks," and called for a global, flexible strategy. The argument was elaborated in a 1989 report from l'Institut canadien d'éducation des adultes,⁸⁵ and recapitulated in 1990 by the Conseil supérieur de l'éducation (an advisory body to the government on all education matters).⁸⁶ In this critical view, Québec is in a "paradoxical" situation⁸⁷ — it has clearly distinguished literacy from basic education, invested substantial financial resources in literacy during the 1980s, developed literacy networks, and organized research and publications; yet it has produced no global plan for literacy. The global plan called for would be developed through wide and open consultation. It would address literacy needs and learning within people's life situations, usually as members of cultural and linguistic minorities, and as people in persistent poverty, with difficult access to

⁸² *Continuing Education Program: Policy Statement and Plan of Action*, Gouvernement du Québec, 1984.

⁸³ Also see Jean-Paul Hautecoeur, "Literacy Policy in Québec: An Historical Overview," in Hautecoeur (ed.), *Alpha 90: Current Research in Literacy*, Montréal, Direction générale de l'éducation des adultes, Ministère de l'éducation du Québec, 1990, 31-51.

⁸⁴ Regroupement des groupes populaires en alphabétisation du Québec, "Document de réflexion: Pour un plan d'action en alphabétisation," Montréal, 1986.

⁸⁵ Boucher, *En Toutes Lettres*

⁸⁶ Conseil supérieur de l'éducation, *L'alphabétisation et l'éducation de base au Québec: Une mission à assumer solidairement*. For an English summary, see Educouncil (Conseil supérieur de l'éducation) 10:1, 1990.

⁸⁷ Boucher, *En Toutes Lettres*

social, legal and health services. It would recognize that illiteracy often reflects a rejection of educational institutions. Consequently, programming would be diverse and flexible, to address various specific milieux. There would be a mobilization of resources from all sectors, since "being at the service of others requires great flexibility concerning the resources to be implemented, and joint action among all those involved."⁸⁸ School boards and popular education groups would have a balanced participation. The strategy would encompass literacy in schools and the prevention of drop-outs. To date, the government has not responded to calls for a broad and flexible literacy strategy.

Anglophone literacy programming in Québec is wholly organized through 16 anglophone school boards. Most work in conjunction with Laubach Literacy Councils, of which there are ten in the province. The school boards and Councils come together in the province-wide Québec Literacy Working Group, which provides services such as professional development, support in program planning and evaluation, and public awareness. For its part, the QLWG seeks from the government more extensive consultation, adaptation of materials from the Ministry of Education to the anglophone context, and adjustments to the program funding mechanism that take into account the anglophone practice of delivering instruction through volunteer tutors, often to geographically dispersed populations.⁸⁹

Ontario

A variety of programs were created in Ontario from the mid-1970s, operated by school boards, community colleges, libraries, community organizations, correctional institutions, and Laubach Literacy of Canada. Funding came from the Ministry of Colleges and Universities, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Skills Development, the Ministry of Citizenship and Culture, usually for English as a Second Language (ESL) programs taking up literacy work, and various EIC grants (Canada Works and Volunteer Initiatives Program).⁹⁰ Most programs had some connection to school boards. Nevertheless, in 1983-4, fewer than half of school boards, usually in densely populated areas, and usually "resource-poor,"⁹¹ offered literacy programming. This uneven development, which produced a literacy programming situation that was "marginal" and "fragmented,"⁹² was recurrently reviewed and deplored in the mid-1980s by both practitioners and policy-makers. Because federal funding had been cut, and there was limited provincial funding and co-ordination, expertise and conceptual development in literacy was mostly located in community programs. This meant that there was both a strong activist sense of the character of the literacy movement, and an understanding of literacy in its political and social context.

From a practitioners' point of view, the crucial problems with government policy concerned funding that was limited, unstable, and restricted to instructional costs; and overburdened staff whose time was often consumed by securing funding.⁹³ Practitioners' coalitions were set up in part to address these problems. The Metro Toronto Movement for Literacy was formed in 1978; its publication, *Starting Out*, came to be distributed throughout the province. The first provincial literacy conference was held in 1984, and

⁸⁸ Conseil supérieur de l'éducation, *L'alphabetisation*

⁸⁹ Québec Literacy Working Group, "Presentation to the Conseil Supérieur de l'éducation," 1989.

⁹⁰ Tannis Atkinson, "Ontario Literacy Project: Final Report," 1985; also see Ontario Ministry of Education, *Adult Basic Literacy: A Directory of Ontario Programs*, 1983.

⁹¹ Ontario Ministry of Colleges and Universities, *Project Report: For Adults Only*, Continuing Education Review Project, 1986.

⁹² Wagner, *Analphabétisme de Minorité* ..., 349.

⁹³ Atkinson, "Ontario Literacy Project."

the Ontario Literacy Coalition was organized in 1986. The attractiveness of coalition-building was significantly enhanced by the promise of a positive government response,⁹⁴ as reflected in a variety of reports.

A 1985 report by the Toronto Board of Education, *The Right to Learn*,⁹⁵ recommended literacy programming in both school boards and community programs. A 1986 Continuing Education Review Project observed that "Current control mechanisms could be made to be more permissive of innovation in ABE,⁹⁶ including by permitting direct funding to a variety of agencies, including other institutions, employers and private providers.

Ontario, like other provinces forced to assume greater responsibility for adult training by cutbacks in federal training purchases, underwent a general revamping of its training policies in 1986. A new "strategy," aimed to enhance productivity and competitiveness, included "basic literacy and numeracy skills essential to further training or employment."⁹⁷ As part of the same effort, Ontario announced a government plan for literacy.⁹⁸ Both "citizenship" and "employment and economic growth" were designated objectives for literacy activity. There was to be not only "broad access to general literacy programs," but also "customized programs to meet specific needs of defined target groups." Target groups specified included women, seniors, natives, francophones, youth, and immigrants. A "lead ministry," Citizenship and Culture, was identified; the lead has subsequently bounced to Skills Development in 1987, and to Education in 1988. In addition to these three Ministries, Colleges and Universities, and Correctional Services, were also involved. An interministerial co-ordinating committee was established, but has lapsed.⁹⁹

Two grant programs were established. Through the Ontario Basic Skills (OBS) programme, integral to the broader training reorganization, Ontario Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology are funded to provide ABE. At least 20% of funding goes to the basic level, to "ensure that training organizations do not focus primarily on the needs of the larger and more active groups requiring upgrading at the secondary level only."¹⁰⁰ Ontario Community Literacy grants¹⁰¹ support programmes operated by non-profit community based organizations (by legislation, grants can not go to school boards or colleges) for people "for whom a lack of literacy skills has been a barrier to participating

⁹⁴ In 1985 the Minister of Citizenship and Culture announced funding for library programs and "urged literacy groups to lobby the government (her ministry in particular) to point out needs and to suggest areas of action." Atkinson, "Ontario Literacy Project," 14.

⁹⁵ *The Right to Learn: The Report of the Work Group on Adult Literacy for the Board of Education for the City of Toronto*, Toronto Board of Education, 1985. Also see Budd L. Hall, Marianne Williams and Brenda Rolfe, "Reading the World: Literacy and the City of Toronto," Discussion paper prepared for the Work Group and Advisory Committee on Adult Literacy of the Board of Education for the City of Toronto, 1985.

⁹⁶ Ontario Ministry of Colleges and Universities, *Project Report: For Adults Only*, Continuing Education Review Project, 1986.

⁹⁷ Ontario Ministry of Skills Development, *Breaking New Ground: Ontario's Training Strategy*, 1986, 32.

⁹⁸ "Ontario Government Plan for Adult Basic Literacy," 1986.

⁹⁹ Wagner, *Analphabétisme de Minorité ...*, 375.

¹⁰⁰ Ontario Ministry of Skills Development, "Ontario Basic Skills: Program Guidelines for Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology," 1987.

¹⁰¹ Ontario Ministry of Skills Development, "Ontario Community Literacy Grants Program: Applicant Package and Instructions," 1988

fully in society, and who have been unable to benefit from the existing institutional delivery system." Funds are also available for outreach and publicity, and for co-ordination between programmes. A later program, Ontario Basic Skills in the Workplace, provides grants to employers, employer associations, non-profit delivery organizations acting on behalf of employers, or to unions, to cover instructional costs for basic education and basic technical and scientific knowledge.¹⁰²

Ontario Basic Skills projects now operate in 23 community colleges at over 90 college campuses, and involve 14000 students. Ontario Community Literacy funding has increased substantially since 1986. The number of programs funded by Ontario Community Literacy increased from 107 in 1987, to 137 in 1990,¹⁰³ to 164 in 1991.¹⁰⁴ In this period the number of francophone programs nearly quadrupled (to 23), the number of native programs more than doubled (to 27), and five programs were begun for students with disabilities. Between 1985 and 1989 there was a fivefold increase in the number of Toronto literacy and ESL programs (which involved 9000 students),¹⁰⁵ and school board programming has increased substantially across southern Ontario.¹⁰⁶

Ontario has also supported extensive infrastructural work. Nineteen umbrella organizations (anglophone, francophone and native coalitions, and sixteen regional or metropolitan networks) are funded. There is a Provincial Literacy and Language Training Resource Centre, Alpha Ontario, containing both reference and teaching materials in English and French, accessed through the public library network. There are computer networks in French and English. Special interest groups have been formed on a number of issues, including rural literacy,¹⁰⁷ family literacy, practitioner training,¹⁰⁸ program-based research, oral history,¹⁰⁹ and literacy for social change.

In 1991, the Ontario government initiated a "policy and evaluation project" that is aimed, after significant program expansion and in a period of "restraint and consolidation," to develop an overall framework of policy, evaluation and accountability.¹¹⁰ Initial documents for the project speak of integrating literacy into a lifelong learning system, and promoting not only equity of access but also equity of outcome. Attention is recommended to variations in individual learning style, recognition of achievement previous to study, integration of supports for study, and integration of transitions between literacy programs and between them and other education and training. A broad consultation process is underway that aims at the development of a policy statement, including a definition of literacy, and principles, objectives and strategies, by the fall of

¹⁰² Ontario Ministry of Skills Development, "Ontario Basic Skills in the Workplace: Program Guidelines," 1987.

¹⁰³ "Ontario Government Literacy Programs and International Literacy Year Activities," Literacy Branch, Ministry of Education of Ontario, 1990.

¹⁰⁴ Asher, "Literacy Initiatives and Issues"

¹⁰⁵ Tsuji, Gerry K., Suzanne Ziegler and Maureen Heath, "A Research Report on the Toronto Board of Education's Response to Adult Literacy," Toronto Board of Education, 1989.

¹⁰⁶ Judith Marshall, "Life-long Learning and Social Literacy," Prepared for the Ontario Premier's Council, 1990.

¹⁰⁷ See Margaret Gayfer, *Putting Rural Literacy on the Map*, Rural Literacy Special Interest Group, Ontario Literacy Coalition, 1990.

¹⁰⁸ See *Literacy Practitioner Training and Accreditation*, Practitioner Training Special Interest Group, Ontario Literacy Coalition, 1991.

¹⁰⁹ See *Popular Oral History and Literacy: A Handbook*, Toronto, Storylinks, 1991.

¹¹⁰ "Adult Literacy Policy and Evaluation Project," Literacy Branch, Ministry of Education of Ontario, 1991.

1992.¹¹¹ A second stage will develop guidelines for quality in programming and instruction. A final stage will develop evaluation guidelines; completion is planned for 1993.

Manitoba

In Manitoba, school divisions in Winnipeg and Selkirk have offered literacy programs since the 1970s. In 1984 the Adult and Continuing Education Branch, which had been sponsoring ESL activity, was given literacy responsibility, and the New Initiatives Program was started. By 1987-8 it sponsored 14 programs. In 1988, a Manitoba Task Force on Literacy was appointed to recommend strategy, based on a process of research and consultation hearings. Its 1989 report, *Pathways for the Learner*,¹¹² recommends a community-based and learner-centred approach — centred "on the motivations, desires and commitment" of people with limited literacy. The metaphor in its title suggests that for those for whom the usual "highway to literacy" (the school) has not worked out, different "pathways to literacy" are needed. The Task Force takes it as a "working principle" that literacy is a "fundamental right of all citizens."

The outcome of this process has been a substantial gain of credibility and a substantial percentage increase in funding for programming arrangements with strong roots in communities; local groups assess local needs, and plan and operate programs. In 1989-90 there were 23 provincially funded community programs, and five federally funded programs. In 1990-91 the number of provincially sponsored programs increased to 27.¹¹³ There is a strong preference for paid teachers and group study situations. There are also several other volunteer and community programs, under other auspices. Especially outside urban areas, the programs are overwhelmingly aboriginal.

A Literacy Office, now guided by a non-governmental body, the Manitoba Literacy Council, provides training for teachers and volunteers, assistance in developing or locating learning materials, networking, and public awareness. Plans for the 1990s include an expansion of existing programming forms, movement into workplace literacy, and co-ordination of all programming activity.

Saskatchewan

In Saskatchewan, literacy programming began to develop in the early 1970s in a few community colleges and in two high-profile volunteer programs, the Regina Public Library program, formed in 1973, and READ Saskatoon, formed in 1978. Community colleges, formed after 1973, are the traditional institutional providers of adult education, including ABE, in Saskatchewan. They were most recently restructured in 1987, when various colleges and technical institutes were reorganized into eight regional colleges, a northern career college, and a four-campus Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology (SIASST). Most programs have used volunteer tutors for literacy students, although all the colleges and SIASST offer ABE classes or drop-in centres at the 1-10 level. Most students in the ABE program are sponsored by social agencies, including the Saskatchewan Skills Development Program (SSDP), initiated in 1984 to provide upgrading for social assistance recipients, and the Non-Status Indian and Métis Program (NSIM).

¹¹¹ "Let's Talk About Literacy: Consultation Guide," Literacy Branch, Ministry of Education of Ontario, 1991.

¹¹² Manitoba Education and Training, *Pathways for the Learner: A Strategy for Literacy for Manitobans*, The Report of the Manitoba Task Force on Literacy, Winnipeg, 1989.

¹¹³ Asher, "Literacy Initiatives and Issues"

ABE program arrangements in the colleges and institutes have been recurrently reviewed in government documents, with particularly noteworthy reports in 1983 and 1987. A 1983 report¹¹⁴ proposed a recognition of adults' right to basic education; a comprehensive plan for ABE, including funding arrangements for both traditional and innovative programs; student supports in child care, housing, and counselling; and professional development for teachers. A 1987 report¹¹⁵ argued for a comprehensive approach to literacy education, envisioned a range of program types — including rural and neighbourhood community education centres, and professional ABE programs — in relationship to the different types of students they attract; it recommended a positive, de-stigmatizing approach to "penetrate deeper" into communities; and it called for systematic co-ordination of the various programming arrangements for literacy, ABE and GED (Graduate Equivalency Diploma — a high-school equivalency certificate earned by examination). This 1987 report was one result of a 1986 post-secondary education conference, and a series of high-level consultations, during which literacy was named an area for action.

However, the programs actually adopted were more an incremental extension of earlier volunteer tutoring programs than the comprehensive efforts called for in previous reports. In 1987 the Minister of Education announced a well-publicized provincial Literacy Campaign, and a Literacy Council to co-ordinate it. The Council was mandated to manage the campaign and advise the Minister.¹¹⁶ Campaign objectives were to gain public support for literacy, reduce school drop-out rates, establish a literacy foundation, and serve 10,000 adults and adolescents through the "development of reading and writing skills in response to the requirements of the learners." Fifteen community projects were organized — most through the nine regional and northern colleges and four SIAST campuses. Two "independent" programs are also supported, READ Saskatoon and the Regina Public Library (these programs have the largest numbers of students in the province). Program grants require co-operation with other organizations, identification of the population to be served, and some consultation with it in program design. Most programs involve volunteers, though this is not a requirement. Libraries receive small grants for materials collections. Although the original objective of volunteer programmes was to reach 5000, they actually reached 3670 over 3 years — with the shortfall attributed to insufficient staff time.¹¹⁷ The Campaign also includes an IBM PALS (Principles of the Alphabet Learning System) program, started in 1988. This program aims to reach 5000, in programs operated by school boards, regional colleges, and SIAST. Total graduates (100 hours in program) to 1990 are about 700 adults and 1000 adolescents.

Although the Campaign has now officially ended and the Literacy Council disbanded, the 15 literacy programs it started will continue to be supported, distinctly from institutional ABE programs, through the new Adult Special Education Branch of the Ministry of Education. The PALS project, of which an evaluation is also to appear, is expected to be continued by all the institutions that have been involved. The Literacy Council will be replaced by a Literacy Advisory Committee. It is noteworthy that the Literacy Campaign

¹¹⁴ Saskatchewan Continuing Education, *Final Report: Adult Basic Education Review Committee*, 1983.

¹¹⁵ Saskatchewan Education, *A New Beginning: A Background Paper on Adult Illiteracy and Undereducation in Saskatchewan*, 1987.

¹¹⁶ Management of the campaign follows policies and procedures in "Report of the Saskatchewan Literacy Council on the Operation of the Saskatchewan Literacy Campaign," 1987; Saskatchewan Literacy Campaign PALS Project Implementation Plan, 1989. Also see Saskatchewan Education, "Literacy in Saskatchewan: A Blueprint for Action," 1987.

¹¹⁷ Saskatchewan Education, "Saskatchewan Literacy Council, Saskatchewan Literacy Campaign 1987-1990," 1990.

is the only provincial-level programming effort to have been systematically evaluated in Canada to date.¹¹⁸ The broadest recommendations of the evaluation renew the calls of previous reports for recognition of literacy as a human right, and for a comprehensive, co-ordinated organization of literacy and ABE programming.

Alberta

In Alberta, colleges have a strong presence. Since the 1960s Alberta Vocational Colleges (AVCs) have had adult academic upgrading and literacy programming as a major part of their mandate. There are now programs in the four AVCs and most of the ten regional colleges; these receive the greatest part of government funding. There are also programs in nine provincial correctional institutions. There has also been a steady growth of volunteer programs, organized by libraries, churches, YM/YWCAs, and others, from three in 1979 to 65 in 1990. These programs are generally supported through the Further Education Councils and Community Education Consortia – community co-ordinating bodies that were originated in the 1970s for the sponsorship of non-credit adult education. Several school boards also offer programs. An ABE Implementation Committee works to develop curriculum and resource materials for the AVC/CVC system. The Literacy Co-ordinators of Alberta, formed in 1986, share resources and expertise, and assist new programs.

A succession of reports and discussion papers since 1985¹¹⁹ have noted that an absence of overall government policies and practices in programming, curriculum, and student assessment makes for lack of co-ordination and sometimes wasteful competition. An Alberta Policy Development Committee, formed in 1989, released for discussion a draft report on policy "foundations" in December 1990.¹²⁰ It does not promise departures from or significant extensions of current practice. Rather it indicates a government intention to maintain support for the existing range of programs. It lays out principles and assumptions aimed to "guide future decision-making" to ensure "direction, fiscal accountability and program effectiveness." The role of the government is defined as ensuring access to quality programs, and coordinating student support. But as regards planning, the government role is defined primarily as "encouraging" and "consulting" with program providers and others, regarding effective delivery; the reduction of barriers to participation; co-ordination in curriculum; service for cultural and linguistic minorities and people with disabilities; collaborative action to bring together available resources; the recruitment and use of volunteers; and public awareness. Alberta is the only province to have gathered and released comprehensive data on literacy programs, staff, volunteer tutors, and students.¹²¹

¹¹⁸ Hindle, Judith K., *Literacy Learning in Saskatchewan: A Review of Adult Literacy Programs* (1989), Regina, Saskatchewan Instructional Development and Research Unit, 1990.

¹¹⁹ Inter-Departmental ABE/ESL Advisory Group (Alberta Advanced Education, Field Services and Further Education Services; Alberta Education and Alberta Manpower) *Adult Basic Education in Alberta: A Discussion Paper*, 1985; Kathryn L. Chang, "Organizing Adult Literacy and Basic Education in Alberta," *Learning* 5:1, 1987; Alberta Association for Adult Literacy, "Alberta Adult Literacy Partnership Consultation," 1989; Alberta Education, "Adult Literacy and Adult Basic Education in Alberta," 1989.

¹²⁰ Alberta Advanced Education, *Foundations for Adult Learning and Development Policy*, 1990.

¹²¹ Alberta Advanced Education, Community Programs Branch, *Highlights of the Report on the Alberta Literacy Inventory*, 1990.

British Columbia

In British Columbia, adult basic education policy that was developed in the late 1970s¹²² allowed for a development of substantial programming through community colleges, and for some exemplary infrastructural work, especially in curriculum development and program articulation. The period of government budget restraint beginning in 1983 weakened the traditional community orientation of the colleges, and weakened literacy programs — both "outreach" programs in community or remote settings, and literacy programs generally, with their relatively high cost per student contact hour. Subsequently college literacy programming seen recurrent expansions, and recurrent cuts and threats of cuts. All fifteen colleges now offer some literacy programming, and at least six include volunteer tutoring programs. Arrangements in colleges vary widely throughout the province. Some colleges have long seen literacy as central to their mandate and have provided consistent support. Others view it as a peripheral concern, and provide little or no support.

The involvement of School Districts (under the Ministry of Education) in "upgrading" programs increased in the late 1980s, with the sense that colleges were not meeting needs. School boards operate learning centres, tutoring programs and some classes. Although fewer than one third of school districts (20) offer programmes — there is a heavy concentration of programmes in the lower mainland and southern Vancouver Island — the majority of the provincial population is covered by school district programming. However, there is no clear assignment of responsibility for issues of adult literacy programming, curriculum and assessment within the Ministry of Education. A changed funding formula for ABE in school districts¹²³ has been expected to support some increase in programming. Grants are based on the fiscal framework used for all education funding, and are now not capped. School districts and colleges are expected to co-operate in identifying and serving local needs.

Since 1986, a number of community Project Literacy organizations have formed in municipalities around the province. These are ordinarily incorporated as societies, involve members of a variety of educational and other agencies, and operate or plan to operate volunteer programs. They have little or no access to ongoing funding. They are organized under the umbrella of a provincial coalition, Literacy BC.

The 1988 Access Report proposed an expansion of educational activity and funding in the province. It specifically identified literacy and adult basic education as a priority concern, and gave preeminence to colleges.¹²⁴ The report recommended that colleges be provided with funding to cover the costs of fees, books and supplies for students enrolled in ABE programmes, and that a provincial advisory committee on literacy be formed. A 1989 report from a Provincial Literacy Advisory Committee¹²⁵ made 34 recommendations. It

¹²² British Columbia Ministry of Education, *Report of the Committee on Continuing and Community Education in British Columbia*, 1976; British Columbia Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, *Discussion Paper 01/79: Report of the Committee on Adult Basic Education*, 1979; British Columbia Ministry of Education, "A Ministerial Policy on the Provision of Adult Basic Education Programs Including English Language Training in the Public Education System of British Columbia," 1982.

¹²³ British Columbia Ministry of Education, "Ministry Policy Circular 37, 1987: Enrolment Counts."

¹²⁴ British Columbia, Ministry of Advanced Education and Job Training, *Access to Advanced Education and Job Training in British Columbia*, 1988, 14.

¹²⁵ British Columbia Ministry of Advanced Education, Training and Technology, *Opening the Doors to Lifelong Learning: Empowering Undereducated Adults*, Report of the Provincial Literacy Advisory Committee, 1989.

called for a comprehensive strategy for literacy, and for an immediate 100% increase in literacy funding, with smaller increases in subsequent years. Funding would provide not only for college programs, but also for community and workplace programs. Although the provincial legislature unanimously supported the recommendations, the government has so far not assented to them, except for making the Ministry of Advanced Education, Technology and Training responsible for literacy strategy, instituting tuition-free enrollment in literacy programs, and consolidating the position of a provincial literacy coordinator.¹²⁶ There is some movement towards program expansion, creating positions for community college outreach workers work with community groups and workplaces, and some consideration of direct funding to community groups.¹²⁷

Yukon

In the Yukon, the traditional provider of institutional programs is Yukon College, which developed out of a vocational training centre in 1983. It offers basic literacy classes at its main campus in Whitehorse and in communities throughout the Yukon. Recently there have been efforts within Yukon College to train practitioners from and for the outlying communities. An independent literacy organization, the Yukon Literacy Council, was formed in 1983, and began receiving government funding in 1986. It operates volunteer tutoring programs in the three largest Yukon communities.

In 1991, the Coalition for Yukon Literacy was formed, including literacy organizations, community representatives, Yukon College, and the Department of Education's Advanced Education Division. The Coalition will assist in the development of the Yukon Literacy Strategy, a component of the Yukon Training Strategy. The government plans an increase in funding to literacy.

Northwest Territories

The Northwest Territories comprise one-third of Canada's land base but are sparsely populated. Aboriginal people — Dene, Métis and Inuit — make up 62% of the population, and among them 72% have fewer than nine years of schooling. Aboriginal school drop-out rates continue to be as high as 80%, and are a subject of continuing discussion. Traditional economic pursuits are still common, and in many communities there is a limited availability of wage-paying employment. Literacy activity there must be understood in the context of territorial efforts to promote both education, and community participation in and control over it, at all levels. Literacy programming relates to the survival of cultures and languages, land claims settlements and the assumption of political control by aboriginal peoples, and economic and community development.

There have been "community adult educators" (originally Department of Education staff, Arctic College staff since 1988) working across the spectrum of education and training since 1967. Literacy came to be paid distinct attention only in the 1980s. A legislative report of 1982,¹²⁸ influential in promoting both Arctic College and community control of education, called for programs for people "who wish to improve their high school qualifications up to grade 10." A 1988 Literacy Strategy, which appeared simultaneously

¹²⁶ British Columbia, Ministry of Advanced Education, Technology and Training, "A Ministry Policy on the Provision of Literacy Programs by the Community Colleges of British Columbia," 1990.

¹²⁷ Asher, "Literacy Initiatives and Issues"

¹²⁸ Northwest Territories Legislative Assembly, Special Committee on Education, *Learning: Tradition and Change*, Yellowknife, 1982.

with an Employment Development Strategy,¹²⁹ called more specifically for "literacy/life skills initiatives for adults who were not successful in the school system or did not have the opportunity to go to school." It said, "All NWT residents have a right to access educational and training programs." A year later, a legislative report¹³⁰ declared that intensive literacy activity in every community should be a number one priority.

The 1988 literacy strategy, updated in 1990,¹³¹ lays the basis for current programming. The 1990 document says, "Residents of all ages should have access to programs which will enable them to achieve a functional level of literacy in their home community, wherever possible.... Programs providing a functional level of literacy should be learner-centred and community-based."

There are 60 communities in the NWT. Of these, 34 have permanent literacy programs in "community learning centres," and in any year another 10 or 15 other communities also have programs in operation. About three-quarters of programs are operated by Arctic College. The remainder, usually located where the college does not deal with basic literacy, are run by non-profit organizations, including libraries, friendship centres, and especially Community Education Councils (roughly the counterpart of school boards in the provinces). Programs are offered in six aboriginal languages (Inuktitut, Cree, Gwich'in, Slavey, Dogrib and Chipewyan, as well as English and French, are all official languages in the NWT). Some programs involve educational radio broadcasting; and many are adapted to local conditions such as seasonal cycles of hunting and trapping. It is a goal to have one-half of teachers aboriginal language-speakers by the year 2000; many are now classroom assistants teaching their language.

A Literacy Council was formed in 1990, to sponsor literacy programming with federal and philanthropic funding. Arctic College has made literacy and ABE a key component of its current five-year strategy.



This section has displayed something of the vast array and variety of policy and programming arrangements in literacy across the country. The next chapter attempts again to stand back from the detail and define some broad issues concerning literacy work in the next decade.

¹²⁹ Government of the Northwest Territories, "NWT Literacy Strategy," Yellowknife, 1988; Government of the Northwest Territories, "NWT Employment Development Strategy," Yellowknife, 1988.

¹³⁰ Northwest Territories Legislative Assembly, Special Committee on the Northern Economy, *Report*, Yellowknife, 1989.

¹³¹ Government of the Northwest Territories, "A Strategy for Literacy in the NWT," Yellowknife, 1990.

Chapter 2

Issues in Literacy Practice and Policy

During the late 1980s and early 1990s, literacy has been the subject of much public discussion, many reports, and much publicity. Politicians' speeches, and prefaces to policy documents, commonly assert the importance of improvements in literacy. Millions of dollars have been spent on public awareness activities. These often let the public know that some government or organization is promoting and perhaps involved in teaching literacy; and they likely generate some public support for that activity. And, although the studies available show repeatedly that word-of-mouth recruitment is central in attracting students to programs, public awareness (sometimes even called "marketing") must help.

In many forums, views of action for literacy have been articulated — literacy "consultations" bringing together members of different sectors of society; public policy forums attended by business, labour and government leaders; provincial advisory committees; interministerial committees; coalitions and alliances of practitioners; literacy conferences; and others. Reports and action plans have been developed concerning literacy and health, literacy and the law, literacy and the public schools, literacy and social service organizations, and so on. Most of these forums for discussion have had funding from the National Literacy Secretariat. They have resulted in pressure on provincial and territorial governments (not on the federal government) to increase support for literacy programming.

I

Is it government policy to create a literate society?

Beyond noting that progress has been made, it is fitting in a review of the state of literacy work actually to examine the political will for literacy — whether creating a literate society is a serious goal of literacy policy in Canada. To do so, we should both review the scope of goals and plans in official policy documents, and give an accounting of actual levels of adult literacy activity.

We search in vain for a "global plan" for literacy — defining the roles of not only educational organizations but also a broad range of government agencies, non-profit organizations, business and labour; and addressing limited literacy in its relationships with poverty. There is even surprisingly little discussion from literacy advocacy organizations of specific goals for literacy improvement. There is little urging, outside Québec and one report from the Ontario Literacy Coalition,¹³² of a global plan for literacy. Furthermore, talk of the "elimination of illiteracy" has nearly vanished from political and policy discussion. During 1990, international declarations were adopted proposing time-

¹³² *Strategies for Change: A Position Paper on Literacy*, Toronto, Ontario Literacy Coalition, 1990.

bound goals of "basic education for all"¹³³ or the "eradication or massive reduction of illiteracy."¹³⁴ But there are no Canadian counterparts to these declarations. Only one government has defined specific goals or deadlines for literacy improvement (New Brunswick, 1% per year for four years). There have been trial proposals from the federal government to cut illiteracy rates in half by the end of the decade.¹³⁵ Of course it remains to be seen how these proposals relate to subsequent policy.

The picture is no better if we attempt to give an accounting of literacy activity. Ideally, such an accounting would state enrollments and program expenditures for programs of all types, in all provinces and territories. This would require a clear and consistent definition of what counts as "literacy" activity. This definition should include programs that are deemed "literacy" as distinct from general Adult Basic Education (or as a specific component of ABE), or are administratively defined at a grade 0-8 level. Alternatively, the definition might include all adult education programs through the secondary level. But, given the likelihood that more basic programs are neglected in program funding and provision, the definition should include separate reporting for "literacy" in the narrower sense. Expenditures for student support allowances and special projects could be reported separately.

However, inconsistent and unclear reporting of data makes a clear accounting impossible. Provinces and territories use different dividing lines between literacy and other adult basic education, and often report partially or not at all. Some, but not all, provide data that includes all adult basic education and even all adult second-language activity as "literacy." There is often not even standardized or aggregated data collection across ministries within provinces. All this is another indication of the underdevelopment of serious policy for literacy.

It is impossible to total the figures on enrollments and expenditures that are available, because so much data is absent, and so much of what is available clearly consists of over- or under-estimates. It seems, however, *plausible to conjecture* that in 1989-90, total provincial and territorial expenditures on literacy programming (0-8 equivalent or distinctive "literacy" programs) could not have exceeded \$125 million.¹³⁶ Total enrollments could not have exceeded 100,000. Even such a generous enrollment estimate means that only about 3% of the 3.4 million with fewer than nine years of schooling, or about 3.5% of the 2.8 million at reading levels 1 and 2 in the Statistics Canada survey, are participating in programs. (These figures are consistent with specific provincial estimates that have been made). In a slightly different light, 100,000 literacy program enrollments would roughly equal the estimated annual number of secondary school drop outs.

¹³³ *World Declaration on Education for All, and Framework for Action to Meet Basic Learning Needs*, Adopted by the World Conference on Education for All, Jomtien, Thailand, Inter-Agency Commission (UNDP, UNESCO, UNICEF, World Bank) for the World Conference on Education for All, New York, 1990.

¹³⁴ Unesco International Conference on Education, 42nd Session, "Draft Recommendation No. 77 to Ministries of Education Concerning the Struggle Against Illiteracy: Policies, Strategies and Operational Programmes for the 1990s."

¹³⁵ Government of Canada Prosperity Secretariat, *Learning Well ...*

¹³⁶ There are also non-governmental literacy funding sources. Business, labour, and community organizations provide space and administrative supports for programs, and some businesses provide workers with paid time for study. Some philanthropies support programs and materials development. Non-governmental support is clearly substantial, but no accounting system allows it to be quantified. And of course these "partnerships" and "contributions" do not and should not supplant the centrality of governmental support.

If literacy programs do not serve all they might, are they at least secure? Pessimists might even doubt whether current programming increases are here to stay. Literacy advocates generally know that multi-year core funding of programs is essential to allow them to consolidate and expand their work, and that project funding is also crucial to enable developmental activities to be undertaken. But they also know that, historically, programs have often been underfunded or sporadically funded. Temporary funding, and grants restricted to "innovative projects" are a perennial problem. Practitioners in many contexts spend time on fund-raising that should be spent on the work itself; practitioners learn to do their jobs only to see their funding disappear; programs disappear by the time that learners decide to enter them, or begin to make progress.

Even with recent programming expansion and policy development, most mandates for literacy work are stated only in plans, policies and strategies; these have some weight in committing governments to act, and in at least two provinces they describe literacy as a right. However, these commitments are not as deeply entrenched as they would be if stated in legislative or judicial definitions of adults' right to basic education. Only Québec has legislation giving adults the right to complete elementary and secondary schooling (administratively, Québec establishes a learner entitlement to 2,000 hours of literacy instruction). In all other provinces and territories, school legislation limits the right to education to children and adolescents. A right to literacy could also be judicially decided, perhaps as an age equity issue under the Charter of Rights. The Canadian Alliance for Literacy has discussed raising a legal challenge, but no action beyond a survey of provincial legislation has been taken.¹³⁷

In sum, governments in Canada are not serious about creating a literate society. There have been recent gains in the extent of programming, but even this expanded activity is limited in proportion to need. Mandates for literacy are seldom deeply entrenched. And there are not in policy discussion either clear goals, or a consensus on strategies for attaining them.

Historically in Canada, government and business have been ungenerous, across the board, regarding adult education and training.¹³⁸ And amidst concern over budget deficits, and particularly in the current recession, there is financial restraint on new commitments. All this suggests that there will be no vast or sudden expansion of program levels in the near future. And, indeed, these policy limitations are embedded within difficult broader discussions of policy (which the conclusion of this report will return to).

But there are more optimistic ways of viewing the current period, than by making an arithmetical juxtaposition of need and provision, or by making gloomy prognostications in relation to the current policy climate. The gains of the late 1980s and of International Literacy Year, in awareness and programming, are significant. Literacy has become an issue for politics and policy. Programming has expanded. Knowledge for and from literacy programming is being consolidated and expanded. The policy capacity of literacy advocacy organizations has been strengthened. These gains have created new possibilities and new questions in literacy work. Current activity can be considered as a phase of experimentation, in which efforts to do literacy programming are multiplied, and

¹³⁷ For related discussion, see Brad Munro, "Human Rights and Literacy," *Tesl Talk* 19:1, 1989, 80-5.

¹³⁸ Muszynski and Wolfe, "New Technology and Training ...;" Ian Morrison and Kjell Rubenson, "Recurrent Education in an Information Economy: A Status Report on Adult Training in Canada," Toronto, Canadian Association for Adult Education, 1987; this is even evident even in government reports, notably Employment and Immigration Canada, *Success in the Works*.

the results of these efforts documented. In this optimistic view, current activity may define the forms of literacy work that could later take hold on a larger scale.

In this view it is timely to raise a number of issues, open questions and recurrent tensions, that will be important in literacy work for the next decade. The remaining sections of this chapter address some of these questions. All the issues discussed concern broad matters of government policy, and some also concern policy and practice at a program or institutional level. The discussion emphasizes the ways that documentation of experience in literacy work, and research into the conditions of literacy work, and stronger literacy policies, might strengthen future developments.

II

A range of learner-centred literacy programming

This section turns attention from the overall extent of literacy programming, to its form — and to questions about general directions of development. It could be thought of as discussing a yet-to-be-realized "system" or "strategy" for adult literacy education.

Policy declarations, whether from governments, advisory bodies, or practitioners organizations, often describe ideals for literacy programming. Two common themes are the importance of learner-centred and community-oriented programming, and of a range of programming to meet the range of learners' needs. Achieving a range of learner-centred programming depends not only on knowledge and skill in the literacy field, but also upon overall policy and strategy for literacy. Some aspects work to attain these ideals, in both programming practice and policy, are discussed in this section.

From packaged to learner-centred teaching practice

Learner-centredness is a central theme in literacy work. Indeed learner-centredness could be called the wisdom of literacy work. It suggests starting teaching (and evaluation) with the individual or collective knowledge and experience of students. There is extensive experimentation in learner-centred literacy work, in areas including student writing; "thematic" approaches to curriculum; mother-tongue literacy teaching; involving students in program control; and the use of volunteers.

Practitioners are learning to shift from structured program packages and tutoring routines to more flexible and responsive teaching practices. In some programs, (including certain "drop-in" centres with one-to-one teaching and certain institutional continuous-entry programs), instruction is "individualized" in the sense that it employs self-paced program packages. Individuals can begin at any point in the sequence, and proceed at various speeds. Specially designed pre-tests and post-tests, integrated with study modules, strictly define the learning process. Some such program packages are workbooks; others are computerized. An example of the latter is the YES Canada Pathfinder program, a computerized-managed instructional system based on an amalgam of provincial secondary curricula. Such program packages, along with highly structured tutoring schemes, and publishers' workbooks, have allowed programs to be set up where experienced teachers are not available or where administrators are skeptical of innovation. Yet the predominant discussion within literacy work emphasizes flexibility in

response to students, and the bureaucratization of learning can often be avoided. Documentation of programs shifting from packaged to more responsive teaching and curricular practices is important.

The movement for "whole language" teaching is very prominent in literacy work.¹³⁹ In particular, many programs emphasize writing at least as much as reading, both as a powerful entry into literacy for individual learners and as a medium through which learners can engage with one another.¹⁴⁰ There are widespread efforts to develop and distribute learner-produced material, valuable for its readability and relevance to other learners. Hundreds of programs reproduce student writing for local use. Some programs have established publishing outlets.¹⁴¹ One commemoration of International Literacy Year has been a Book Voyage, the circulation of a growing collection of student writings throughout at least 300 programs around the country (indeed around the world).¹⁴² Bibliographies of learning materials that emphasize student writing are now beginning to appear.¹⁴³ The prevalence of student publishing is in a sense an achievement of the "literacy for liberation" view (described above), since it emphasizes the knowledge and assertiveness of learners themselves. It also allows for somewhat easier discussion between this view and traditional skill-focused tendencies in literacy work, which have themselves been moving towards a greater emphasis on learner-centredness.¹⁴⁴

Issues in learner-centred curriculum go beyond student writing, of course. There are other forms of putting learner-centred materials into place, for example in "thematic" approaches to curriculum,¹⁴⁵ which develop reading and writing as means of approaching practical questions of finding employment, raising children, renting housing, and so forth. This raises, among other questions, the issue of how student writing is related to other distinct forms of written material — such as bureaucratic documents and forms, or newspapers and other sources of public discussion — which involve distinct activities of reading and writing, and distinct bodies of background knowledge. Pedagogical experimentation and theorizing is necessary to clarify how "learning from experience" can address these distinct forms of written material.¹⁴⁶

¹³⁹ Cf. Joyce White and Mary Norton, *Whole Language: A Framework for Thinking About Literacy Work with Adults*, Ottawa, National Literacy Secretariat, 1991.

¹⁴⁰ A valuable discussion of these practices is provided by Sally McBeth, "Creating Curriculum: A Learner-Centred Approach," in Maurice C. Taylor and James A. Draper (eds.), *Adult Literacy Perspectives*, Toronto, Culture Concepts, 1989, 145-53.

¹⁴¹ Notable examples include the New Start Reading Series from East End Literacy Press in Toronto, and *Voices* magazine from the Invergarry Learning Centre in Surrey, British Columbia.

¹⁴² For a selection of writings from across Canada, see *Movement for Canadian Literacy, Learners' Voices: The Book Voyage*, Ottawa, 1990.

¹⁴³ One noteworthy example is the project of the Canadian Congress on Learning Opportunities for Women, *Telling Our Stories Our Way: A Guide to Good Canadian Materials for Women Learning to Read*, Toronto, 1990.

¹⁴⁴ Some, however, do argue that ideological battles should be tenaciously fought, between those who see learner-centredness and learner-produced material as useful techniques and those who see them as weapons for political change.

¹⁴⁵ As developed in British Columbia Ministry of Advanced Education and Job Training, *Adult Basic Literacy Curriculum Guide and Resource Book*, Victoria, 1987, or Ministère de l'éducation du Québec, *Guide de formation sur mesure en alphabétisation*, Montréal, 1988 (its forthcoming English version is called *A Guide to Customized Literacy Training*).

¹⁴⁶ Cf. Richard Darville, "The Language of Experience and the Literacy of Power," in Maurice C. Taylor and James A. Draper (eds.), *Adult Literacy Perspectives*, Toronto, Culture Concepts, 1989, 25-40; and Franca van Alebeek and Tineka Krol, "Research Behind a Language Textbook for Adults in Basic Education," in Jean-Paul Hauteceur (ed.), *Alpha 90: Current Research in Literacy*, Montréal, Direction générale de l'éducation des adultes, Ministère de l'éducation du Québec, 1990, 239-59.

Related questions arise in workplace literacy, where experimentation and negotiation are under way to find balances between machine- or job-specific reading and writing, and a broader literacy encompassing not only job performance, but also questions of health and safety, union participation, and general education.

A number of programs across the country offer mother tongue literacy teaching.¹⁴⁷ Some do so as a matter of general political principle — that people have a right to develop literacy skill in their own language; or pedagogical principle — that developing strong literacy skills in one's first language is the best basis for subsequent learning. Other practitioners understand mother-tongue literacy as a defence of indigenous and official languages (which, although endangered, still have possibilities of surviving across generations).¹⁴⁸ The underlying principles need extensive discussion, and experiences in these programs should be documented.

Assessment or evaluation practices (for placement of students, setting learning objectives, assessing individual learning, and measuring overall program outcomes) are a subject of ongoing discussion. Many programs emphasize student self-evaluation, or the informal evaluation that occurs in on-going dialogue between student and tutor or teacher. In one practice, a teacher, or a co-ordinator and tutor, meet with a student to define goals, and to decide how to measure or document learning, perhaps drawing up a "learning contract." At a later meeting they discuss and agree upon a description of progress made. Success is seen when a student reaches his or her own personal goal, which may vary from passing a driver's test to entering another educational program. This emphasis allows for maximum learner control, and for programming and teaching that are responsive to learner needs.¹⁴⁹

Student participation in programming planning and control is another aspect of learner-centredness. Some programs now involve learners on their boards or planning committees. Many learner events and conferences provide opportunities for learners to compare experiences and to speak out. Advocacy organizations and interest groups often include learners as members. (The Learner Action Group of Canada, formed under the auspices of the Movement for Canadian Literacy to promote learner participation at all levels, is one of the more visible). There should be further documentation of experiences of learner participation.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁷ For example, Québec offers mother tongue instruction in Spanish for Latin American immigrants, in Creole for immigrants from Haiti, and in Inuktituk and Cree for aboriginal people. The Toronto Board of Education sponsors a Multilingual Literacy Centre that offers mother tongue literacy instruction in Portuguese, Spanish, Urdu and Punjabi. The Northwest Territories provides literacy programs in English and six aboriginal languages. Francophone programs in some predominantly anglophone parts of Canada strengthen the French linguistic community while developing literacy skills. English literacy programs in Québec can be viewed in the same light.

¹⁴⁸ Two-thirds of First Nations have languages that are endangered (less than half of young people speak the language), declining (less than half of adults speak the language and there are few young speakers), or critical (there are few living speakers). Assembly of First Nations, *Towards Linguistic Justice for First Nations*, Ottawa, 1990.

¹⁴⁹ Work to develop these ways of thinking is under way. See, for example, East End Literacy, *This is Not a Test: A Kit for New Readers*, East End Literacy Press, Toronto, 1990. There are efforts in Manitoba to provide a certificate based on completion of a learner's goals.

¹⁵⁰ See, however, Movement for Canadian Literacy, "Mission Statement of the Learner Action Group of Canada," Ottawa, 1990; *From Energy to Action: Learners Involved in Literacy*, Toronto, Ontario Literacy Coalition, 1991.

One-to-one volunteer tutoring, groups and paid workers

A number of virtues are commonly claimed for volunteer tutoring in literacy: Tutoring allows an intense and supportive one-to-one relationship, especially at the basic literacy level. One-to-one tutoring allows confidentiality, to avoid the identification and embarrassment of students. Sometimes the personal commitment in volunteer tutoring is said to be the heart of true literacy work.

However, there have also been perennial criticisms of one-to-one volunteer tutoring, to the extent that in some contexts of discussion, "volunteer" is a pejorative term. Some practitioners and advocates argue that volunteers should not be relied on to teach, as a "cheap" solution — providing education to those with least, on terms that those with more would never accept. Others argue that literacy teaching should strive to avoid isolated one-to-one situations whenever possible, that, in groups, students learn they are not alone, that group work allows a broader support, and, in groups meeting several times a week, a more continuous support. There are also discussions concerning ways to strengthen the use of volunteers, for example through improved training, and ongoing training, or through assigning volunteers a variety of roles throughout programs, not only in teaching.

There *is* reason to be skeptical about the effectiveness of volunteers as teachers, especially with students who have difficulties learning, who need more than practice reading and writing, and some experience of literacy as social interaction. Volunteers — with brief training, and working much less intensively than career literacy workers — simply have fewer opportunities to develop a depth and a repertoire of teaching skill. Sustained debate and developed research into the characteristics of effective one-to-one teaching; and into the situations where volunteers with brief training can be effective and those where they cannot, would be useful in pushing this discussion ahead.¹⁵¹

In a variety of ways, programs are learning to combine the benefits of one-to-one tutoring (an intense and supportive relationship, especially at the basic literacy level) and group work (broader support, and a sharing of problems). Small groups are particularly favoured in francophone programs throughout the country. Especially outside Québec, the small group setting is important as a space in which people can achieve confidence in their mother tongue and culture; for some francophones, it may be one of the few public spaces where it is possible to speak French. Programs that rely primarily on one-to-one teaching also organize small writing groups, or groups to study selected themes. Programs develop "bridging" efforts, usually involving some form of small group work, to help students move from one-to-one literacy tutoring to more advanced classroom instruction, where they encounter hierarchically organized curriculum, evaluation and teaching approaches, and, where, with increasing class size, they lose the close social support often provided in literacy programs. Documentation of arrangements which combine individual and group work could be very useful.

In discussions among people working with volunteers in different contexts, it sometimes becomes apparent that the relationship between volunteers and learners' communities is of crucial importance. Co-ordinators and trainers often wrestle with the hierarchical relationship between a tutor "who knows" and a learner "who doesn't know," or with a sense of social distance and superiority expressed when tutors talk about dealing with "these people." Co-ordinators of tutoring programs, in selecting tutors, sometimes seek

¹⁵¹ One very useful contribution is a videotaped and transcribed panel discussion, *The Role of Volunteers in Adult Literacy*, Literacy Branch, Ministry of Education of Ontario, 1991.

teaching experience, but most often look for a supportive attitude and a willingness to learn; sometimes an effort is made to select tutors from backgrounds similar to those of people who will be students, or who are members of the same community as students. But when tutors are from the same community — a rural area, or a trade union, for example — the sense of hierarchy and distance does not arise because people know one another, and are likely to be interdependent, in broader contexts. These observations suggest that volunteerism may be at its best when it isn't "volunteer" work, but simply action within a community, to make it more self-sufficient.¹⁵² The discussion of all these issues concerning volunteers will continue for a long time, in part because they cannot be resolved at the program level alone, but also involve issues of policy.

Learner-centredness, program staffing and training

Learner-centred teaching practice and community-oriented programming are not merely matters of educational ideal. To discuss them seriously is also to discuss funding and policy.

Literacy teaching is a challenging occupation. It is often noted, for example, that special skill or knowledge is necessary to work with students with learning disabilities. In literacy programs working with speakers of English or French as a second language (whether those are mother tongue literacy programs or not), teachers are challenged to deal with students' different levels of fluency and literacy in two languages. To use educational technology skillfully, making judgments about when it should be relied on and when it should not, and dealing with the pedlars of equipment and software, requires a considerable expertise.

But to emphasize such particular examples of the difficulties of literacy teaching may be misleading, for the challenges are pervasive. Responding to specific student needs with specific teaching methods and materials (rather than simply following structured teaching methods or mass-produced materials) requires sophistication and flexibility from a teacher. Learner-centred teaching requires blending a sensitivity to learners' interests and modes of learning, with a thorough command of the "technicalities" of reading, writing and numeracy. Using "found materials," for example, requires just this combination of an understanding of learners' interests with an insight into the form and difficulty of materials that might address those interests. Some teachers report that skillful use of a "whole language" approach takes years of experience to develop.¹⁵³

These observations of the difficulties of literacy teaching point to the importance of adequate staffing levels in literacy programs, of the preliminary training and ongoing development of literacy workers, and of policy and program arrangements that support adequate staffing and training.

Learner-centred and community-oriented programming requires staff-student ratios low enough that the needs of individuals can be attended to, and that programs can be shaped to help develop their communities. In classroom instruction in schools and community colleges, there are attempts to keep the size of literacy classes below 10 or 12 students, or classes for beginning readers below eight. A majority of college adult basic education programs in a recent survey had 20 or fewer students per class.¹⁵⁴ Basic

¹⁵² Again, see *The Role of Volunteers...*

¹⁵³ Susan Church, Ruth Gamberg, Ann Manicom and Jim Rice, "'Whole Language' in Nova Scotia," *Our Schools/Our Selves* 1:2, 1990, 46-58 and 1:3, 1990, 90-104.

¹⁵⁴ Association of Canadian Community Colleges, *Literacy in the Colleges and Institutes*

upgrading classes in New Brunswick community colleges enrol between four and eight learners per instructor.¹⁵⁵ These conditions need to be standardized.

To be effective, volunteers must enter a secure program that can provide initial training, ongoing contact between program co-ordinators and tutors, and continuous training and discussion in which tutors can learn new methods, and can work collaboratively to solve problems that arise in the tutoring process. If inadequate funding *forces* the use of volunteers, independent of any principled decision to use them, programs will be weakened. And if inadequate funding for co-ordination of volunteer programs forces high ratios of co-ordinator's time to volunteers' time (co-ordinators may oversee a hundred or more tutor-student pairs), programs will be weakened again. Although there is not an established consensus, discussions often suggest that 20-50 tutors per full-time co-ordinator is a reasonable ratio. Too often, co-ordinators of tutoring programs oversee such large numbers of tutors and students, and deal with so many other administrative tasks, that they cannot interview all tutors, or maintain ongoing contact with pairs.¹⁵⁶

In thinking about the training and development of literacy workers, some focus must be on training programs themselves. There should of course be exchange of experience in the range of developing training ventures (discussed above in Chapter I, Section 2). Among universities in particular, there should be constructive discussion of the content and extent of training, and of practitioner involvement in program planning.

But beyond an examination of the nature of good training, there must be examination of practitioners' access to good training. Access to training depends on certain obvious conditions: programs must be available, and practitioners must have the time and money necessary to engage with them. Furthermore, practitioners' development often occurs through collaborative problem-solving and planning — "methodically observing everyday practices in order to describe them precisely, communicate them, compare them with others and eventually modify them."¹⁵⁷ Collaboration too depends on certain conditions: time together, some stability of involvement or employment, and time that can be devoted to the discussion and development of craft. There are disturbingly common weaknesses.

Volunteer training is weakened by the high ratios of tutor-student pairs to co-ordinators that leave co-ordinators generally overburdened, so that they cannot give sustained attention to training.

For career literacy workers (in the sense of full-time or part-time workers who can hone their skills), there are too seldom real opportunities to engage in study. As with questions of training and supporting volunteers, questions of training cannot be separated from broader policy issues, concerning teachers' contract security, and the availability of paid time for preparation, training and the exchange of experience. There are literacy teachers (most often in school board continuing education programs) who are paid only for their teaching time, which is often only a few hours a week. Such part-time teachers with no

¹⁵⁵ New Brunswick Advanced Education and Training, *Literacy Awareness*

¹⁵⁶ Overburdened co-ordinators are often discussed in meetings of literacy workers. They are documented, for example, in Hindle, *Literacy Learning in Saskatchewan*; their relationship to the image of literacy work as a charitable endeavour is discussed by John MacLaughlin, "Feel Good Literacy: Changing the Message," *Literacy on the Move* (Ontario Literacy Coalition), November, 1990, 15-17.

¹⁵⁷ Jean-Paul Hauteceur, *Program-Based Research in Literacy*, National Literacy Secretariat, Ottawa, 1991, describes both this model of research and development and its scant development to date.

job security, although often committed and wanting to improve their work through experience and training, have little opportunity or incentive to do so. Neither are regular, even full-time, institutional contracts a guarantee of opportunities for study. Too often, practitioners even in these enviable circumstances have limited time and money for ongoing training, or for work with colleagues to develop both their programs and their individual skill. A statement from the Association of Canadian Community Colleges notes that "Most faculty/support staff have extremely limited access to training Talk about lifelong learning has little meaning if teachers are not expected and supported to be lifelong learners themselves."¹⁵⁸ Some "professional development" questions are of course settled in negotiations between teachers' unions or associations and educational institutions; others in governmental and institutional policy. In both contexts, there should be an insistence on the importance of study for literacy workers.

Creating the conditions for practitioner training, and for the learning that occurs through collaborative planning and problem-solving (conditions defined in funding and administrative procedures, at both program and policy levels), is a major issue for the 1990s. Means must be found to resist self-defeating stinginess in program support.

Community and "standards"

Government reports and policy documents often use the language of learner-centredness and community. It is now commonly observed that programming, curriculum and teaching methods should be diverse, that programs rooted in learners' daily environments can most easily adapt to their needs, and that community involvement in literacy programming builds a feeling of "ownership."

Highlighting this language in government reports can lead to a rosy view of the diversity of programs and their integration into communities. But there are many questions concerning the relations between rhetoric and reality, policy and programming, in regard to learner-centredness and community-specific programming. The achievement of community specificity in literacy programming, should not be exaggerated. Community specificity is one principle; it suggests some measure of program autonomy. Program accountability is another principle; it is sometimes at odds with community specificity and program autonomy. Their relations remain to be worked out.

At the same time that learner-centred practices in literacy work have been developed, and a variety of programming forms have been elaborated, there have arisen pressures for "accountability," for "standards" or definitions of "quality," for definitions of "good practice" or "exemplary practice," and for "consistency" or "articulation" between programs. For example, in 1988 the Council of Ministers of Education announced actions that provinces and territories would take regarding literacy: these included increasing publicity, programming, and practitioner training; and "the establishment, as much as possible, of coherent programs and consistent standards in order to facilitate the recognition of literacy achievement to the greatest extent possible by educational institutions, employers, and the public."¹⁵⁹ The Movement for Canadian Literacy in 1991 declared that the "essential next step in the development of effective literacy level education in Canada must be the definition of standards for the provision of that

¹⁵⁸ "Association of Canadian Community Colleges," in *Canadian Commission for Unesco's Report on the Future Contributions to Literacy in Canada*, Ottawa, Canadian Commission for Unesco, 1991, 69-71.

¹⁵⁹ Council of Ministers of Education, Canada, *Adult Illiteracy in Canada: Identifying and Addressing the Problem*.

education."¹⁶⁰ The 1991-2 policy and evaluation process in Ontario, described in initial documents as aiming at "a comprehensive and unifying approach to the development of policy and evaluation," is designed to yield a steady march, through the preliminary steps of policy and guidelines for quality, to guidelines for evaluation.¹⁶¹

In practice, community specificity and autonomy depend upon the extent to which governments devolve authority and resources to programs. All programs are regulated by the documentary procedures and controls of governments and institutions. The space for program autonomy and community specificity is effectively determined by funding formulas or grant requirements, requirements for reporting on student progress or other aspects of program operation, and teacher or tutor qualifications. It is in these various documentary procedures and controls that the real relations between policy rhetoric and programming practices are defined.

Such procedures do not bear only on institutional programs, and self-identified community-based programs do not avoid them. They are central in defining the space that *any* program has to respond to its particular students, and to shape itself specifically to its community. Of course, "standards" and "quality" can mean rigid systematization and cost-cutting provision, or inducements to community embeddedness and ample resources. They are not terms that announce a victory or defeat; they only define a terrain for struggle. Documentary procedures and controls may promote good practice, just as much as they may inhibit autonomy and community involvement. As a practical matter, defending program autonomy and community specificity means working to define these documentary procedures and controls in ways that promote, or at least in ways that do not restrict, programs' capacity to act.

Student and program evaluation

One set of documentary procedures and controls are those that organize student and program evaluation.

There are diverse methods of student evaluation, and they serve diverse purposes: placement of students, setting learning objectives, assessing individual learning, and measuring overall program outcomes. Testing may be oriented to either academic or functional knowledge and skills. Some "achievement tests" (e.g. the widely used Canadian Adult Achievement Test) modify test items originally designed for school children, or use items which are typical of school achievement measures. Other tests (e.g. the Ontario Test of Adult Functional Literacy) measure performance on items that simulate the reading tasks an adult might encounter in daily life.

Issues of evaluation may be thought of in terms of opposing virtues and dangers. Evaluation can encourage coherence in programming strategy, and can allow students to move from program to program, by establishing standards recognized between programs and institutions.¹⁶³ Avoiding evaluation may mean a dissipating lack of focus and direction. But evaluation may also mean deadening centralization. The practical question is how evaluation can be organized to honour community specificity and learner-centredness.

¹⁶⁰ Movement for Canadian Literacy, *Organizing Adult Literacy and Basic Education in Canada: A Policy and Practice Discussion Document*, Ottawa, 1991.

¹⁶¹ "Adult Literacy Policy and Evaluation Project," Literacy Branch, Ministry of Education of Ontario, 1991.

¹⁶³ A number of provinces specify various levels of adult basic education and provide certificates at the conclusion of each.

A danger in the present situation is that, as government funding increases, so will demands for restrictive systematic evaluation. The systematic evaluation instruments ready to hand are the standardized tests that do not, and can not, reflect the wisdom of learner centredness and community embeddedness in literacy work. Practitioners are often critical of standardized tests. Tests are often culturally biased and inappropriate to people who have endured negative schooling experiences. Testing may dictate instruction (in "teaching to the test"), rather than learning determining evaluation. Testing may even dictate recruitment; some prison programs define their objective as getting a given number of students to score at a grade 8 level on a mandated standardized test; this leads to recruiting people who are nearly able to pass it already. Failure of literacy students to show substantial gain on standardized tests can also be dispiriting to those who work in the field.¹⁶⁴ Nevertheless, standardized achievement testing is widespread, especially within institutional settings. This reflects, in part, the pressure that adult educators face, or feel, to report student's progress according to widely recognizable measures. One Ontario report even recommended (the recommendation was not adopted) "materials and methods to assess and measure literacy and numeracy levels at entry and at periodic intervals in all programs."¹⁶⁵

However, if concepts of evaluation are separated from concepts of enforced standardization, evaluation can be a means of defining and promoting learning from the standpoint of particular students and communities. Evaluation methods can be devised to maximize the space for diverse program structures and teaching methods. There are ways of thinking about gains in literacy as those made when individuals reach personally defined goals — writing a story, getting a driver's license, becoming competent at using certain documents in a workplace or other setting — whether or not they gain at the same time the kind of literacy that is measured by standardized tests. It is even conceivable that community organizations could make similar definitions not of individual but of community-relevant goals. What is not yet clear is whether such informal, student-centred evaluation practices will prove a defensible "accountability" of programming accomplishments — whether thinking about assessment in relation to individual or community goals can extend to ways of aggregating such gains to report on overall program achievement; and whether it can allow the kind of unifying framework that would make it easy for students to move from one program to another with some assurance of their placement.

The question of program evaluation is closely related to student performance testing. Some provinces have developed evaluation instruments that allow for a narrative reflection on program principles and achievements.¹⁶⁶ Again, the question is whether such methods can establish the credibility that would deflect restrictive program evaluation procedures — whether those are based on numbers passing a standardized test, numbers going on to further education or training, numbers gaining employment, or other indexes that would have the net effect of excluding certain potential students.

¹⁶⁴ One American dispirited by minimal gains in standardized literacy is George M. Diekhoff, "An Appraisal of Adult Literacy Programs: Reading Between the Lines," *Journal of Reading* 31:7, 1988, 624-30; some dispirited Canadians are Rolf R. Pritchard and Helen Yee, "Johnny Came Back to School But Still Can't Read: A Reflection upon Seven Years with Adult Basic Upgrading," *Education Canada* 29:1, 1989, 44-48.

¹⁶⁵ Ontario Ministry of Education, *Evaluation of Literacy Skills Initiatives in Ontario*, 1989, 99, cited in Guy Ewing, "Introducing the Woods Gordon Report," *Literacy on the Move*, February 1989, 11.

¹⁶⁶ See, for example, Audrey M. Thomas, *Adult Literacy Volunteer Tutor Program Evaluation Kit*, Victoria, British Columbia Ministry of Advanced Education and Job Training, and Ministry Responsible for Science and Technology, and National Literacy Secretariat, Department of the Secretary of State of Canada, 1989.

Curricula

Like evaluation procedures, curricular definitions can sharpen and extend the orientation of students and teachers, or can blunt their indigenous sense of purpose. Curricular models restricted to an "upgrading" concept are likely to blunt as often as they sharpen. But less restrictive models are possible. Curriculum guides, for example, from Québec¹⁶⁷ and British Columbia¹⁶⁸ are learner-centred in tone, and call for teaching based on the needs, participation and life situations of students.

However, even distinctively adult curriculum and assessment arrangements, that understand literacy and learning as integrated in practical life situations, can unwittingly be an imposition on learners, and can undercut the democratic collaboration in learning that is the rightful centre of literacy work.¹⁶⁹ Indeed any "approved" curriculum, standard evaluation instruments, or time limits on study, can have the effect of constraining the learning process and reducing the effective autonomy of programs. It depends on who defines the integration of learning into life, and how. The need is for curriculum and materials development that is not closed, but that, while providing resources, is open to and indeed promotes the generation of local questions and materials.

Teacher qualifications

Questions of how "standards" relate to community specificity and program autonomy arise in many areas of literacy work. One final area that must be mentioned is that of teacher selection and qualification. Some programs (northern and native programs, inner-city programs, and union-sponsored workplace programs) select teachers or tutors from learners' communities and pay them for part-time teaching, or for training, because, as has long been recognized in international discussion, teachers from students' communities are often particularly effective.¹⁷⁰ Tutors or learners sometimes become career literacy workers. Requirements that literacy practitioners be certified teachers, or hold university degrees, could undercut such practices of community-specific teacher recruitment. Some program administrative arrangements require credentials. School board teachers of credit courses are usually required to hold teacher certification. Possession of a bachelor's degree is commonly required of community college faculty, and in some cases a graduate degree is preferred. The multiplication of training opportunities, especially in universities, increases the possibility that adult literacy teaching may become professionalized, in the sense of requiring academic credentials of practitioners.

The practical question (that must be addressed at both program and policy levels) is how both to avoid restricting entry into literacy work, imposing formalistic demands, or cutting off program autonomy in teacher selection, while opening up training opportunities that make it possible for practitioners, particularly literacy workers organic to their communities, to become stronger in their work. In one scheme under discussion, no certification would be required of people entering the field, but literacy practitioners would receive some form of "credit" for a variety of forms of training (formal courses,

¹⁶⁷ Ministère de l'éducation du Québec, *Guide de formation ...*

¹⁶⁸ British Columbia Ministry of Advanced Education and Job Training, *Adult Basic Literacy Curriculum ...*

¹⁶⁹ Marcelle Dubé, "La démocratie en pratique d'alphabétisation," *Alpha-Liaison*, May, 1988, makes this argument regarding Québec's *Guide de formation sur mesure ...*

¹⁷⁰ The famous "Declaration of Persepolis," from the 1975 International Symposium for Literacy, for example, says that teachers "should not form a specialized and permanent professional body, but should be recruited as close as possible to the masses undergoing literacy training and should belong to the same or to a related social and professional group in order to make dialogue easier."

workshops, self-directed study) undertaken as they work.¹⁷¹

As a practical matter, defending program autonomy and community specificity means working to define a great variety of documentary procedures and controls in ways that enhance rather than restrict programs' capacity to respond to their communities. The definition of these procedures and controls will be a recurrent issue in the 1990s.

A range of programming

It is commonly said in the declarations of both advocacy organizations and governments that there should be a range of programming available, to meet a range of learner needs. This defines another set of broad considerations about the forms that literacy programming may take in the next decade and more.

The "range" of programming should be thought of in two ways. It may be understood as extending over a range of student commitment. A range of program opportunities would extend from part-time one-to-one tutoring, to full-time study in situations which can lead to academic or vocational credentials. In many communities, there are tutoring programs but no opportunity for group work, full time study, or movement to higher levels of upgrading. Sometimes there are institutional classes, but nothing more informal or close to the familiar life routines of learners. Creating a range of programming implies overall adequate funding, and an overall co-ordinated strategy for literacy at the community and provincial or territorial levels.

The "range" may also be understood in a second way — to consist of the conventional division of program types into community, workplace and institutional programs (or, stated differently, programs which focus on "literacy work" understood as expressing a very general right to the use of spoken and written language, on "upgrading" understood as the gaining of academic credentials and certificates, and on "basic skills" understood in economic contexts).¹⁷² A strategy for literacy would include some definition of the proper balance among "literacy work," upgrading, and basic skills programs. This section will discuss the issues concerning this sense of the range of programming, emphasizing issues in community and workplace activity.

The community in literacy

Depending on context, the term "community" broadly suggests two distinct but deeply intertwined tendencies. Within the literacy field itself, "community" suggests understanding literacy issues, and doing literacy work, in the context of communities rather than as a centrally defined schooling. People in the literacy field often struggle for literacy work as a movement, originating from the grass roots and not centred in government, free from the centralizing controls of a state system. Within the literacy field, "community" suggests that it is most accurate, and most pedagogically useful, to understand literacy and literacy learning in specific sociocultural contexts.

Within a set of broad tendencies in political discourse and government practice since the mid-1970s, "community" suggests reducing the scale and centrality of government, and promoting the involvement of "partners" outside government. Without suggesting that

¹⁷¹ Cf. *Literacy Practitioner Training and Accreditation*, Practitioner Training Special Interest Group, Ontario Literacy Coalition, 1991.

¹⁷² Cf. Richard Darville, "Adult Literacy Policy Issues in the 1990s," in *Launching the Literacy Decade: Awareness into Action, Second North American Conference on Adult and Adolescent Literacy, Conference Report, 1991*, International Reading Association.

governments have no genuine interest in community definition of programming, it is only reasonable to recognize that motivations are complex. There are many efforts within government to reduce expectations that government can solve problems alone, and in many areas of social and economic policy there is talk and practice of "partnership." In financial terms, from a government perspective, involving "community" may look like a way to reduce costs. In literacy specifically, having community or voluntary organizations as service providers means that literacy workers can be unpaid, or at any rate be paid less than would their counterpart teachers and administrators in the state system. Growth of the state system of education is kept in check. Thus government interest in "community partners" expresses both a skepticism that government can solve problems, and a budgetary interest in keeping the scope of government services in check. "Community" is a cousin to "privatization."

The relations between these two "community" tendencies, understanding literacy as a movement, and understanding that government ought to reduce its responsibility for literacy, are complex and often contradictory. Some relations point back to the earlier discussion in this report concerning whether governments are serious about creating a literate society: if responsibility lies everywhere, governments need not be held responsible. Other relations between the two tendencies point to questions about the forms of programming.

With regard to programming forms, the term "community-based" is itself used in different ways in different circumstances. This variety of usages in part represents pedagogical or political differences. And in part it represents different regional traditions in adult education. Sometimes "community-based" designates programs on the basis of formal or structural characteristics. Non-profit independent literacy organizations with their own boards of directors are usually called community-based. The term is also applied to programs with links to other local governmental and non-governmental agencies, or programs that use volunteer tutors from the community they serve.

But more strongly, the term "community-based" designates substantive links of programs to communities, or control of programs by communities, in ways that go beyond structural arrangements. Programs in urban areas may be located in store-front settings or in public spaces such as community centres or libraries, and programs in rural areas with low population densities may use itinerant tutors or teachers. Some programs are directly operated by the organizations (e.g., trade unions, community centres) of which potential students are members. Some programs go beyond "public awareness" or publicity activities, and engage with neighbourhood networks to attract potential learners; francophone literacy organizations, for example, often combine awareness-building with program planning and student recruitment by conducting door-to-door surveys of learning needs and obstacles to study in French (especially outside Québec).

One Recommendation in the "Declaration from the Toronto Seminar" states that "Funding institutions must recognize and respect the autonomy of community-based literacy groups to determine the content, methodology and administration of their programs."¹⁷³ The Regroupement des Groupes Populaires en Alphabétisation du Québec defines popular literacy groups in various ways, firstly that they are "politically, educationally and

¹⁷³ "Declaration from the Toronto Seminar: Literacy in Industrialized Countries," in Margaret Gayfer (ed.), *Literacy in Industrialized Countries: A Focus on Practice*, Toronto, International Council for Adult Education, 1988, 12.

administratively independent."¹⁷⁴ In practice, as argued above, autonomy and independence depend upon what institutional arrangements define the space in which programs work. They depend upon the ways in which governments devolve authority and resources to programs, or keep programs on a short tether.

Government departments and educational institutions relate in a variety of ways to non-governmental organizations that provide programs, and to community participation in programming.¹⁷⁵ There are at least three common patterns. (1) Governments provide grants to independent non-profit literacy groups, or to organizations with broader purposes that include students as members; program arrangements and accountability are defined on a contractual basis. (2) Educational institutions make available to voluntary organizations a range of support services, including tutor training, learning materials, and public awareness efforts. (3) Educational institutions recruit volunteer tutors from the community; they may also assemble community advisory boards.

The first pattern intuitively seems the most likely to allow "autonomy." It is striking that grants to independent organizations have *not* been the predominant development in the recent expansion of literacy activity. Only in Manitoba and Ontario have independent programs been a major component of programming increases. In Ontario, funding for institutional programs is still much greater than for community programs (there is about three and a half times as much Ontario Basic Skills funding for community colleges, as Ontario Community Literacy grants). In Québec, advocacy for autonomous programs has not been effective. Although the *groupes populaires* did ground-breaking advocacy work, they have not benefited from government initiatives, which have given the *commissions scolaires* the major role in literacy activity, and "restricted the expansion of the existing [popular] groups and prevented the formation of new organizations."¹⁷⁶ The institutions have claimed the largest share of the expansion of literacy programming — including both efforts to extend literacy work *through* existing institutions into the community, and efforts to develop programming in workplaces.¹⁷⁷

Educational institutions

The bulk of all literacy programming still takes place within educational institutions or under institutional controls. In the pattern emerging in most provinces, there will be some support for "community" programs that lie outside the educational system, or that at least work outside institutional walls. But this funding will flow through the educational system. In Québec and Ontario, community programs are frequently linked to school

¹⁷⁴ Louise Miller, "The Approach of Popular Literacy Groups in Québec," in Margaret Gayfer (ed.) *Literacy in Industrialized Countries: A Focus on Practice*, Toronto, International Council for Adult Education, 1988, 32; cf. Miller, "Le Regroupement des groupes populaires en alphabétisation du Québec," *Learning* 5:1, 1988, 16-17.

¹⁷⁵ Cf. Richard Darville, "Prospects for Adult Literacy Policy in British Columbia," *Policy Explorations* 4:4, 1989 (ED 320 019).

¹⁷⁶ Miller, "The Approach of Popular Literacy Groups in Québec."

¹⁷⁷ We might *speculate* that this pattern is explained by politicians and civil servants viewing community programs as potential sources of political criticism. Community programs may work not only to provide ways for people to develop individual skills in familiar local settings, but also to provide ways for people to express distress and anger and demands for change, and to strengthen politically the collectivities of which they are part. This line of speculation would draw attention to the fact that in Québec, which has had politically and fiscally conservative government since the mid-1980s, the "popular" groups (which don't call themselves "community-based") have pushed government for a strategy to deal with illiteracy, which necessarily links literacy policies to employment, poverty and social rights policies. Ontario groups seem less based in a sense of popular mobilization. Or we might speculate that since literacy is now driven by economic interests, governments will ensure that it is provided through governmentally-managed structures. All such speculations point to the need for serious political history of literacy policy to be written.

boards. In the West and the Maritimes, links are developing between community programs and the community colleges.

Given this direction of development, it appears that the greatest potential impact of the movement for learner-centred and community-specific literacy programming will be within institutions. Questions of community specificity, and the attendant issues of program autonomy, although raised in their sharpest form by self-consciously community-based programs, may have their most important bearing on institutions. Of course there can be community orientation in institutions.¹⁷⁸ As a practical matter, the community specificity of much literacy programming will be governed by provincial and territorial funding and reporting procedures, by college and school board administrative procedures, and by the variety of educational "climates" in those institutions. The struggle for community specificity will have to be fought at all these levels.

Workplace literacy

After community programs, the other major novel development in programming forms since the mid-1980s has been programs in the workplace. From one point of view, workplace programs offer the most immediate way of addressing the economics of illiteracy — the question of "productivity" that has been so central in policy discussions. From another point of view, the workplace may be seen as one ideal setting for literacy programs, since worker-learners can have immediate benefit from the skills they acquire, and recruitment can be supported by powerful networks among workers.

Questions about workplace literacy will be prominent in the 1990s. One question concerns the spread of workplace programming. There have been many widely circulated arguments about the importance of literacy, or what are often called "basic skills," in the labour force. It is pointed out that workers with adequate basic skills allow for (text-based) training; and that they may exercise the initiative and the flexible problem-solving ability that can make an enterprise more efficient. Indeed, a Conference Board of Canada survey exploring the absence of basic skills indicates that one third or more of employers experience workforce basic skills-related problems with training, job reassignment, product quality, or the introduction of new technology. Yet the same survey shows that less than 10% of employers are involved in literacy programs, or even have counselling and referral supporting employees' study.¹⁷⁹ Businesses usually take programming initiatives only when confronted with a "crisis" situation, involving, e.g., health and safety (employers may be subject to legislation requiring that workers be informed of health and safety dangers and procedures), or training requirements associated with technological change.¹⁸⁰ Business has often been reluctant to make a commitment to involvement in literacy, or to any funding for it. Even businesses that support other kinds of training see literacy as somehow different. It is obvious that common economic arguments about the importance of literacy do not coincide with the perceptions or the actions of many employers. Most programs are set up at the initiative of school boards, colleges — or unions.

¹⁷⁸ Community orientation in institutions tends to be less documented than in other programs — in part because their funding arrangements usually require less substantial documentation. But see Association of Canadian Community Colleges, *Literacy in the Colleges and Institutes*.

¹⁷⁹ Robert DesLauriers, *The Impact of Employee Illiteracy on Canadian Business*. Conference Board of Canada Human Resource Development Centre, Ottawa, 1990.

¹⁸⁰ Wendy Johnson, "Workplace Programs in Canada," *Literacy at Work* (ABC Canada Newsletter) 1:1, 1991, 6.

These patterns — perhaps accounted for on the understanding that many firms currently either impose low skill requirements or can draw from large pools of relatively skilled workers — perhaps account for the chiding tone sometimes adopted by advocates of workplace literacy. For example,

An exclusive focus on current relative costs and benefits of investing in improved functional literacy carries with it a danger of ignoring future labour requirements. If the level of literacy required to function effectively in the job market continues to rise, the projected shortage of most types of skills will become a severe constraint on virtually all industries' capacity to maintain and improve their competitiveness.¹⁸¹

Unions are sometimes wary of dangers that the literacy issue may pose to workers — threats of dismissal, or of rigid hiring requirements. Nevertheless, unions have been somewhat quicker to develop an interest in literacy than have employers. Unions want their members to be better able to deal with collective agreements, benefit plans, health and safety notices, and the like; they want education for members who might participate in union activities more fully if they had better literacy or spoken language skills; and they want to assist workers to enter training, or secure job advancement or change. These claims and others are put forward by union federations, including the Canadian Labour Congress, the Canadian Federation of Labour, and the Fédération des travailleurs/-euses du Québec, which have developed resources for awareness and training, and suggestions concerning basic skills clauses in collective agreements.¹⁸²

Although program development has not been fast, the provincial and federal governments are promoting workplace literacy, and businesses are increasingly active. Programming is almost bound to expand over the next several years.

The impact of economic arguments has not been only on workplace programs. It is clear from recent history that an economic interest in literacy has been central in bringing the issue in general to prominence. It has allowed for some strengthening of all forms of literacy work, including programs that work for literacy for individual dignity and social equity. But this is a pattern that could be reversed by easily imaginable policy decisions. In the present economic recession, an economically driven interest in literacy could weaken considerably. Rather than training, at least training new employees, employers might simply screen more rigorously. In another scenario, a narrowly interpreted economic interest in literacy could result in a narrowing of literacy work, if federal and provincial labour-market ministries take over the greater portion of literacy work, and absorb resources that would have supported broader programming. Such an economic re-orientation of the whole shape of literacy work is sometimes discussed — and sometimes denied. A 1991 New Brunswick report says that "Many people (perhaps those not in the labour force) may be satisfied with their present level of literacy skills.... Clearly, there will need to be different solutions to different problems, and some priorities

¹⁸¹ O'Neill and Sharpe, "Functional Illiteracy ...," 71.

¹⁸² See, e.g., *Literacy for Workers: The Power to Grow*, Canadian Federation of Labour, Ottawa; "Dossier spécial sur l'alphabétisation et la formation de base des travailleurs et travailleuses," *Le Monde ouvrier*, (Bulletin d'information de la Fédération des travailleurs et travailleuses du Québec, Février 1991, No. 2.

may have to be set." The report then develops proposals for funding arrangements in accord with the implied priorities.¹⁸³ On the other hand, the Ontario Literacy Branch has declared that funding workplace literacy initiatives will not be "at the expense of existing or new community-based programs."¹⁸⁴

At any rate, there is a defence to be mounted of a broad approach to literacy work. Clearly two lines of defence are possible. One defence is asserting literacy as a human right. The other is asserting the importance, even for economic reasons, of programming forms which attract people to learning in a wide variety of situations, in and out of the workplace, and produce a generally more literate society. The choice of how much to emphasize each of these defences in public discussion must be made by literacy advocacy organizations.

A related question concerns the meaning of the term "workplace literacy." It is sometimes used to refer to machine- or job-specific reading and writing, and sometimes to extend to a broader technical literacy, questions of health and safety, and union participation and general education. There is a very common tendency in work-related training to tighten up the connections between curricula and specific job tasks.¹⁸⁵ However, in literacy the case is often compellingly made that learning that begins very broadly is central to learning particular skills. One could argue that there is now a consensus among those experienced in the field that programs should "consider both organizational and worker needs," and that program planning should involve more than management and the educational organization involved; it is also crucial to involve the union (where there is one), or even have it take the lead; and that participants must be involved, as "successful programs ... consider both organizational and worker needs."¹⁸⁶ The balance between job-specific and more extensive learning is still being worked out in practical experiments, policy deliberations and collective bargaining.¹⁸⁷ The differences between approaches to workplace programs should be stated and elaborated; the results of different practical experiments should be documented; and questions about the organizational and political processes through which "workplace literacy" is defined should be carefully studied.

The anchors of illiteracy

In an industrialized society with nearly universal elementary schooling, and nearly ubiquitous print, it is reasonable to ask what keeps literacy from developing, what holds illiteracy down — the metaphorical "anchors" of illiteracy.

Among the anchors of illiteracy are the limited availability of literacy programs, and barriers to participation in them. The costs of study — such as tuition, transportation, foregone wages — are frequently obstacles for potential learners. Women in particular must often cope with inadequate child care, lack of transportation (especially in suburban and rural areas), and the burden of doing two jobs a day. Women's male partners

¹⁸³ New Brunswick Premier's Advisory Council on Literacy, *Framework for Action*.

¹⁸⁴ Literacy Branch, Ministry of Education of Ontario, "Workplace Literacy Regional Meetings: A Summary Report," 1990.

¹⁸⁵ See, for example, Nancy Jackson, "The Case Against Competence," in Julie Davis et al., *It's Our Own Knowledge: Labour, Public Education and Skills Training*, Toronto, Our Schools/Our Selves Education Foundation and Garamond Press, 1989.

¹⁸⁶ ABC Canada, "Workplace Literacy: An Introductory Guide for Employers," Halifax, 1991.

¹⁸⁷ A variety of approaches are described in Maurice C. Taylor, Glenda R. Lewie and James A. Draper (eds.), *Basic Skills for the Workplace*, Toronto, Culture Concepts, 1991.

sometimes resist their efforts to further their education.¹⁸⁸ Some government programs help overcome these barriers. For example, some programs offer arrangements for childcare; some are tuition free; some offer stipends. But such supports are not universal. Standards should be devised for such programs of assistance, and the adequacy of existing measures assessed.

School and society

Education systems that continually leave children and youth with limited literacy are another of the anchors of illiteracy. Although school attendance is compulsory from age 6 or 7 to age 15 or 16 in different provinces and territories, not all students develop literacy skills. It is difficult to know how many students leave school each year with notably limited literacy skill. The Statistics Canada survey shows that 6% of 16-24 year olds are at levels 1 and 2 of reading ability. A Canadian Teachers' Federation survey of public found that teachers now say that 18% of students they deal with have "basic" literacy difficulties — e.g., with regard to reading, "understanding word meanings and concepts presented in uncomplicated contexts," as appropriate to a grade level.¹⁸⁹ It is often asserted that about one-third of students leave school before obtaining a diploma.

Whatever the figure, the question naturally arises what processes and practices in schools and in society at large produce these results. A number of school processes are now commonly identified. Many school systems, from the 1960s, adopted a general practice of "automatic promotion," pushing children through the school grades regardless of their learning. It is now often recognized that practices of "ability tracking" or "streaming" end the development of literacy skills for some students; drop-out rates are known to be markedly high for students in "special education" programs, and for those in the lowest streams of secondary school. It is now recognized in a general way that children from working class, poor, and linguistic minority families often enter schools with less of the kind of language and literacy experience that schools are set up to build on; thus schools need to change their ways of working to build on the experience that all students bring. And it is seen that for many students who are marginally successful (who are "at risk," to use the current jargon) a critical period occurs around grade 8, when many become disaffected from schooling. These practices and processes are increasingly viewed critically. Across the country there are efforts to improve elementary education and to reduce secondary school drop-out rates. Plans include expanding kindergarten programs; focusing elementary school curricula on literacy, and analytical and communication skills; delaying the commencement of secondary school streaming; and reducing drop out rates through the early identification of "at-risk" students, provision of counselling services, and "mentoring" to encourage school completion.

Such measures are valuable. Their results should be documented and their adequacy debated. It is important, however, not to take too sanguine a view of current reforms. There is bound to be resistance to the changes that would ensure that the schools effectively enable all children to develop literacy. More intensive teaching for "at risk" students means higher school funding, which clashes with budget restraint. Eliminating "streaming" means overcoming the resistance of parents whose children benefit from such arrangements. Standard school curricula are arguably not fit for poor and working

¹⁸⁸ At least one study found single mothers of young children, and middle-aged women, underrepresented in literacy programs; see Hindle, *Literacy Learning in Saskatchewan*, 89.

¹⁸⁹ Wendy K. Warren, Ruth Rees, RossAnn Edwards (Social Program Evaluation Group, Queen's University), *Teachers and Literacy*, Ottawa, Canadian Teachers' Federation, 1991, 40.

class children,¹⁹⁰ but changing that — incorporating into curricula class, gender and race perspectives on knowledge — would lend a "political" character to education that would certainly be contentious. School breakfast and lunch programs imply a recognition that social assistance and minimum wage levels are not adequate to support families.

As this last point suggests, very broad economic processes and policies bear on people's opportunities to use, and thus to sustain or develop, literacy. From an adult literacy perspective, it is obvious that literacy and numeracy learning is effectively curtailed by the denial of children's rights to be physically and emotionally prepared to learn, most acutely by hunger. Poor families also have difficulties in trying to supplement the schools' provision of learning materials and teaching work. People struggling to survive under social assistance and minimum wage rates that do not insure an adequate living may lack the time or the presence of mind to use literacy in their leisure, or to improve their employability, or to strengthen their communities.

The numbers of poor children, and of single-parent (usually mother-headed) families in poverty, are growing. Especially in the recession, economic and other forms of social distress are expanding and intensifying. But for most governments, it is not a goal of policy to eradicate poverty.¹⁹¹ Even those governments that might make it a goal can scarcely find the means to begin. Adult literacy advocates are natural allies of those struggling to change these conditions of poverty.

Literate jobs, and access to communication

People find that their literacy skills get "rusty," or that they lose confidence, if they spend years in communities or workplaces that do not provide them opportunities to use reading, writing and numeracy. Such experiences are another of the anchors of illiteracy. Work organization can promote or hinder literacy, and promote or hinder participation in literacy programs. Some studies, for example, show that people in low-skill, dead-end jobs tend not to see value in, or participate in, education, and likewise to be little involved in their children's education; while people in jobs with broad skills, or with opportunities for advancement, tend more to participate in education. Such findings suggest that policies for literacy would include policies for expanding job skills and advancement opportunities. Such possibilities have seldom been discussed, although recent work from the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development has begun to promote discussion.¹⁹²

Although in Canadian communities and public life it often appears that there is too much, not too little, print, much written material is not oriented to the needs, capabilities, or experiences of new readers. Much printed information appears to be produced by and for organizational insiders — legal information that only lawyers can understand, health information drafted for doctors and nurses, regulations and directives that seem to be written in the language of the bureaucrats issuing them and not in the language of those who are expected to follow them. One kind of work aimed at addressing this situation usually goes under the banner of "plain language." It is the effort to write simply, to eliminate specialized jargon or explain it where necessary, and to lay out information in

¹⁹⁰ Bob Davis, *What Our High Schools Could Be*, Toronto, Our Schools/Our Selves Educational Foundation and Garamond Press, 1990.

¹⁹¹ A broad argument concerning the difficult context for such efforts in a "liberal welfare state" such as Canada can be found in Gosta Esping-Andersen, "The Three Political Economies of the Welfare State," *Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology* 26:1, 1989, 10-36.

¹⁹² See Lauren Benton and Thierry Noyelle, *The Literate Worker: Adult Literacy and Economic Performance in Industrialized Nations*, OECD, Paris, 1991.

an order that is sensible from the perspective of probable readers. Plain language work generally occurs where institutions and professions have a message they want to get out to the public, or information they want to get back. The intention is to facilitate this transfer of information. There are notable efforts in the health and legal professions to make vital information available in "plain language," efforts in banking and industry to simplify forms and documents,¹⁹³ efforts within government to change the character of writing for the public,¹⁹⁴ and interventions from the literacy movement into plain language issues.¹⁹⁵ In a related effort, libraries increasingly work to provide collections of material suitable for new readers, and highly accessible information services.

A second kind of work addressing the dearth of material for people likely to be literacy learners is practices of student publishing, and similar efforts to broaden the circle of published writers within community and working class contexts. There is often a political animus to learner or community publishing — a struggle against the very ordinary oppression in industrialized societies, that in spite of their being so much print, most people's voices, experiences, and knowledge, are not represented. Community publishing aims not to allow institutions to communicate more effectively with the public, but to allow more people to have a say. Learner publishing, giving literacy students access to publishing through literacy programs, relates to more general issues of access to the means of communication, for women, native people, immigrants, people with disabilities, and people living in poverty. Creating a literate environment that is permeable to those learning literacy, or those with limited literacy skill, is an open boundary of literacy work.

These two different kinds of work can be expressed in terms of rights of access. Plain language work involves access to information. Learner and community publishing involves access to the means of communication. All these efforts need to be documented, and institutional resistances to them confronted.

III

From practice to policy

In all areas of literacy work there are ongoing processes of discovery. To encourage them there should be of course general support for literacy programming, and specific encouragement of innovation. There is also the possibility — which has informed this discussion of issues for the 1990s — that the discoveries of practice can be taken up into policy, and into an expansion of literacy work. This possibility raises questions about the extent to which the policy process is permeable to discoveries made in practice, and about the capacity of the governments and institutions that regulate literacy work to absorb its lessons. Practitioners have urged that:

¹⁹³ *The Decline and Fall of Gobbledygook: Report on Plain Language Documentation*, The Canadian Bar Association and the Canadian Bankers' Association Joint Committee Report, Ottawa, 1990.

¹⁹⁴ *Plain Language: Clear and Simple*, Ottawa, Minister of Supply and Services Canada, 1991; the counterpart French publication is *Pour un style clair et simple*.

¹⁹⁵ Ruth Baldwin, *Clear Writing and Literacy*, Toronto, Ontario Literacy Coalition, 1990; Progressive Literacy Group, *Writing on Our Side*, Vancouver, 1986.

The literacy community in Canada represents a considerable depth and breadth of knowledge and experience. It is therefore essential that literacy practitioners and program participants be involved in the development and implementation of public policy.¹⁹⁶

The literacy community — workers and students — must take a leading role in developing policy at all levels of government: local, regional and national.¹⁹⁷

For the literacy community to take a leading role in the development of policy — to use these statements as a leitmotif for the conclusion of this report — advocacy organizations must be somehow represented in the processes that define literacy policy. And these organizations must undertake to engage with the public discussion of literacy, the drafting of policy statements, and the devising of documentary procedures and controls.

Representation can occur in various ways. Advocacy organizations might select representatives to sit on literacy advisory bodies. These have, in the past, often included learners and practitioners as individual members. However, even this is not always done, and these bodies never give a leading role to representatives of literacy organizations. On the other hand, practitioners' and advocacy organizations might choose not to sit on advisory bodies, in order to maintain a critical distance. So proposals for policy and administrative procedures might be circulated publicly for reaction from literacy organizations. Finally, of course, the literacy community might itself initiate proposals for policy and administrative arrangements, and call on governments to respond.

In order to make proposals, or to be able to respond to them, the literacy community must articulate positions and secure consensus on them. How can this be done? One essential element in articulating positions is to document and systematize the discoveries of practice in a variety of forms: evaluation reports, data-gathering surveys, research studies, resources for teaching or program organizing, outlines for practitioner training programs, and so on. Such documentation is increasingly being done, and it is influencing many programming and funding decisions. But for the literacy community to take a leading role in developing policy, for the community to speak to government with one voice and with the assurance of knowledgeability, more is required — consensus on leading positions.

Internal organization of the community is not easy. There are many differences, even divisions, within the literacy field. In different regions, there are differences between school boards and colleges, between institutions and non-profit organizations, or between any of these and programs in workplaces. Programs that rely on volunteer tutoring may be set against those that employ career literacy teachers. Those who approach literacy with economic motivations, and those who approach it with justice motivations, often do not sit easily together. There are differences between rural and urban, minority language and dominant language, and so on. Sometimes these differences are merely differences of focus; sometimes they involve ideological disagreements; sometimes they are fueled by competition for resources; often they reflect the splintering of responsibility at administrative and ministerial levels. Sometimes the literacy community seems divided and conquered, when contentions obscure the common objective and experience of working to create a more literate society.

¹⁹⁶ "Cedar Glen Declaration."

¹⁹⁷ "Declaration from the Toronto Seminar: Literacy in Industrialized Countries."

All this of course makes it difficult for the literacy community to create strong coalitions, and indeed there has not been, at least nationally, a definitive policy statement from the literacy community since 1987. Neither has there been any national inquiry into the state and prospects of literacy work, that might set, outside of government, a policy agenda.

What matters might be addressed in a policy statement or policy agenda that aims to take a leading role?

The increasing emphasis on standards and accountability in literacy work must be juxtaposed with an emphasis from practice on learner-centred and community-specific curriculum and assessment and program staffing, and the programming autonomy that they require. Achieving a productive balance between them requires that the literacy community assert the lessons of its experience in any designing of grant applications, curriculum definitions, assessment procedures, reporting requirements, and the like.

In achieving a range of programming, and avoiding an uneven development of the literacy field, questions arise concerning the definition of funding streams and formulas, in which it is determined what kinds of programs will be eligible for governmental support, and in what proportions. For the literacy community to take a leading role on these questions, its organizations need positions on the most constructive balance between community, institutional and workplace programs, and the forms of funding that will enable all to be strong.

Finally, work for literacy policy, or for freeing the anchors of illiteracy, now unavoidably involves articulating the knowledge gained in literacy practice to a larger political and economic discussion about education and training, and indeed about the kind of society we want in Canada. Although policy interest in literacy picked up as the Canadian economy was coming out of a recession, and now we are deep in another, the discussion of government commitment to literacy and specific plans for literacy will continue. It will involve questions of literacy as a human right, labour force literacy as an element in economic competitiveness, the priority of literacy in claims for public resources in a time of government restraint, and the political force that organizations supporting literacy can bring to bear. Advocacy organizations and practitioners will need conscious strategies to engage in this discussion.

Literacy has been put on the agenda through a conjunction between powerful economic interests in labour force qualification, and community interests in individual and community well-being and strength. Paradoxically, the realities to which the literacy movement has drawn attention for at least 15 years are now also topics of discussion by labour market managers, business and labour leaders, and pundits of all stripes. But the terms of discussion are not often those which the literacy movement itself would have chosen. The literacy community is willy-nilly entered into a larger discussion.

In one vision of a future for Canada, it should be a joint goal of capital and labour, even a societal goal, to make Canada economically competitive internationally, not by producing mass market commodities with a low-wage labour force, but by producing high quality or high value-added commodities with a highly skilled high-wage work force. This vision has generated very broad questions concerning how our culture and society can be developed to sustain competitive economic institutions. The literacy discussion is intertwined with discussion of national standards for education, and the national testing that would support them; drop out rates and ways to reduce them; adult vocational training in general, and the roles and responsibilities of business, unions, federal and provincial governments, and educational institutions. As regards literacy policy, it is being said that

Canadians, *at least* those in the active labour force, should have the skills necessary to work flexibly and to be involved in continuous training and retraining.

Some in the literacy community would want to refuse engagement in this dominant policy discussion, with its subordination of society to economic purposes. But what is the alternative? In another vision, it should be an attainable economic and social goal to have full employment and minimum standards of social equity. Economic goals are then seen as means to enhance Canadians' democratic control over the conditions of their own lives. This vision, which points to the embedding of social and educational rights in the framework of political and economic agreements, also certainly has consequences for literacy policy: it would not be viable to have hundreds of thousands of people whose literacy skills were adequate (in employers' view or in their own) only because they were unattached or only marginally attached to the labour market, and to community and political organization. In such a vision, arguments for literacy do not depend on government and business having problems with people's limited skill. Rather an equitable distribution of literacy skills and opportunities to use literacy are sought as fundamental rights. This argument, though it has had limited force in Canadian political discussion in recent years, is one that the literacy movement can develop and assert.

In this broad policy discussion, the literacy community may make affiliations with other movements for social equity. Even beyond that possibility, there are lessons in literacy work — about why and when and how adults learn — that are important for the whole policy discussion. The wisdom of literacy work is that people's learning and use of language and literacy must be centred in their communities and their various purposes. Learning begins close to people's lives in all their complexity, and often in conjunction with the organizations that people have learned to trust. Therefore learning cannot be reduced to what would be contained within any centralizing edicts. (With regard to economic goals, one might say that the economy can only be strengthened by releasing processes of learning that are beyond management control). In the 1990s it will be a challenge for the literacy community to assert this wisdom in a very broad and complex policy discussion, and for the economic and governmental institutions that promote and regulate literacy work to learn to assimilate its lessons.

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