

Research in Practice in Adult Literacy – RiPAL

by **Mary Norton**

The Alberta RiPAL Network was initiated in 2000 as a project.

Its aim was to support adult literacy educators linking research with practice and doing research themselves. The Literacy Coordinators of Alberta (now Alberta Learning) sponsored the project, in partnership with The Learning Centre Literacy Association and the University of Alberta's Centre for Research on Literacy. The project was funded by the National Literacy Secretariat, with Alberta Learning.

The Network project grew out of various research in practice initiatives, including a 1997 survey of interest in literacy research in practice in Canada, a seminar about research in practice, and an Alberta-based research in practice project about participatory approaches in adult literacy education (Norton and Malicky 2000). As well as providing insights about participatory approaches, this project demonstrated the value and importance of collaborations between programs and universities. It also provided recommendations about how to support research in practice efforts. These recommendations, along with Horsman and Norton's (1999) framework for supporting literacy research in practice, were springboards for the RiPAL Network project.

In the first phase of the project, ten literacy and ABE educators participated in an on-line graduate course sponsored by the University of Alberta. Course participants learned about research and practice, clarified their questions or areas of interest, and developed research proposals. Those who participated in the second phase of the project used various methods to carry out research and met in inquiry sessions to share their learnings. Discussion during these sessions helped all participants to dig deeper, push at the edges, and depart with more questions. Most participants were also able to attend the 2001 Gathering about literacy research in practice in Edmonton, which was organized through the RiPAL Network.

Despite challenges, such as perceptions about research, confidence about doing research and writing,

and lack of time for writing, five participants completed studies and wrote reports about their learnings. These reports are now available on the RiPAL website. As well, participants made various presentations about the project and about their research at the 2001 Provincial Literacy Conference (Alberta), the 2002 RaPAL conference in England and at the 2002 Portraits of Literacy Conference in Vancouver.

While no longer funded as a project, the RiPAL Network continues as a concept. Projects offered under the Network umbrella include Violence and Learning: Taking Action (VALTA) and the Professional Development Project (PDP). Through the VALTA project, educators in Alberta participated in an online course and are currently exploring ways to address impacts of violence on learning. The PDP is investigating what desires and possibilities exist for professional development among coordinators of community adult literacy programs.

In 2002, the RiPAL Network web site (www.nald.ca/RiPAL) was launched. It provides information and links about research in practice networks and projects, events, databases and on-line resources. Initially an Alberta-based site, it is being expanded and updated through the collaboration of interested people in five provinces. The updated site will be launched in June 2003.

For more information about the RiPAL Network, contact mary_norton@eLit.ca. Copies of research in practice reports can be downloaded at www.nald.ca/RiPAL or ordered for \$5.00 each, plus shipping, from The Learning Centre, 10116 105 Avenue, Edmonton, AB. T5H 0K2. ■

SOURCES:

Horsman, Jenny and Mary Norton (1999). *A Framework to Encourage and Support Practitioner Involvement in Adult Literacy Research in Practice in Canada*. Ottawa: National Literacy Secretariat.

Norton, Mary and Grace Malicky (2000). *Learning about participatory approaches in adult literacy education. Six research in practice studies*. Edmonton: Learning at the Centre Press.

Available on-line at
<http://www.nald.ca/province/alt/ripal/resources/learning/cover.htm>