

What is to be done?

As I write this, strong winds are blowing. It is a warm, sunny day and the forecast is telling us that what is on the way is a blast of arctic air. Spring is, of course, on the way. But in the meantime we can expect chilly, if not frozen, receptions most days.

Perhaps it's my optimistic streak, but I like to believe this metaphor holds for literacy work as well. Right now the climate is not particularly conducive to genuine education. We are no longer allowed to ask literacy for what, literacy for whom. We are no longer allowed to say that literacy is a right rather than a charitable enterprise. Instead, in many parts of the country (those where basic literacy programs still exist), we are told we should be saying essential skills for all, so that the GDP will grow.

In the first week of March I received a press release announcing that the latest online tool from CCL can be used to 'assess' skills. Curious, I went online and discovered that the only function of this tool is to test individuals against the IALSS benchmarks. What a shame. This information may be relevant for statisticians. But it does not tell practitioners anything that can help us figure out what is making it difficult for a specific individual to decode words as they read, or to glean the meaning of the words they decode, or to understand how the text could affect their lived experience. It does not tell us how to assess whether our programs meet the needs learners express when they walk in the door, nor does it indicate who has stopped attending or why. It does not tell us whether programs receive adequate support and resources, nor what barriers learners face that make it difficult for them to learn.

So these are frozen wastelands, as far as genuine education is concerned. As far as research that could support practice and programs? Nothing but ice, ice, ice as far as we can imagine. Yet I know that many practitioners keep doing what they have always done: trying to meet the learners on their terms,

trying to build from what they know, trying to support learners making changes they want to make, trying to help them believe in themselves and to show them that they are making progress.

So why do I hold the image of spring in my mind? When I think of ice, I remember that it breaks by cracking. The huge dissonance between what is happening in programs and the ridiculous rhetoric that seeks to define literacy are creating cracks. Cracks can only lead to change. So let us consider that dissonance as rich in potential to foment change. Let us keep naming what doesn't make sense. Let us keep clear about what we know to be true and real, and what is just nonsense. And let's keep speaking out.

Tannis Atkinson,
Editor

Literacies: Researching practice, practising research is a journal about adult literacy research and practice in Canada. It is a forum for people to share ideas and experiences about how research and practice connect, and how each can inform the other.

Our intention is to respect and nurture diversity. We only publish materials that use non-discriminatory language and avoid stereotypes.

The views expressed in the articles and advertisements do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the editorial committee or the publisher.

Editors for this issue: **Tannis Atkinson and Phyllis Grace Steeves**

Managing Editor: **Nancy Jackson**

Publisher: **Tracey Mollins**

Copy Editor: **Sondra McGregor**

Proofreader: **Liane Keightley**

Design and Production: **Cheryl Ulan,**

Mouseart Graphic Design

Printing: **ABC Press**

Distribution: **The Learning Centre, Edmonton**

Cover Photo Credit: **Tracey Mollins**

Literacies is published by the **Department of Adult Education and Counselling Psychology, OISE, University of Toronto**

Editorial Committee:

Betsy Alkenbrack, Richard Darville, William Fagan, Michael Johnny, Phyllis Steeves, Anneke van Enk

Thanks to our sponsoring subscribers:

**Mary Hamilton, Carl Mollins
Grass Roots Press, New Readers Books**

E-mail: journal@literacy.ca

Web site: www.literacyjournal.ca

ISSN 1705-7434

Issue #10: **March 2009**

Subscription Information:

Canada: **1 Year [2 issues] \$15**

Outside of Canada: **1 Year [2 issues] US\$15**

Address inquiries about your subscription to:

subscriptions@literacyjournal.ca

OR

Literacies

Box 165

Ardrossan AB T8E 2A1 Canada

Privacy Policy: **We do not share or sell our list of subscribers.**

We acknowledge financial support from the **National Office of Literacy and Learning, Human Resources and Skills Development Canada.**

We would also like to thank our partner organizations: **the Department of Adult Education and Counselling Psychology, OISE, University of Toronto, and the National Adult Literacy Database.**

Please be patient!

We are working as hard as we can to develop a strategy for finding a way to continue. To check on our progress, visit our website or blog. If you'd like to get updates from us, send us your email address!
journal@literacy.ca