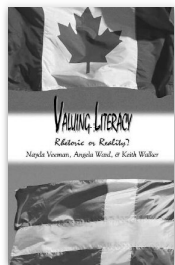


Briefly Noted by Maria Moriarty

Valuing Literacy: Rhetoric or Reality

(2006) Nayda Veeman, Angela Ward, Keith Walker. Edmonton: Detselig.



Valuing Literacy is based on a case study of adult learning policy in Canada and Sweden. The aim of the research was to explore why Canada and Sweden fared so differently in the OECD's 1994 International Adult Literacy Survey, which found that adult literacy levels in Scandinavia were significantly higher than those in English-speaking countries. The study takes a critical look at whether current literacy strategies in Canada are working and explores the political and social underpinnings of the current strategies in Canada and Sweden. The book includes personal stories of individuals who have returned to school as adults and the educators who work with them, providing an engaging look at how the complexities and challenges of public policy play out in the lives of adult learners and practitioners. For example, in discussing adult literacy in Canada the authors make this thought-provoking observation:

In Canada, adult literacy is an individual rather than a community problem and it is dealt with as a charitable cause. There is no universal publicly funded system of adult basic education to provide compensatory education for adults in any jurisdiction. Instead, undereducated adults must avail themselves of a patchwork of volunteer programs or projects offered by community-based organizations. There is no reliable schedule of adult learning opportunities, nor do all Canadians have access to funding for study at the basic level. The charity nature of literacy and the name literacy itself are disincentives—and often a disservice—to adults who might lack self-confidence or need special help in addressing learning needs (p. 102).

Intended for policy-makers, adult educators and researchers, *Valuing Literacy* is also very accessible to the general reader and provides a fascinating account of the contrasting results of the democratic approach to adult learning in Sweden with the liberal approach in Canada. You can order a copy from your local or online bookstore.

Learning in Community: A Study of Learning Circles in Canada

(2006) www.nald.ca/learningcircles



is the report of a collaborative study of community learning circles in urban, rural and Aboriginal communities in Canada. The research project developed out of discussions of lifelong learning by a group of literacy workers in Toronto who were concerned by the increasing focus on formal education and the emphasis on training as the accepted and best means of social inclusion.

The project, funded by the National Literacy Secretariat and supported through a partnership between the Metro Toronto Movement for Literacy, the Bay of Fundy Marine Resource Centre and the National Indigenous Literacy Association, looked for community learning groups in urban, rural and Indigenous communities that could provide an alternative vision of lifelong learning. The learning circles documented in the study operate without relying on written language, although written language may be used as a resource, and learning circle members may

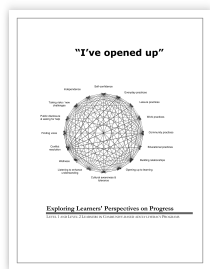
Questions are being asked, challenges are being issued, learning is happening—here's a brief look at some of the exciting, challenging and inspiring work on learning in Canada.

become more adept at using written language through their participation in the learning circles.

The study found that these learning circles provide unique opportunities for supporting learning, including literacy learning, while addressing personal and community issues. The learning circles support learning by people who would not qualify for formal education or training programs or would not find these programs conducive to their learning. The primary examples of learning circles are Indigenous circles, teaching groups in Indigenous communities and organizations that follow the tradition of learning in a circle where everyone around that circle is respected equally. Similar learning circles have developed in response to the needs of non-Indigenous rural and urban communities. Examples include a circle of Nova Scotia fisherman conducting a critical examination of fisheries policy, a group of immigrant women in Toronto learning about issues of cultural diversity, seniors exploring health issues through theatre, and psychiatric survivors studying the language of art criticism.

This exploration of learning circles provides an alternative view to the often restrictive, narrowly focused and hierarchical formal education programs offered to adults in Canada. And, perhaps most importantly, it challenges us to critically examine and think more carefully about concepts of lifelong learning.

The project documents are all downloadable at: www.nald.ca/learningcircles/reports.htm.



Learners' Perspectives

What do adult literacy learners think about their own learning in programs and how do learners measure their own progress and success?

These fundamental questions are explored in **I've Opened Up—Exploring Learners' Perspectives on Progress**, the report of a study

conducted in 2006 by researchers in five Ontario community-based literacy programs—Parkdale Project Read, Literacy for East Toronto, Regent Park Learning Centre (all in Toronto), Action Read Community Literacy Centre in Guelph and Wellington County Learning Centre in Arthur.

In the study, 56 adult literacy learners reflected on and described the progress they had made in developing self-confidence, in finding voice, in opening up to learning, in taking risks and new challenges and much more. Learners also described their sense of personal transformation and the benefits they see in their lives as a result of their participation in a literacy program. As

part of the study, the research group created a Tool for Documenting Learners' Perspectives (beginning on page 34), an invaluable aid for practitioners to chart progress from the perspective of adult literacy learners. *I've Opened Up* provides a unique view of the difficult to measure but critically important and complex transformations that adult literacy learners know are important as they move forward in learning and life.

An additional feature of this project is *Measuring Non-Academic Outcomes in Adult Literacy Programs: A Literature Review* that provides a fascinating overview of the work that has been done to look at the complexities, and often unexpected gains and benefits, of adult literacy learning.

The project documents are all downloadable at: www.nald.ca/ppr/researchproject.htm.



Workplace Learning

Fostering Partnership Development: An Historical Look at the National Literacy Secretariat Business and Labour Partnership Program (2007) is an interpretive and

comprehensive case study to document the HRSDC/NLS Business and Labour Partnership in Canada. As one participant in this study noted, "Canada was the envy of the industrialized world for its creation and innovation around workplace literacy in the 1990s" (p. 5). Through a series of face-to-face interviews and a review of archival records, documents and field notes, the study examines and charts the process of partnership development and the strategies used to engage business, labour, literacy practitioners and provincial and territorial governments in work-related literacy. The study examines the key stakeholders' perspectives on:

- the major accomplishments of the program and the impacts on workplace literacy practices over time;
- the factors of a successful partnership within the program;
- the dynamics of the program;
- the proposal and project-support experiences within the program; and
- the factors of an unsuccessful partnership.

The study also discusses the implications of recent policy and administrative changes: "During the period of program change, the policy objective of achieving literacy gains in the workplace became secondary to the preoccupation with accountability (p. 13)."

This is a timely publication, capturing the important contributions and accomplishment of the

National Literacy Secretariat Business and Labour Partnership Program in fostering workplace learning. It reminds us how much stands to be lost in the current policy climate. This study deserves to be widely read so that the accumulated knowledge and experience can somehow be preserved. Perhaps its findings could lead Canada to once again provide workplace learning opportunities that the rest of the industrialized world would envy.

The project documents are all downloadable at: www.partnershipsinlearning.ca/index.html

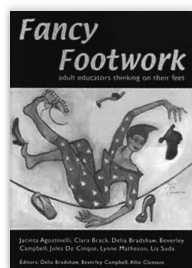
Integrating Equity, Addressing Barriers:

Innovative Learning Practices by Unions (2007), was developed by the Labour Education Centre with the Centre for the Study of Education and Work, and commissioned by the Canadian Council on Learning's Work and Learning Knowledge Centre, a consortium of more than 150 organizations led by the Canadian Labour Congress and Canadian Manufacturers & Exporters.

This report describes the amazing range of learning supported by unions in Canada that are little known, perhaps, outside the labour movement. It describes 35 innovative and diverse education- and learning-based initiatives that labour unions across the country have supported or sponsored, including literacy, workplace skills, apprenticeship, anti-discrimination and labour education. Unions have fostered these initiatives to address the systemic barriers workers have faced, in the workplace and in accessing learning opportunities in general. These barriers include lack of time, prohibitive costs, class, age, gender, sexual orientation, race and cultural background, employment status and educational background.

The full report is downloadable at: www.cclcca.ca/CCL/AboutCCL/KnowledgeCentres/WorkandLearning/index.htm

Fancy Footwork—Adult Educators thinking on their feet



Eds. D. Bradshaw, B. Campbell, A. Clemans
Melbourne, VALBEC. 2007
"When stories become the start of the educational journey, rather than its destination they provoke powerful and fresh insights."

Fancy Footwork is a book of stories written by a group of women, all of whom have worked or are working in adult literacy and adult education in Australia. They met regularly, in each others homes, over a period of 18 months, to talk, to share their stories, questions and reflections about their work, and between meetings they wrote to each other. This group of women did what many of us say we wish we had the time to do: they made space and time to come together. The result is a rich and many-textured mosaic of experiences, emotions, reflections and questions about learning and teaching and working.

As I started to write a description of the book I used my tried and true system. As I read I made a list of the topics I planned to highlight. But in this case my system broke down, as my list got longer and longer. I realized that there are just too many wonderful stories here and I didn't want to leave anything out! Just to give you a sense of how rich this book is, here is a small sample of the items on my list: a thought-provoking reflection on adult education instructors as "subversive nomads"; how a lost earring opened up a rich vein of reflection on learning and knowing; how one instructor used scarves to make a computer lab—where she was asked to present a workshop—welcoming and beautiful (go to <http://michalk.id.au/ala/change/> to see a multimedia record of result).

And there's more, much more.

Here's how one member of the group described the experience:

In the beginning we met with a piece of writing and something for show and tell as a way of introducing ourselves. Now I'm writing this, it occurs to me that we're continually introducing ourselves to each other, but also we're introducing ourselves to our own selves, as in 'I didn't know what I thought until I saw it written down, or heard myself speak' (p. 14).

The book is for sale on the website of VALBEC, the Victoria Literacy and Basic Education Council: www.valbec.org.au. So, buy it, read it, pass it along—let's be inspired and inspiring, let's tell our own stories. Maybe this is the first of many gathering of the "subversive nomads". ■

SOURCES:

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