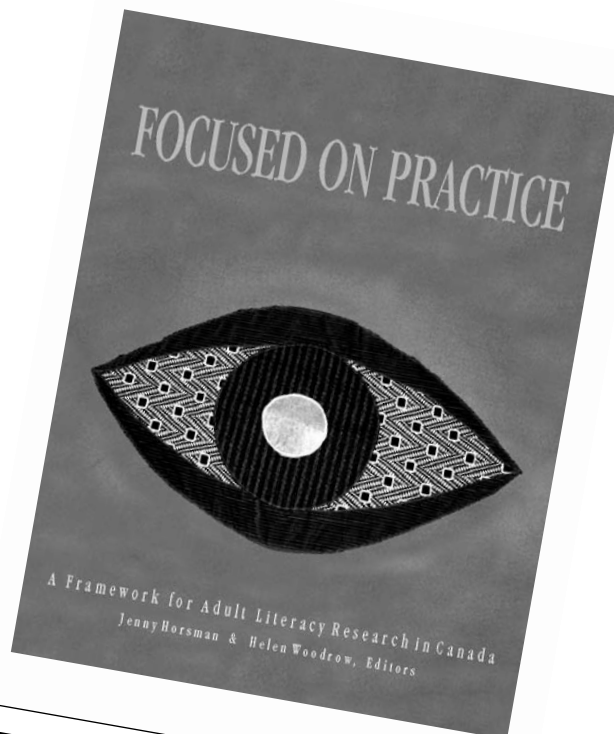


Some Realities of Working in Adult Literacy:

Snapshots from
Focused on Practice



In Newfoundland and Labrador:

"The bulk of literacy programs are provided by community-based organizations that may or may not receive funding for the literacy work they do. These programs are often run by volunteers and some have a minimal core staff person who is paid far less than their professionally recognized counterparts at colleges and school boards."

In PEI: "The practitioners who facilitate these programs are hired by Holland College and require a PEI Teacher's Licence as well as experience or formal training in adult education. They are hired on short-term contracts and receive health and retirement benefits. The instructors in this setting have generally been part of the system for several years and are comfortable with that arrangement. Their issues are not so much around the terms of their employment as they are around the methods and supports needed to help those with low literacy skills to move forward."

In New Brunswick, most teachers in the more than 100 Community Adult Learning Programs "have Education degrees or other relevant post-secondary education. They are paid \$14.14 per hour for 35 hours a week" for 34 weeks between mid-September and June.

Nova Scotia: literacy practitioners perceive that there is "a 'two-tier' system of literacy delivery...in the province, with institution-based adult educators having more status and being much better paid than community-based practitioners, even when delivering the same Level 3 curriculum.... In spite of these concerns, one of the common themes that emerged at focus group meetings that brought people together from community and institutional groups was the surprising similarity of their issues and the need for continued connection and sharing of information."

In Nunavut: "Most literacy programs offered at the Community Learning Centres must rely on short term third-party project-based funding.... Adult Educators must compete in a formal process that includes the submission of proposals.... With an increased awareness of literacy needs, competition for these funds has increased over the last few years. However, the amount available in each fund has remained unchanged."

In the NWT, "[m]ost adult educators work alone. They have to address a broad range of needs, from low-level literacy, to GED, to preparation for apprenticeship examinations. They often feel very isolated, and are able to come together only once or twice a year on their respective campuses. Some campuses have instituted buddy systems or regular teleconferences to bridge the isolation. Given the distances and the costs of travel, face-to-face meetings are prohibitively expensive."

At a National **Aboriginal Literacy** Gathering in 2002, practitioners reported that "funding criteria often precluded literacy programming in Aboriginal languages except in the territories, where Aboriginal languages are official. A handful of programs in other provinces were creative in how they incorporated Aboriginal language literacy. Most certainly, practitioners were doing their level best to ensure that methodologies and resources were at least culturally relevant, if not culture-based. However, such resources were minimal, and often required that practitioners 'burn the midnight oil' to produce them."

Bonnie Soroke created this zipper sculpture as a Wild Card for the "Focused on Practice" project to develop a framework for adult literacy research in practice in Canada. The full report is available online at www2.literacy.bc.ca/focused_on_practice/focused_on_practice.pdf.

In Manitoba: "In recent years community programs have felt increasingly beleaguered by accountability requests. They do not feel their training and learning needs are met and are concerned about how to provide quality instruction and quality programming that meets learners' needs (including appropriate supports such as travel and child care)."

In Saskatchewan: "Many CBOs [community-based organizations] and regional colleges rely heavily on volunteer learners in their programs, including ESL learners, in a more cost-effective manner. Although there are advantages to this approach, there are also concerns. Over the last few years many organizations have noticed a shortage of volunteers. Some programs do not have the staff needed to effectively support the numbers of tutors and learners in their programs. Additionally, it is often the highest need learners who end up in volunteer programs and these learners may need more support than can be expected of an average volunteer tutor."

In Ontario: "The literacy practitioners contacted in this project talked about the heavy demands of this accountability framework. They described a sense of exhaustion at meeting all the administrative and reporting tasks expected by funders while trying to meet the needs of learners who often face personal crises, all on very limited resources. In particular, practitioners talked about the lack of resources and poor working conditions. They described a sense that there is always more work for less money and that they constantly have to justify their existence."

In BC: "In contrast to the optimistic picture of the BC economy, there are many still-growing and unmet needs in the BC literacy field. Funding for program development and expansion for the secondary and post-secondary institutional programs is limited or lacking for the community literacy programs. This fiscal insecurity for literacy programs has a serious impact on literacy workers and their programs throughout BC."

SOURCES:

Snapshots of Our Reality. In Jenny Horsman and Helen Woodrow (eds.), *Focused on Practice: A Framework for Adult Literacy Research in Canada* (2006). Vancouver: Literacy BC.