



THE LITERACY ENQUIRER

Concerned Literacy Workers speak out about ...



OCTOBER 2004

The Official Story: Whose story is it anyway?

by Guy Ewing

The official story

People come to literacy programs, receive training services, and, for the most part, go on to employment or further training and education. (See the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities Literacy and Basic Skills Program 2003-2004 Annual Report.)

An unofficial story

Mira comes to a literacy program, joins a learning group, gains confidence, learns to find the town that she comes from on a map, participates in an ongoing discussion about moral relativism at

her learning group, starts keeping a journal, reads out loud in the group, starts finding it easier to read the flyers and notices from the city that come in her mail, starts sharing picture books with her grandchild, drops out of the program for a while to take care of her sick sister, comes back. (See Mira.)

Some questions about the official story and all of the unofficial stories

- Why is Mira's story invisible in the official story?
- Wouldn't people value literacy programs more, and understand them better, if Mira's story were visible in the official story?

- What can we do to make Mira's story, and all of the other unofficial stories, visible?

Two ideas for making the unofficial stories visible

- Tell the unofficial stories
- Work to change the current policy framework so that it can officially validate and support a broad range of learning opportunities and programming flexibility in literacy programs.

Literacy is an integral part of lifelong learning, not just a prerequisite set of skills. Change the official story so that it can acknowledge this reality. ↻

EXPERIENCE IS
KNOWLEDGE.

KNOWLEDGE IS
POWER.

EXPERIENCE
YOUR
POWER...

...SPEAK OUT!

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The IALSS: Whose story will it tell?

According to the 1994 International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS), 48% per cent of Canadians do not read or write well enough to meet the demands of the changing workplace.

When the IALS report came out, newspaper headlines declared the “literacy deficit” to be a national emergency — without an immediate remedy Canada would be unable to compete in the global economy. We were told that it is our duty as good citizens to upgrade our skills to meet the demands of the 21st century — if we do not, we ourselves will be responsible for our own ruin.

The second IALS survey, called the International Adult Literacy and Skills Survey (IALSS), is underway. The international report is due this spring and the Canadian report is due in September 2005.

Who or what is being assessed?
Individuals? Systems?
Literacy programs? Teachers?
Education policy makers?

What will the headlines be this time?
Who will be praised and who will be blamed? How will the literacy field respond? How, in this era of standardized testing, will we assert our knowledge and experience as practitioners, as learners, as workers and as citizens?

Read more about the IALS and IALSS at www.literacyjournal.ca. Click on the web forum tab and then on the fall 04: IALS link. ☺ TM

The Adult Education Review: another home, another official story



Will there be a new home
for literacy or will it remain
under-housed in MTCU?
asks

Tracy Westell

At the recent Ontario Literacy Coalition conference, Kathleen Wynne, the MPP heading the adult education review, said that she supported the idea of a “home” (read secretariat??) for adult education in the provincial government. Of course, this would require the Legislature’s approval before it could be implemented. It would have to be like a group home, housing all of us disparate adult ed folks in one house. This doesn’t bode well -- we know that group homes often elicit the NIMBY (not in my back yard) response and are stopped before they begin. Adult literacy has always suffered from NIMBY, having never settled anywhere for long (I count four ministries) and always changing itself to fit its new surroundings. Would the form of government body housing literacy change the function of literacy policy?

Certainly having the adult literacy

portfolio in a “work preparation” branch has influenced the government’s motivations for funding adult literacy: Jobs are the ultimate goal. There are other pressures on adult literacy policy, not the least of which is the Auditor General’s report of a few years ago which has the literacy bureaucrats madly counting beans on Wellesley Street.

A secretariat sounds like it might be able to set its own agenda although it would still be subject to the accountability craze of the Ontario government (a craze that has swept through all governments who can afford it). The up side of having a secretariat is that every time the literacy portfolio has moved house, we have seen new doors crack open and new possibilities take shape. A secretariat would mean we could build a house to fit literacy instead of literacy shape-shifting to fit its

new home; you know, Extreme House Makeover - not Trading Spaces.

What does this adult ed review have to do with the Bob Rae review of post-secondary education in Ontario? Apparently not a lot.

Wynne’s office says there’s no formal relationship between the two reviews. I guess post-secondary means ‘after completing secondary school’ and not ‘after not completing secondary school.’ And adult education means ‘education for those who need a second chance, remediation, upgrading, etc.’ and not ‘education for adults who want to learn.’

If you go to the post-secondary ed review web site (interestingly called raereview.on.ca: why wasn’t the adult ed review web site called wynnereview.on.ca?), Rae asks us “What’s your vision of a learning province?” Certainly my vision would include access to learning for all adults in Ontario, regardless of their purposes for wanting to learn. And you wouldn’t have to be able to read to take a course in Canadian history or Jacques Derrida (see page 4) and you wouldn’t need to write to discuss your ideas and have your voice heard.

According to Wynne’s office, the adult ed review will be released late this fall...

The Enquirer will have the story. ☺



Read all about it. We're in
the read again!



Literacy one book at a time A literacy worker's story

by Flora Doehler
Librarian, AlphaPlus Centre
fdoehler@alphaplus.ca

I could say that the satisfaction I get from working as a librarian in a literacy library is the sense that I'm working for the greater good of raising literacy levels, but that wouldn't really be true. No. My satisfaction comes from connecting one by one with instructors and other literacy workers because they help people to live fuller lives under difficult circumstances. Let me explain. A literacy coordinator can call in from a northern fly-in community where an apple costs \$2 and a public library or a bookstore isn't in the picture at all. Another instructor can e-mail from an urban school board where adult education has slid down the priority list. What both people have in common is that they are swamped with work, pressed for time, coping with continuous intake and multiple goals, needing help to find materials that will balance the learner's needs

with LBS requirements. I figure that I'm here to help support overworked but diligent program workers by listening and by connecting them with practical materials so that they can perform heroic acts.

People want books from AlphaPlus for many reasons: "I am working with a learner who had a brain injury 5 years ago and has lost his spelling ability, but can read well." "We're developing a literacy program for workers in the hotel and restaurant sectors." "I'm looking for resources that practitioners can use with teaching ideas, and practical applications."

Regardless of the request, they all lead back to helping one person: the learner. And when I'm lucky, I get to witness it.

Recently I was helping a practitioner when a man came in to deliver a package. He stopped in his tracks when he spotted the practitioner. She was his former instructor! He declared her to be the best teacher he'd ever had and proudly told her that he had his own delivery business and that, "Life is good." He left to continue his deliveries, the practitioner resumed her book search, and I felt that I'd been treated to a live vignette about the drama that is literacy. What a great feeling!

So, if you are a literacy worker and need some materials, give me a call and perhaps we can both get some satisfaction. ☞

Can I be replaced by technology? A literacy worker's query

Can I be replaced by the computer in my program?
By the software loaded into it?
By online resources on the Internet?
By chat rooms and online discussions?
By virtual classrooms?
By video conferencing?

Were teachers replaced by books?
By pencils?
By pens?
By telephones?
By movies?
By tape recorders?
By televisions?
By VCRs?
By DVDs?



Technology and its advance has always been with us.
And we are still here.

Can technology ever really replace the interaction that takes place when two or more people meet to learn, whether that meeting is face-to-face, using a telephone, e-mail, or within a virtual classroom?

I mean, can it, really replace the value and importance of the interaction of two or more people?

Is technology a good thing or bad thing within literacy practice?
Can it replace us?
Should we be wary of it?


Think of the pencil and paper advanced now to stylus and palm pilot—the new look of the tool.

Can I be replaced by a stylus?
I think not! ☞

Defying Categories: A worker's story

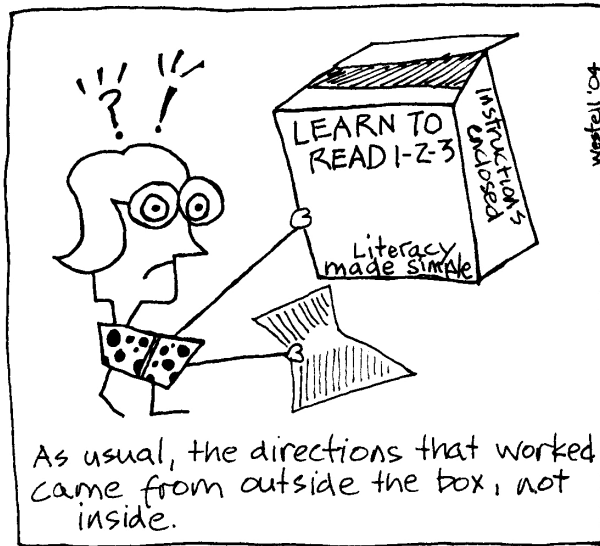
Giuseppe the cleaner couldn't read or write and they fired him. In desperation he opened a delicatessen in Carlton which was an immediate success. Soon he owned a thriving chain of stores.

"Imagine,"
they said, "what you could have been if you could read and write?"

"A cleaner"
said Giuseppe. 

From: Watts, Maree
"How do Power
Relationships, Within an
Adult Literacy Initial
Assessment for CES-
Referred Clients,
Influence the Assessment
Discourse?" in *Literacy,
Adults and Diversity*. Eds.
Ian Falk and Margaret
Penson. Literacy and
Learning Series, no. 1,
National Languages and
Literacy Institute of Australia. 1996.

[CES-Referred clients are unemployed workers referred by Commonwealth
Employment Services.]



**Are you enjoying this paper? Do you have any
queries or stories that you would like to share?
Would you like to join our learning circle
discussions? Contact us at
literacyenquirer@yahoo.ca.**

What's the question?

Practitioner/researcher queries

by Sheila Stewart and Nancy Jackson

Why bother doing research? Who is it for anyways?

Do I have to have a hypothesis? Do I have to do a literature review?

What does culture have to do with it?

What about a research question? Do I need one?

What's a focus group? A control group?

Who's in control anyways?

What's ethics got to do with it?

Does research have anything to do with practice?

Could it help tutor training? Learners? Intake?

How the heck would I find the time to do research anyways?

Why would I want to?

Can I avoid stealing people's stories? Whose stories does research tell?

Am I supposed to be objective?

What about surveys? What's a sample?

What is data? How do I collect it? Organize it? Analyze it?

Where do I keep it? Does it need watering? Feeding? A litterbox?

How do I choose research partners? What if we disagree?

Should I do research in my own program? Would it be biased?

What about confidentiality? What if others ask to see my data?

Who can I talk to about what? Who's in charge?

How would I recognize a finding if I bump into one?

How do I get conclusions? Do I need to have recommendations?

How do we get the money? Who owns the research?

How do I deal with the funder? What's the role of government?

What should the research report say? Who is for? What if no one reads?

What do we do after the final report? After the party? Is it over?



Derrida: What's Jacques got to do with literacy?

Dis is da creeda of
Mr. Jacques Derrida:
Dere ain't no wrida.
Dere ain't no reada,
Eida.

By Tracy Westell

Jacques Derrida (pronounced dairy-dah), the French philosopher and father of deconstructionism, died at aged 74 in France this month. Derrida and other French philosophers like Foucault and Lyotard, questioned the so-called “truths” that underpin much of Western thought (or Western meta-narratives). They deconstructed the conscious and unconscious intent of writers (of fiction and non-fiction) and questioned the power, discourses and social constructs embedded in text. Through this process they revealed the subjectivity and positioning of writers and their text, and, consequently, of the “truths” used in their texts.



Le Monde, 1973

Derrida and co. have greatly influenced thought in many fields including academic literacy studies, one branch of which is called the New Literacy Studies (NLS). One of the main proponents of the NLS is James Gee. He describes a discourse as a “socially accepted association among ways of using language, other symbolic, expressions, and ‘artifacts’, of thinking feeling, believing, valuing, and acting that can be used to identify oneself as a member of a socially meaningful group or ‘social network’, or to signal (that one is playing) a

socially meaningful ‘role’.” (Gee, 1996). The NLS theorizes that literacy is a socially embedded practice that is experienced differently in different roles and contexts; that it is formed by different discourses that are powerful (or not) in cultural, political and social contexts; and that literacy is practiced for different reasons that are “embedded in broader social goals and cultural practices.” (Barton and Hamilton, 1998). NLS challenges those who hold power: “NLS, then, takes nothing for granted with respect to literacy and the social practices with which it becomes associated, problematizing whatcounts as literacy at any time and place and asking ‘whose literacies’ are dominant and whose are marginalized or resistant.” (Street, 2003). And so, not only is the NLS discourse complex, it has woven into it a critical pedagogy which assumes that people will ask hard questions, especially of those controlling the dominant literacy discourse.

The policy view of literacy (and the public view greatly shaped by

media accounts of government policy initiatives) is a simpler one than that of the NLS. Barton and Hamilton write, “In the media narrative on literacy the autonomous view of literacy usually provides the framing of what are regarded as possible or reasonable questions to pose and limits what might be possible answers.” (1998). The answers narrow as government develops policies that embody the notion of the learner as human capital (to be invested in and used) and literacy as autonomous skills acquired through discrete activities in rigidly prescribed levels.

If Jacques Derrida and co. were working with us in literacy programs in Ontario today they might ask “What is the main intent of LBS? Whose interests does it serve? What does the language of its policies/directives reveal about the writers? Whose voice is dominant? What meta-narrative/story is bolstered and what stories are ignored or simplified?

Perhaps its time to start answering some of these questions. ❧

Literacy for Social Change

by Nadine Sookermany



Literacy practices are ways of acting and behaving that reflect power positions and structures (Barton, Hamilton and Ivanic, 2000). The ways in which these practices reflect and shape social structures are what we do in our work as literacy workers. The main factors of ‘really useful literacy’ are first, recognizing learners’ experiences, and second, letting learners recognize their potential power to effectively and collectively change their situations. These are linked to two core elements of adult education as social change: first, education must be

grounded in real and realizable struggles for democratic control and second, it does not perpetuate the status quo. Instead, it challenges the learner to move forward, to look through a different lens, to rethink their goals (hooks, 1994). We must employ liberatory and emancipatory pedagogies in literacy programs in order to provide students with different lenses through which to view, perceive, and understand reality and, subsequently, to produce social change. When we look at learners’ experiences and needs, we see that adult learner goals are broader and more complex than



simply employment or further training. There are also many measurable changes that learners can and do experience through education that incorporate not only knowledge and skills, but also attitudes and behaviours. Literacy is about much more than reading and writing; it is about who decides what kind of knowledge counts, why it counts and what they want to do with it (Martin and Rahman, 2001). If literacy programs continue to leave unexamined the sources of knowledge they use, then learners’ knowledge will be unexamined and unacknowledged too and we will be ignoring the real work that needs to be done. If we examine and acknowledge the forms of literacy that are practiced in learners’ lives we see the many ways that learners engage with literacy daily in order to get by in the world such as interacting with social workers, teachers at their children’s schools, the transit operator as they attend appointments, the medical receptionist at the doctors’ office, etc. When one looks at the multitude of social literacies that we engage in on a daily basis, we begin to understand how groups on parenting, citizenship and

community action are important and valuable as real knowledge “Useful literacy can teach people to read and write, but we can only learn what ‘really useful literacy’ means from our students” (Martin and Rahman, 2001). This is the crux of our work in literacy. It is the difference between teaching skills and empowering action. Until we empower learners to recognize their experiences and their ability to make change, we just aren’t doing the work. ☞

Works cited

Barton, D., Hamilton, M. and Ivanic, R. (Eds.). (2000). *Situated literacies: Reading and writing in context*. London: Routledge.

hooks, bell. (1994). *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*. New York: Routledge Press.

Martin, I. and Rahman, H. (2001). “The politics of really useful literacy: six lessons from Bangladesh.” In J. Crowther, M. Hamilton and L. Tett. (Eds.), *Powerful Literacies*. National Institute for Adult Continuing Education (NIACE)

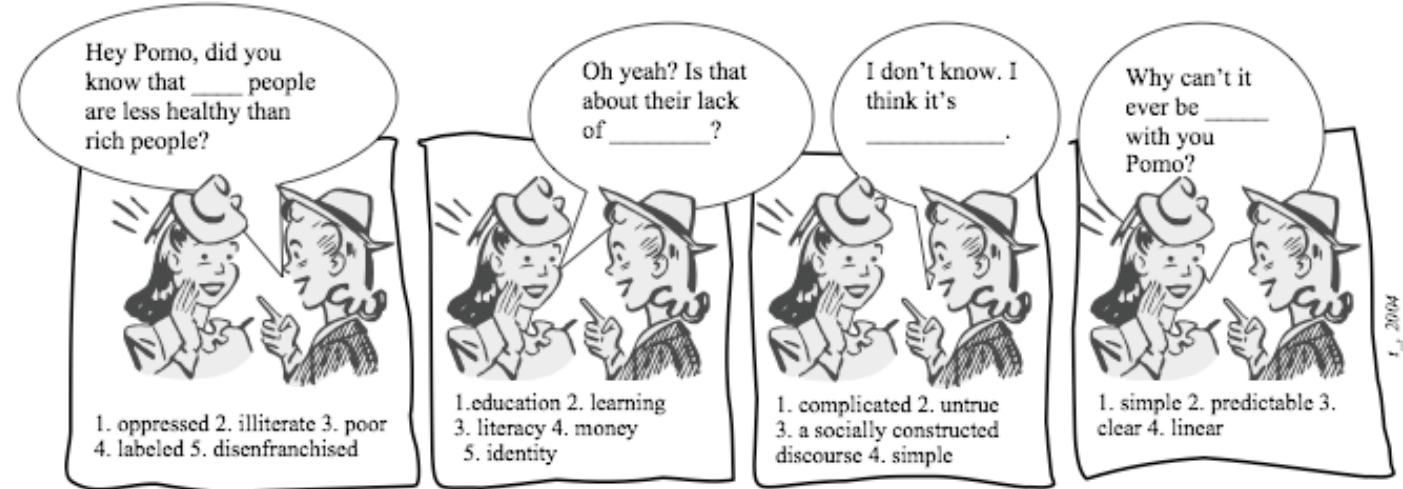
PoMo* Cloze Exercise for Literacy Practitioners

Use the word lists to complete the dialogue— or use your own words.

Please submit your completed dialogues to
literacyenquirer@yahoo.ca.

*post-modern

by T&T 2004



Five salaries

by Maria Moriarty

CEO – Canadian Tire: \$8,547,543 annually or \$4696.45 per hour (for a 35 hour week)

Average hourly salaries for literacy workers in Community Based Literacy Programs in Ontario

Executive Director of a Literacy Program: \$21.44/hour

Program Coordinator: \$17.87/hour

Paid Instructor: \$17.08/hour

Unionized Literacy Instructor in a school board program: \$32.59/hour

Cost of Living

Tank of Gas - \$30.00

Large Pizza - \$20.00 ☞

Teacher-activists: A story about education reform

This is Laure Gaudreault.

She was born in 1889 and began her teaching career in 1906. Gaudreault taught in rural Quebec for many years and then became a journalist. She took advantage of this forum to raise public awareness about the plight of the rural teacher. She returned to the classroom in 1936 and found that working conditions for female elementary school teachers in rural areas had not improved during her absence.

Gaudreault decided to organize an association for these workers.



On November 2, 1936, the Association des institutrices rurales de la province de Québec held its founding meeting. Then Gaudreault travelled across the province -- under her leadership thirteen regional associations were created and more than 600 teachers became members.

In February 1937, the association delegates assembled as the new Fédération des institutrices rurales de la province de Québec and nominated Gaudreault as president.

One way that she kept the federation strong was by ensuring communication among the regional associations — she

published and edited *La petite feuille*, the voice of the elementary school teachers.

Gaudreault resolutely defended the rights of female elementary school teachers as she worked to improve their working conditions and professional status. She laid the foundation for teacher professional development through various committees and study groups. Throughout a career that spanned more than 60 years, Gaudreault's involvement in unions and her will to change the teaching environment in Quebec was an inspiration to all who met her. Teachers as well as Quebec society benefited from her contribution to the development of unionism in Quebec. ☞ TM

Literacy practitioners and learners learn about worker rights ...

Seeds for change:

a worker-centred literacy curriculum guide

www.clc-ctc.ca

– click on the organizing tab, click on literacy, click on resources

WorkRight.ca:

a web site with resources www.workrights.ca/woindex

Community Legal Education Ontario:

clear language material about a variety of worker and social rights

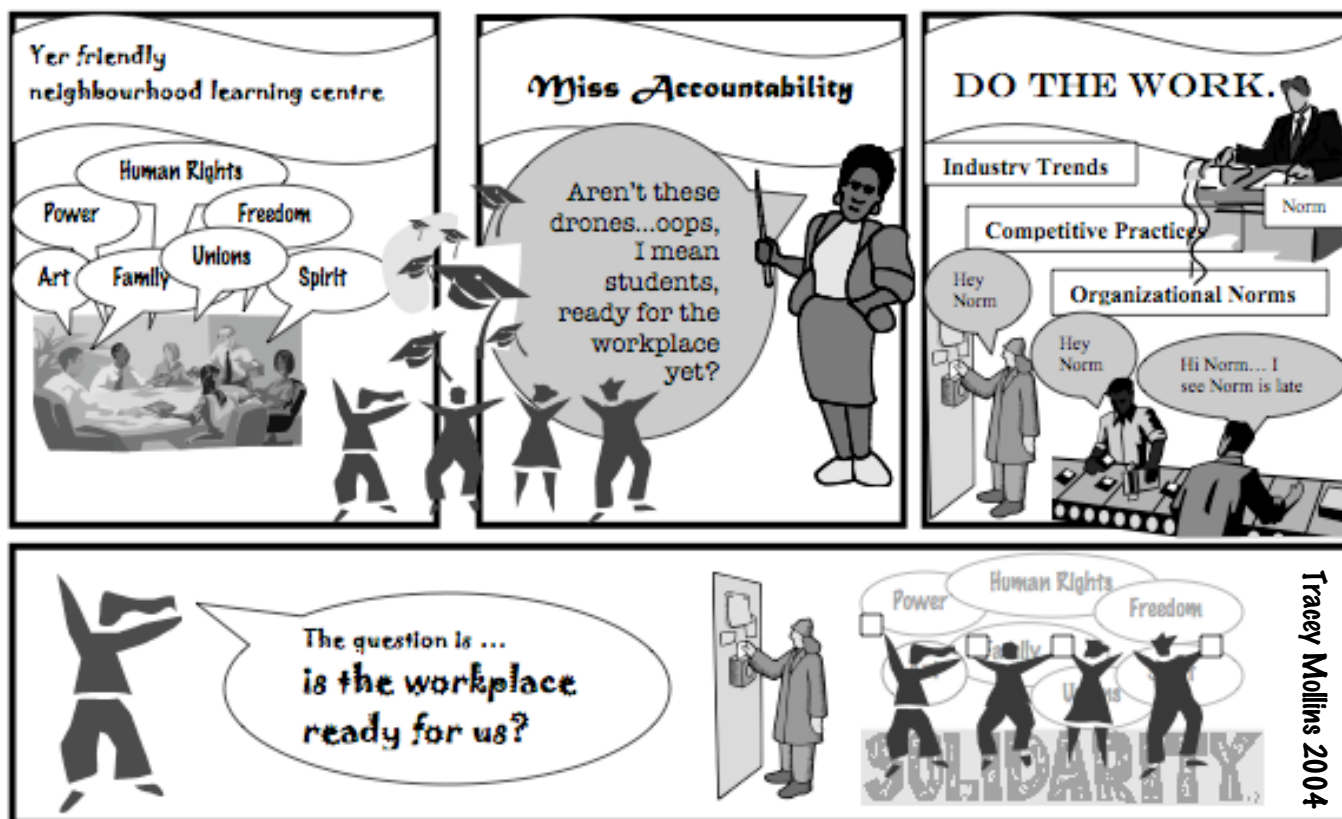
- www.cleo.on.ca

Working Conditions 4 Literacy Workers

How do your working conditions effect learning conditions in your program?

Talk to us ...

wc4wl@yahoo.ca



Practitioner Knowledge: A story about translation

by Tracey Mollins

This summer I heard a story from the US about how practitioner knowledge, if framed in language that policy-makers understand, can inform and direct policy. The storyteller told us that framing literacy policy in terms that are important to the broader policy agenda means that there is a chance that someone will pay attention to our issues — and in the first decade of the twenty-first century, we're in a back-to-basics mode.

To make sure we end up with a policy that meets the needs of adult learners, we need to:

1. Be clear about our vision.
2. Identify both the explicit and the underlying drivers of the dominant policy agenda.
3. Translate our vision into terms that are acceptable in the dominant policy arena.

She told us that *Equipped for the Future* is an example of how the above strategy can work — that EFF built alliances based on a consensus

about "literacy for what?" For example, the government has economic goals and learners want better.

The goal of EFF was to create an adult literacy education system that focuses on preparing adults for the future. EFF presents a clear vision of what adults need to know to fulfill their roles as citizens, workers and family members and developed maps for each of these roles.

The citizen map tells us that our role is to work to eliminate discrimination; to figure out how a system works and identify how to have an impact; use diverse resources including personal experience; respect and learn from others; reflect and reevaluate our own ideas — in short, be a lifelong learner, an activist and an advocate.

The worker role map tells us that we are to "do the work." We are to value people different from ourselves while working within organizational norms and respecting

organizational goals — determining both individual and organizational priorities based on industry trends, labor laws and competitive practices — in short, we are to leave our advocacy, our activism, and our lifelong learning skills at the door.

It seems to me that EFF actually represents the vision of the policy-makers and employers presented in a language they think literacy workers, those who are sympathetic to what our storyteller called a *'60s access-to-opportunity approach*, will find acceptable. You can see the ghosts of a holistic approach behind the layers of literacy for the real customers of adult education — employers and governments interested in the product of skilled, compliant employees.

To me, this story of what happens when literacy workers water down the culture of literacy and try to speak the language of policy-makers has a very sad ending. ☹

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The Literacy Enquirer is published by the *policy learning circle*. The *policy learning circle* meets informally from time to time in a variety of venues to discuss how practitioners can have input into policy decisions and how to bring our knowledge to the policy-making process.

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The LE is also available in PDF.

Contact us:
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Any short (500 words or less) articles that question or challenge dominant ways of thinking about adult literacy will be accepted



Photocopy this newspaper!