



Connecting Literacy, Learning & Work

by
Christine Pinsent-Johnson

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Connecting Literacy, Learning & Work

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Introduction

OVER THE COURSE OF SEVERAL YEARS, the program I work in changed its approach to teaching literacy for adult students who had work-related goals. Underlying our new approach was a gradual transformation from seeing literacy as mostly a skill and task-based activity to seeing literacy as a practice-based activity. *Connecting Literacy, Learning & Work* will try to capture both the *thinking* and *doing* sorts of shifts that occurred. It will describe how learning and assessment activities changed, how instructors took on different roles, and even how we began to work with a more diverse group of students. I will also draw on both experience and published research to reflect on and analyse the changes within the context of adult literacy program development related to employment. By sharing what we have done and exploring what this may mean, I will move back and forth between the theoretical and the practical to build a comprehensive and useable understanding of literacy, learning and work.

Telling our story

Combining theoretical ideas and practical application in one document is not a straightforward task. Deciding what kind of book this would become was a challenge, and I'm still not sure if it's readily definable. Is it a handbook, case study, curriculum guide or research report? I can't say it's any one of these, but it does share elements of each. It does contain some research-based discussion, curriculum ideas, a few ready-to-use tools, interviews with instructors, and student photo stories. It is a book that tells a story about an adult literacy program that made changes to the way it thought about and taught literacy for adults who want to make changes to their working lives. Although there is one story, it is told from many perspectives: the students, the instructors, program managers, published research and my own. Finally, this book is intended for those who work in adult literacy programs and are engaged in the on-going process of making connections between literacy, learning and work.

Upon reading this book, I hope readers will be able to relate to the experiences of colleagues who made substantial program changes and view the changes within a broader context. It is imperative to include theoretical discussion alongside more practical experiences in a book that is used by program planners and instructors. Theory or personal philosophies, whether we have articulated them or not, inform our practice.

A key implication of our attempts to organize learning is that we must become reflective with regard to our own discourses of learning and to their effects on the ways we design our learning (Wenger, 1998, p. 9).

If we believe that adult literacy education consists of a set of skills and accompanying knowledge that must be mastered before fully engaging in and contributing to community, work and family, then we will deliver programs that insist on separating literacy from the ways it is actually used and relegate students to the margins of society. But if we believe that literacy is an integral part of daily activity, shaped by the setting, activities, participants, and resources, and therefore inseparable from the way it is used in the community, at home, with family and at work, then we begin to see adult literacy education in a different way.

***... literacy is an integral
part of daily activity ...***

Who are our students?

The adults we work with encounter numerous barriers to entering and/or staying in a job that provides a living wage and personal satisfaction. It is a challenge to develop a description of our students because I am limited to using labels and categories that distance and define people, and describe them in ways they would not use to describe themselves. I will use them reluctantly, however, to make a connection to existing descriptions so there is an immediate recognition of the adults who attend our program. The labels used to describe the students include marginalized, varying levels of formal education, low levels of literacy as defined by IALLS (Level 1), visible minority status, single parents, dependent on social assistance, and mildly disabled. Their own stories, which appear throughout the book help to override such labels.

The most significant barrier is not one that can be applied to them. It is the dismal prospects they will ever have of finding a job that will support them and their families, a job that is secure and has the potential for advancement. Most students have little or no paid work experience in Canada or their native

countries (for those who are immigrants¹). For those who receive some form of social assistance, they must balance their potential employment income with the loss of assistance income and benefits (e.g., dental and drug coverage, subsidized housing, access to social workers, etc.). Most will not likely be able to earn an income high enough to cover the benefits that will be lost if they stop receiving social assistance. Such a situation:

can leave them no better off or even worse off as the result of taking a job. These kinds of ‘barriers to work’ as they are sometimes called, can contribute to a low-income trap, in which individuals are unable to complete the transition off welfare [and disability support]...(TD Bank Financial Group, 2005, p. ii).

Although the focus of our program is to help adults find employment, the program is not in the business of getting people off social assistance nor does it have to be. Instructors have become very aware of the financial implications that need to be considered if a student enters the job market, and assist students in making informed decisions. This means that students are encouraged to find a balance between work and social assistance in order to gain the benefits of both for themselves and their families.

My experience and background

I have been in a unique position to write this book. I was an instructor in the program from 1992–2001. Then I took on a role outside the classroom as an assessor and lead instructor in 2001, which allowed me to step back from the day-to-day demands of teaching to really think about, hear and see what was going on in our program. For the first nine years as an instructor I worked directly with various groups of students. Initially, I thought about and taught literacy in mostly a skill and task-based way. My planning binder was neatly divided into subjects like reading, writing, spelling, grammar and math (5-tab dividers were always used!). I worked with students assigned to various levels, developed tracking forms and assessment activities to capture the bits and pieces of literacy skill, such as writing a complete sentence or identifying the main theme of the story, that could be used to demonstrate a student’s achievements at a particular level. But I quickly recognized that this way of teaching literacy and seeing literacy seemed so limited. What we did in the

¹ Many of the students who attend the employment preparation program have immigrated to Canada. If they did not speak English, they most often attended second language programs prior to attending our program. In second language programs they acquired a functional level of language and literacy, but need on-going access to adult education opportunities to gain greater proficiency in specific areas such as employment and academic literacy.

classroom didn't look anything like what people did with literacy outside the classroom. How could I make these worlds connect? Over the next few years I attempted to use theme-based² and participatory³ kinds of approaches in my class. Although I recall moments of dynamic, interactive and truly meaningful learning, these were fleeting. I was never able to create an on-going momentum, a feeling that we were working together for a sustained period of time to fulfill the reasons people had for being in the class. There had to be other approaches.

What we did in the classroom didn't look anything like what people did with literacy outside the classroom.

In 2000, during my final year of teaching a class, I decided to pursue my master's degree part-time in adult education. Although this was also the first year of program change, I was not involved in the change decisions any more than the other instructors, and my work as a graduate student was not at a point that it could be used to support any changes. The following year I took on the dual role of assessor and lead instructor, which meant I met all new students coming into the program and became a liaison between teachers and program managers. This is the unique position I was in: I was able to listen to students talk about themselves, their reasons for coming to the program, their dreams for the future; I listened to instructors talk about their work with students, their challenges, frustrations and their stories of accomplishment; I began to see the kinds of pressures experienced by the program managers to operate a program using guidelines and procedures that didn't always reflect changing realities; and I began to read about and think about different ways to understand literacy. The feeling that there had to be other approaches became an active attempt to find, talk about and implement new ideas with the instructors, managers and students.

Working with instructors, students and an advisory committee

Although I am the writer and research coordinator for this book and the larger project that it was part of, it wasn't accomplished without the contributions and work of many people. Most of the instructors in the program were involved directly in the project, and I relied immensely on the four instructors who are or were directly involved in the development of the employment preparation component of our program. I never actually taught an

2 I relied on *A guide for planning and implementing instruction for adults: A theme-based approach* by John M. Dirkx and Suzanne M. Prenger, published by Jossey-Bass, 1997.

3 I drew from *Making meaning, making change: Participatory curriculum development for adult ESL literacy* by Elsa Auerbach, published by Center for Applied Linguistics and Delta Systems, 1992.

employment preparation course, and had to rely exclusively on the experiences of the four instructors. Without their involvement, this document would not be possible. In addition, a larger group of program instructors worked with students to develop the photo stories.

I also worked with an advisory committee comprised of people who would assist me with various parts of the book. As mentioned earlier, it has shades of a handbook, case study, curriculum guide and research report. To help me develop such a diverse text I needed to work with a diverse group with expertise in each area. I was incredibly fortunate to bring together the very people I wanted and needed to provide guidance, challenge ideas, recall incidents, make invaluable suggestions and generously provide their time and experience. Finally, two members of the advisory group were actively involved in leading both a group interview and the photo story project, pivotal elements to ensuring the success of the project.

Overview of the document

Placed throughout the book are six photo stories developed by students with the support of their instructors. Students were asked to take pictures and then describe what they felt was most important to learn in relation to employment. Their stories are powerful and compelling, and have been intentionally placed throughout the document, breaking up the theoretical discussions and my own interpretations. Details of the development of the photo stories are in Appendix 2.

In Chapter 1, I introduce a way to organize a discussion of literacy, learning and work. This is needed to ensure there is a common way to talk about a variety of teaching approaches in adult literacy programs. By no means is this the only way to organize a discussion of literacy learning related to work, but it is a useful framework to describe our particular program experiences and my own interpretations. Chapter 2 is essentially a review of current research related to literacy, learning and work, and includes a brief discussion of best practices in programs for adults who encounter multiple barriers to employment. With some common understandings and approaches in mind, I describe our own program in Chapter 3 and highlight some of the key challenges we encountered when making a shift from a predominantly skill and task-based approach to a practice-based approach. Chapter 4 draws heavily on the instructors' discussions of the strategies and approaches they now use when developing learning and assessment activities. The final chapter, Chapter 5, will bridge theoretical ideas with the instructors' strategies by describing in detail a way of connecting literacy, learning and work that could be adapted by instructors who are also searching for new approaches related to employment preparation.

Yasmen's story

Yasmen talks about having greater independence since starting her first job at a school for children with visual and hearing impairments.



MY NAME IS YASMEN. I am 32 years old and I have two small children. I came from Somalia to Canada in 1997. I lived in Toronto first before I moved to Ottawa. I am a single parent.

When I was in Toronto, I volunteered at a community centre to help at the front desk. I helped the people who came in and sometimes I answered the phone. When my husband left, I moved to Ottawa to be closer to my family. All my family lives here.

I came to school because I wanted to learn more English. I started working in February 2006. I work in the afternoons, so I can still go to my English class. My sister helped me to apply



I wanted to be independent.
It makes me feel good to do
things for myself.

for the job as a cleaner. Her boss asked her if she knew anyone who could work. She asked me if I was interested, and I was. I wanted to be independent. It makes me feel good to do things for myself.



I clean the washrooms and offices at a school for deaf and blind children. When I go in I have to put on a uniform because then they know who you are.

I never had this kind of job before or knew how to use the cleaners. I didn't know. I learned the names of cleaners and toxic signs, and recycling from my class at school. My boss trained me too.

The first thing you have to do is sign in. You can't go in unless you sign in and get an I.D. card. My boss taught me to read the cards. You have to sign out when you finish.

This is the students' music room. I like to watch them when I am working. It sounds good. They are very good.

In the kitchen, I have to clean everywhere. This is a big kitchen for the students. I clean it every afternoon. I pick up the garbage and change the recycle bins.



These are the front door flags.
I think they are beautiful.
It feels like a special place.



I like the children's classroom.
You know that it's only for kids
and it is beautiful. It's special
to me because it is for small
children.



The reception area is very
important to me. This is
where people come in to get
hired. They need to relax and
so it needs to be clean and
comfortable.



There is a big wall that has a painting on it that looks good. The students made it and everyone who comes in are interested in looking at it.

For my work, I need to have a big yellow cart. You need two bags. One is for paper only and the other side is for cleaning stuff. Having two different bags helps me not be confused. It makes my job easier.

The toilet paper has to be checked and it is very important to put in the washrooms. The duster is used for doors and windows. The very big garbage can is for washroom garbage. The towel I use to clean the sink area.



This is the staff bulletin board. If something happens, you can look for the phone numbers and make a call.

The staff have a special office to sign in and out at break time. You can make coffee there too. There is a calendar, keys, and a washroom. The supervisor writes on the board to leave messages.

There are so many doors at my workplace. This is the front door and I like the way it looks. There is a park in front of it and this is where the students and children play.



Because I was so shy at first, it took me two days to feel comfortable. All the signs were in French and I didn't know how to read French. Other people at work helped me with this.

This is my first job. My husband did everything before but we are not together right now. Now, I do everything. I go to work, I pay the bills, and look after my children. Coming to school really opened my eyes to a bigger world. I am very proud of me and I like to learn more.

Coming to school really opened my eyes to a bigger world.

CHAPTER ONE

Frameworks for discussing literacy, learning and work

THIS FIRST CHAPTER WILL INTRODUCE a consistent way to talk about literacy learning in general, in addition to literacy learning related to work. To discuss literacy learning in general, I refer to a framework developed by two American literacy researchers nearly 20 years ago that continues to be relevant and useful. Then, the remainder of the chapter will describe my own attempt to organize the book's discussion of literacy learning related to work. This organizing framework is based on my own way of conceptualizing how our program changed its approach. To discuss different approaches to literacy, learning and work, I have used different prepositions to emphasize the intensity of the connection each makes between literacy and work. I use the terms learning literacy *about* work, learning literacy *for* work and learning literacy *at* work to capture these ideas.

A way to discuss literacy learning

Literacy learning can be viewed in many different ways by programs and I wanted to use a description (not a definition) that would capture divergent views, yet also be readily understood. Lytle and Wolfe (1989) developed a framework based upon existing concepts of literacy in both theory and practice. They suggest literacy learning can be discussed and understood as the development of *skills, tasks, practices* and *critical reflection*.

When literacy is viewed as primarily a set of *skills*, instruction is focused on skill-building activities such as decoding and encoding, sentence structures, and paragraph development. Underlying such a perspective of literacy learning is the idea that skills can be accumulated and then applied in a variety of different ways. The literacy-as-skills perspective is also the basis for a traditional schooling model of literacy education.

Literacy can also be viewed as the ability to carry out and complete specific *tasks* such as completing a form or addressing an envelope. In this kind of

instruction, there is some sense of context due to the socially constructed nature of the tasks, but tasks are too often used to assess literacy achievement without acknowledging how the task is actually used in real situations. For example, in a task-based approach to literacy learning, a student might learn to complete a job application in class, but might not learn to complete the application under the conditions required by the employer. “Literacy as skills denies the role of meaning in literacy; literacy as tasks denies the role of social context” (Fingeret & Drennon, 1997, p. 62).

Literacy activities are integrally tied to people, ways of speaking, knowing and doing things in a particular setting.

Literacy as *practices*, on the other hand, emphasizes “our pluralistic culture and the many different social contexts in which literacy is used” (Lytle & Wolfe, 1989, p. 10). Literacy activities are integrally tied to people, ways of speaking, knowing and doing things in a particular setting. For example, a literacy activity such as writing a note will be different at home, in the community, and at work. At home, the note might be written quickly and stuck on the refrigerator to tell family members you will be late; in the community, a note might be written with a sympathy card; and at work, a note might be written outlining a discrepancy in a report. Although these activities all involve some literacy skills to do the task, the context for writing the note will introduce many other considerations that need to be addressed to complete the activity. Simply having students write a note to demonstrate their abilities with text does not mean they are engaged in a practice-based activity. What is the situation that has sparked the need to write a note? Would the student actually choose to write a note or use another method of communication? Is note-writing an activity that actually takes place in these kinds of situations?

Intrinsically linked to a practice-based view is the idea that literacy is *critical reflection*. This means the situation itself becomes the subject of analysis and reflection, and meanings are problematized (thought about in relation to who and what has power, who doesn’t, and what can be done). For example, I may think it’s a reasonable goal to teach a student to write notes while at work. Perhaps they can take a phone message or request a schedule change. This seemingly simple activity has many issues to consider. Firstly, I have made the assumption that this is in fact a useful activity. What if it isn’t? What if schedule changes are done using a specific form and the employees on the floor never answer the phone, only the supervisor? What if the student does proceed with the note-writing activity and tries it at work, only to find out that her co-workers resent her for writing down information about them? How is literacy supported or hindered at work? What or who decides how texts are used and which texts have the greatest value? Lytle and Wolfe emphasize

that analysis of the function and purpose of literacy activities within their social context (literacy as practices) without acknowledging and acting upon the inherent power structures (literacy as critical reflection) can lead to an uncritical acceptance of “a normative framework” (Lytle & Wolfe, 1989, p. 11).

The organizing framework developed by Lytle and Wolfe is a particularly useful way to think about literacy learning because it describes the various approaches that programs use. I’m going to take it one step further and suggest that a practice perspective with critical reflection be used to view skills and tasks, as shown in Figure 1. Critical reflection is placed within a practice perspective, as it is an integral element. A focus on practices that is always tied to critical reflection allows us to see how literacy is used by us, for us and about us. It can also be used as we think about teaching literacy and how literacy is used by students, for students and about students. If the focus is primarily on the development of literacy practices and critical reflection, *it does not mean that literacy skills and tasks are neglected*. Rather, a focus on practices and critical reflection helps to re-focus and better inform the development of literacy skills and tasks. In turn, skills and tasks can enhance the development of practices.

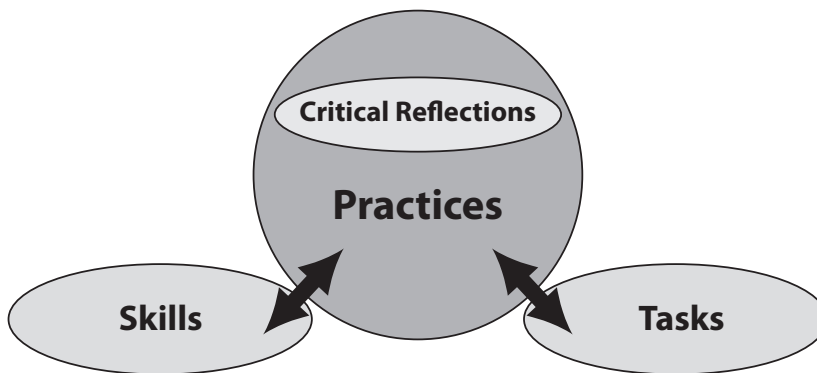


FIGURE 1.1: A focus on literacy practices and critical reflection.

A way to discuss literacy, learning and work

In the rest of this chapter, I will look at three different approaches to literacy learning and work that are distinguished by the intensity of their connection between literacy learning and work learning. While it may seem simplistic to distinguish approaches to learning literacy and work by playing around with prepositions, it has helped me to clarify my own thinking about our program changes. To discuss what we did and continue to do, I will look at the ways we created activities, and organized ourselves and our students to support learning literacy *about* work, learning literacy *for* work and learning literacy *at* work. In

addition, I will connect to the ways different approaches are documented by aligning them with one of the three prepositional turns of phrase. This is my own organizing framework and while others may disagree, I have found it to be a useful way to talk about our program changes.

A schooling approach: learning literacy *about* work

As suggested above, literacy-as-skills is the underlying concept for a traditional schooling approach to adult literacy learning. In addition, a literacy-as-tasks perspective also emulates a schooling approach if it disregards the ways in which the students will actually use literacy outside a program. When our program was predominantly school-like, instructors (including myself) used materials that had some sense of context (e.g. application forms, letters, memos, etc.), but they too often focused on developing literacy skills without addressing how such tasks might actually be carried out, that is, in the way, in the place, with the people and with the resources that they would normally be performed. For example, I often had students complete job application forms thinking that I was strengthening their ability to complete all forms at some point in their future. Looking back now, I see many problems with such thinking:

- ▶ Students were completing forms for jobs they weren't actually applying for; the form may not have been remotely connected to the kind of workplace a student may eventually enter.
- ▶ If this was only a practice activity, how much meaning did it have for the students? How much value did they assign to the activity, and how much effort would they have devoted to it?
- ▶ The form was being completed without considering how it was actually used by the employer. Did the employer want the form completed on-site? What value did the employer attribute to the form? Was it merely a procedural activity or a way to screen out applicants?
- ▶ Could the form actually be completed with assistance (away from the employer perhaps) or was it to be done under the watchful and judgmental eye of an employer?

All of these dynamics were overlooked when my approach to literacy learning was primarily skill and task-based. It is only now that I can clearly see a difference between skill and task-based literacy learning and practice-based literacy learning.

A skill and task-based perspective supports schooling approaches. School literacy is a way of thinking about, talking about, understanding and participating with text that is usually found in traditional K-12 school environments. This means that traditional school settings have their own values, ways of doing things, beliefs and meanings associated with text that are exclusive to that setting. In a schooling approach there is a singular focus on teaching literacy skills as they might be taught in elementary schools. There is a focus on decoding, developing vocabulary based on word lists, sentence construction, parts of speech, reading stories and answering comprehension questions, proper spelling and punctuation, etc. that are often learned without considering how such skills are actually used beyond the school setting. The underlying motivation for such an approach is the perception that such skills form the building blocks needed for all uses of literacy and will readily transfer to a variety of literacy applications.

... traditional school settings have their own values, ways of doing things, beliefs and meanings associated with text ...

I recall spending a lot of time thinking about innovative ways to teach these skills, but I also seemed to be constantly asking myself, “Why is it that students can do this skill so well on the worksheet or test, but totally forget everything when they write in their journals?” It’s likely that very little skill development transfers from one literacy application to the next (from the worksheet to the journal), particularly for adults like those in our program with low levels of formal education and who are not native speakers of English. One study suggests that only the most rudimentary text skills transfer for any adult learning literacy: an ability to read left to right, basic decoding and remembering a limited number of sight words (Mikulecky et. al. 1994).

Isn’t a schooling approach needed to enter other educational programs?

The argument for a practice-based approach is easier to make if students have employment goals and goals related to their home and community lives. But what about students who have academic goals like completing high school, entering a community college program or writing the GED exam? Don’t the literacy learning activities needed for these kinds of academic contexts closely resemble the kinds of literacy learning activities associated with a schooling approach? The answer is yes and no. Different academic settings have different academic practices. For example, students may enter an academic upgrading program in a community college and learn the same kinds of things about literacy, even though they may be entering vastly different programs in computer technology, trades, horticulture, social services, health sciences, etc. Those diverse fields certainly use literacy in very different ways, and it’s likely

that each college program uses literacy in different ways. Why prepare all students the same way? A schooling approach can be monolithic and inflexible in its focus, and does not usually accommodate the ways in which literacy is actually used in different settings.

Contextual approaches: learning literacy *for* work

Many alternatives to the traditional schooling approach have been developed and put to use, namely functional context education, participatory approaches, and integrated or embedded literacy. While each of the approaches offers an alternative to a traditional schooling approach, they do so in different ways by taking into consideration the context for learning. In other words, literacy activities in a program look very much like activities an adult might engage in outside the program, whether at work, at home or in the community.

Functional context education

Functional Context Education (FCE) was developed by the U.S. military to raise the reading levels of U.S. recruits. Instead of using generalized and decontextualized approaches, literacy development was combined with the actual materials and knowledge a recruit needed to learn. In other words, recruits were not simply developing general reading and writing abilities but focused on developing only the skills they actually used in their work roles (e.g., as a cook, a mechanic, a medic etc.). When the reading scores of recruits in generalized programs were compared with those in a context specific program, grade level scores were found to be substantially higher for those who developed skills within a specific context.

Thomas Sticht, an American cognitive psychologist, has written extensively on the theory and applied its underlying concepts to adult literacy instruction and employment preparation programs (quotation marks are the author's):

...the idea that literacy is something one must “get” in one program, which is then “applied” in another, is misleading. Rather, it is argued that literacy is developed while it is being applied. This means that for the large numbers of youth and adults who read between the fifth and ninth grade levels, literacy and content skills education can be integrated. Therefore there is no need for special “remedial” literacy programs to get students to “prerequisite” levels of literacy before they are permitted to study the “real thing” (Sticht, 1997).

While a functional context approach to job-related literacy learning has much to offer, and helped to inform our own thinking when our program began making changes, it does have some limitations. It does not address the full range of understandings and meanings related to the idea of literacy as practices and critical reflection. Rather, there is only a narrow focus on the development of literacy skills and tasks within a specific context, while the broader impacts of people, relationships, values, beliefs, power, etc. within that context are not addressed directly.

It does not address the full range of understandings and meanings related to the idea of literacy as practices and critical reflection.

Participatory literacy

Where functional context approaches fall short, participatory approaches excel. Participatory literacy models were developed to directly challenge the perception that adults who had limited literacy abilities also had some sort of deficit. Participatory approaches, according to Auerbach (1992), also infuse meaning into literacy learning by:

- ▶ Having the students determine what to learn based on their work, home, school and community lives;
- ▶ Viewing the instructor as a facilitator of learning who takes on the role of problem-poser and co-learner to help students draw out issues and reflect on them while facilitating the development of students' own solutions and actions;
- ▶ Creating collaborative environments in which students and instructor share ideas, discuss issues, try out new learning, support, give feedback, and pass on new knowledge; and
- ▶ Developing literacy learning that encourages students to think critically and make changes on a personal and societal level.

But participatory approaches can send some contradictory messages about the social nature of literacy. Although the content comes directly from the students' own work, home and community lives, is there a similar flow from the program back into these domains? In participatory programs the classroom becomes a model—what happens in the classroom creates possibilities for the students' lives outside the classroom, states Auerbach. There is an assumption that the ways in which people learn to use and think about literacy in the classroom, with a group of supportive peers and an encouraging facilitator, will be readily transferable to other contexts.

Integrated and embedded literacy

Descriptions of integrated and particularly embedded literacy, as it is used in the UK, seem to be more aligned with our own program. Integrated literacy is the term used in both Australia and New Zealand to describe how literacy, numeracy and language instruction are delivered in combination with job training. Although guidelines for integrating literacy suggest that the approach *reflects* the concept of literacy as social practice (Workbase, 2003), the guidelines discuss only the development of literacy skills and tasks within a specific context, similar to a functional context approach. Further emphasizing their skills and task approach is a task analysis tool used to plan literacy learning activities for specific jobs that focuses on tasks alone without acknowledging how people, relationships, values, beliefs, power, etc. shape learning.

In the United Kingdom, this idea of connecting literacy learning to a specific context is referred to as *embedded learning*⁴. In essence, literacy, language and numeracy are embedded into the learning content of a broader topic, such as construction apprenticeship, childcare, horticulture, a course for foreign-trained nurses, a coaching course for youth and an alternative health care course (Roberts et. al., 2005). Sometimes both literacy and content-based instructors work together and at other times programs are taught by a single instructor. While a variety of ways to organize embedded learning are described, the key is to link a practical task to the development of language, literacy and numeracy. Embedding is not simply a matter of making a connection to curricula but involves the active participation of the instructor in determining how literacy, language and numeracy are used in particular jobs, and the vocational programs that support those jobs. Instructors also need to understand both the transferable and setting-specific or situated skills. As a result, students valued literacy, language and numeracy when they could see that it was an integral part of the job they wanted to obtain. More importantly, students began to see themselves as members of a particular work community; in other words, they no longer saw themselves as students but as workers.

An embedded approach may initially sound similar to both an integrated and functional context approach but there is also mention of students' changing identities, similar to a key element of participatory approaches.

As a result, students valued literacy, language and numeracy when they could see that it was an integral part of the job they wanted to obtain.

4 Case studies can be found at http://www.nrdc.org.uk/publications_details.asp?ID=21

Materials related to the initiative can be found at <http://www.dfes.gov.uk/readwriteplus/embeddedlearning/index.cfm>

Each of the above contextual approaches focuses on the ways literacy is used and understood by adults but they don't provide as complete a picture as an interpretation of literacy as a social practice.

A social practice approach: learning literacy *at work*

The decision to look at the job-related learning in our program as social practices is my interpretation. Others might interpret it differently, but I have chosen this perspective for a few different reasons:

- ▶ In the past 20 years, a large body of research has contributed to new ways of understanding and discussing literacy.
- ▶ This understanding has offered an alternative to the predominant view of literacy as a set of skills that operate separately from the ways people use them.
- ▶ The focus of research has been on how people use literacy, why they use it in such a way, who is involved in its use and what it ultimately means to them.

The resulting understandings are most often referred to as 'social'. Then, depending on the specific interpretations of what this means, other words might be added (e.g., social activity, sociocultural, social context, etc.). Use of the word social helps to distinguish these understandings from cognitive views of learning, which suggest learning occurs only within one's head according to developmental stages, and behaviourist views, which suggest learning occurs as the result of external stimuli. One view does not necessarily supersede another: we learn when we touch a hot stove and when we are developmentally ready. We also learn when we interact. Examining learning as a social activity helps to provide a more complete picture than simply looking at physical responses and cognitive development.

Use of the word *practice* helps to focus these ideas even more and suggests that our ways of engaging in literacy are not simply a by-product or a means to some sort of social interaction but are in fact *the* interaction. Our social practices or ways we think, do things and communicate are constructed by us and others, whether we realize this or not within social groups that we participate in. These ways of thinking, doing and communicating then become our way of understanding the world. Since literacy is embedded in a group's way of thinking, knowing, doing, communicating and understanding,

literacy is embedded
in a group's way of
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and understanding

it is also a social practice. As a result, literacy looks and feels very different across groups of people, time and place. Barton and Hamilton (1998) outline what literacy as a social practice means:

- ▶ There are different literacies associated with different domains of life (work literacy, home literacy, community literacy, health literacy, etc.).
- ▶ Some literacies become more dominant, visible and influential than others because of the power of certain institutions, like the K-12 education system.
- ▶ The ways we interact with text are intertwined with what we do and who we are.
- ▶ Literacy changes (over time and place) and new practices are often learned informally.

How instructors' understanding of literacy learning connects to literacy as social practice ideas

How do these ideas of literacy as social practice relate to the way instructors in the program think about literacy? When the four instructors currently involved in the employment preparation programs (Carol McMurchy, Dianne Bertrand, Elizabeth Ivey and Susan Verret) were asked what they consider to be the most important learning concept that drives their teaching, they each connected directly to ideas of literacy as social practice when they emphasized the importance of learning the *culture of work*—its expectations, values, ways of talking, ways of knowing, ways of using tools, and interacting.

... emphasized the importance of learning the culture of work ...

Carol said her students have to be able to understand work culture in general, along with the culture of the specific settings that they are in while on their placements. She explained how she allocates time each day they are in class to discuss workplace scenarios:

Every day we talk about scenarios...working together and solving problems. What do you do if you have a problem? Do you solve it or go to the supervisor?

If there are no immediate issues from the students' experiences, Carol or one of the students draws from a box of questions she created to spark the conversation. For example, she developed about 50 different questions emulating those often asked during interviews to discuss situations and help familiarize students with the job interview process. She explains how one

student faced a question in an interview that related to a class discussion. “She said, ‘I didn’t quite understand the question but I understood the word, and when I heard the word I knew what to say because we had practiced it.’ ”

Susan also talked about how her students need to understand the sociocultural issues related to the healthcare training programs they want to enter and the actual jobs the training will lead to. When students try to enter a training program they have to pass an entry test and a job interview. Sometimes both the employer and trainers are involved and both are looking for different things from the students. They have to demonstrate their knowledge within “the culture of healthcare using the context of interview questions,” she said. During the interview, students are asked all kinds of questions about working in the field. They may be asked about patient care, how to care for the elderly and the disabled, even whether or not they prefer to work one-on-one or in a team. Susan emphasized, “They have to be able to give the appropriate answers to show they understand the culture of healthcare.” In addition, students also have to prepare for the academic demands of the training programs and the entry test that is given to assess their academic skills. They need to have a broad healthcare vocabulary, be able to read the information found in textbooks, and be able to take multiple-choice tests. She said that there usually isn’t a lot of writing in the job or the training program, but effective reading skills are essential so she spends more of her time developing reading skills and healthcare vocabulary. In essence, learning the culture of healthcare training programs includes both particular kinds of academic and work-related literacy practices.

Elizabeth said her main goal was to encourage her Adaptive Learning⁵ students to develop a healthy self-esteem that would help them fit into any work environment.

That means that they have confidence in their own ability; they know their strengths and are able to speak about them without expecting the social worker beside them to do all the talking...mistakes happen...they have to have the ability to accept we all make mistakes.

She added that students need to be effective communicators and be able to provide clear answers to questions, ask for clarification when necessary and also ask their own questions. She helps her students understand body language and tone of voice. “Definitely it’s work culture,” she explained. They learn interview techniques and problem-solving through role-plays, simulations, and

5 Adaptive Learning is a component of the adult literacy program that works with adults who have developmental disabilities.

scenarios. She then described how she and the assistant instructor will set up a simulation in which they speak to each other in the same way they've heard the students speak to each other in order to have students analyse their behaviours. "We do a lot of role modeling," she said.

Dianne discussed the challenge her students face in understanding the vocabulary of regulated childcare. She explained that they had to learn a completely different way of communicating with children while in the childcare. No longer could they simply say, "No, don't do that," or even ask innocently what a child was painting. Words, tone and body language had to be carefully controlled in order to suggest possibilities not boundaries, to allow for choices not reprimands and to make direct connections with the child at a physical, emotional and developmental level. Often, text played a key role when her students learned to read picture books (they weren't simply learning to read the words but were also learning when to pause, how to ask questions and other techniques to involve the children in the reading process) and she emphasizes the importance of supporting her students in learning new ways of communicating with the children.

In each of the above instances, not one instructor focused only on the development of literacy skills and tasks to describe what their students needed to learn in order to meet their work-related goals. Instead, they discussed the importance of a variety of social practices such as ways of talking, thinking, understanding, knowing, learning, and doing. I suggest that students are learning literacy at work in such an approach because the sociocultural dynamics of the workplace or training program become the focus of learning. In addition, both students and instructors are directly engaged in these settings, which will be described in detail in Chapter 3.

... the sociocultural dynamics of the workplace or training program become the focus of learning.

Summary

This chapter described a broad framework that can be used to discuss the variety of approaches used by literacy programs—approaches that may be based upon developing *skills, tasks, practices* or *critical reflection*. I suggest that skills and tasks drive a literacy learning approach that is more like school than work, while practices and critical reflection reflect the realities and complexities of the workplace. In addition, a skill and task-based perspective is limited in its ability to help instructors see and understand literacy as it is used by students, for students and about students. On the other hand, a practice-based approach with critical reflection helps instructors to see the complex

dynamics of literacy and to develop meaningful, useful and even life-changing literacy learning opportunities. If practices and critical reflection become the focus of learning literacy, it does not mean that skills and tasks are negated; rather, they are reformed based on the ways they are actually used and not on assumptions about their use. To make connections between literacy, learning and work, I developed ways to describe literacy learning about work, for work and at work. Although our own program has experiences with all three types of connections, literacy learning at work will be the focus of discussion.

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complex dynamics of
literacy

Jane's story

Jane discusses achieving her goals in a creative photo story using signs with key messages, and even involving her children.



I WAS BORN IN MALONE, NY. I came to Canada in June 1996. I got married a month and one day after I arrived in Canada. When I came I only had 9th grade education. I had worked as a carnie, I set up and tore down rides, and I also ran them. The actual setting and tearing down is very physical. The living arrangements are not the normal lifestyle. There is no privacy, you live in what's called a bunkhouse. If there is not enough room in the bunkhouse you have to find your own place to sleep, like tents, trucks, rides, or get a hotel room, which then costs money. But the people are the plus. I got close to everybody and you can count on them for support.

I was pregnant with Sarah when I came to Canada and stayed at home and did the odd babysitting job. I read lots and lots of books on parenting. I had a midwife and had the baby at home. I didn't have immigration status and was not eligible for OHIP. I paid for my ultrasounds.

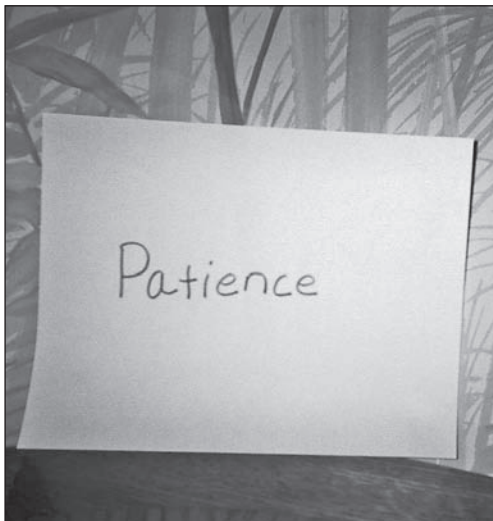
I had Damian in 1999. I took a few years to learn how to deal with two babies. I then had Jasmine in 2000, the millennium baby. When she was born I babysat and went to parenting groups at Belair Community Centre. I took "You Make a Difference" course and other parenting courses.

When Damian was two he stopped saying his words and never cried. I had to teach him how to play, how to move a car across the floor, how to move a rattle to make sound. When he was two years seven months he was diagnosed with autism. At first I was in denial. I thought my life was over. Sarah, my oldest, would say, "It's okay, Mommy, we're going to learn him."

I have three wonderful children. They have shown me a lot in life. Sarah has taught me you have to be calm; you have to handle a situation calmly. Not everything has to be handled with loudness and aggressiveness. When a customer comes in and has an attitude I say to them, "Excuse me I don't have an attitude towards you. Respect me the same way I respect you."

Damian has taught me how much we take for granted in life, such as speaking, communication and being able to do everyday things.

Jasmine has taught me you've got to stand up for yourself sometimes. Even though my children have some learning disabilities, I realize there are other parents who have it worse than me.



When I first became a single parent three years ago, it was difficult. It was hard not to have another adult there for help and hard on the kids because they had question upon question. My kids gave me encouragement. Some days I would come home and say, "I don't think I can do this." Sarah would say, "Mom, you can do it!" We would all sit down and do our homework. My Dad used to tell me, "As long as you try, you are succeeding."



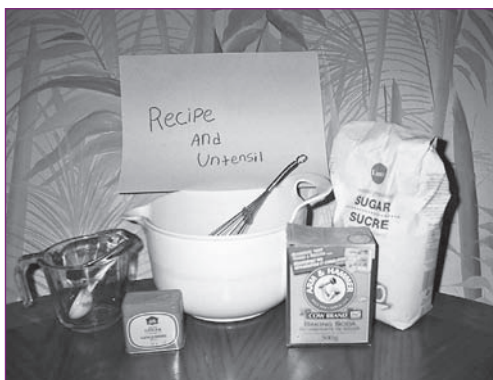
I was a stay-at-home mom for seven years. I finally got my papers and asked my doctor if she knew any information about courses. I wanted to learn what I needed to succeed at getting a job. I met a social worker, and she gave me the paper about "Skills to Go." This course had reading and writing but also the opportunity for a job placement. I was excited about the kitchen because I love to bake.

This course had reading and writing but also the opportunity for a job placement.

When I came to the school, I didn't have the confidence.

When I first got to the door, I held onto it and then let go. Then I thought, "I can do this." When I walked in I had butterflies in my stomach but I looked at the students and they were talking and it was a comfortable environment. They actually came to me and introduced themselves. The first student was Laykin.

My teachers taught me how to spell the Canadian way. I learned structure, as in how to present myself to people in an interview. I was taught to say yes instead of yah. I learned to slow down when I was speaking, to take the time to listen. When I went for my interview at Tim Horton's I was nervous and then I thought about our mock interviews and calmed down. I also learned to do the things I am trained to do. If a worker doesn't do their job properly it can affect new business and the other co-workers.



I used to follow recipes, but not properly. I can say there is a difference now when I bake, especially brownies and brown sugar. I learned vocabulary such as fold and whisk. I learned that beat and mix are two different things. I took the Safe Food Handler's course with the City of Ottawa. I learned how to properly thaw, store, handle and serve foods safely. I got the certificate after I finished the course. I also learned about health inspectors and what they look for in a commercial kitchen. My kids never ate carrot cake until I made it at school and brought it home. I make other people's recipes too now. Many of my friends and I take turns making each other's dishes. We get together and the kids are involved in the preparation.

After I completed my placement, Marie, the supervisor, offered me a job. At first I was terrified. I thought it was going to be overwhelming but it took some time to adjust. Marie taught me to take my time because if you rush you're just going to make mistakes and go nowhere.

I had to make time for school, children, and myself. Eventually, I had to make time for work

There were certain ways that things had to be done. I had to listen carefully sometimes to two people at a time. Our customers were in the building so I had to greet them properly. Everyone was watching. You can't cut a burger open to see if it's done like you can at home. When I made vegetable platters I would look at it and judge how it looked. I enjoyed doing this job.

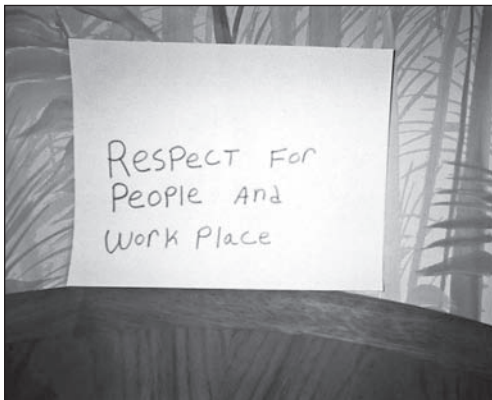


Adjusting to time was a real issue. I had to make time for school, children, and myself. Eventually, I had to make time for work. It took me three weeks to get used to getting up and having the kids prepared for school.

When I finished school I worked for a short time at the cafeteria. I had to leave there because I did not have my work permit. I finally got it and started looking for work. I needed a way to get messages about jobs; some of my neighbours do

not have phones because they don't have the money. I have my own phone and sometimes let them use my number for messages.

When I started work at a busy coffee shop, I found it difficult because it is constantly busy, and a lot of government people come in. I get this impression that they think they have a good job and I am lower than them, but I serve them in the proper manner just like I serve everyone. When I'm working I have a lot of confidence. Return customers appreciate it when I have their order ready when they step up to the cash. I have one lady who has an extra large triple, triple and a cinnamon raisin bagel double toasted with butter to go every day. I've learnt cash, coffee making, sandwich bar, stocking and kitchen, serving. At first I felt I was under pressure. Now after seven months I know my job well. There are still some things I need to learn.



When I won the award (Cooperator's Learner Achievement Award), I felt like I was on top of the world. I felt I had a lot of confidence in myself but if it wasn't for the other people I would not have learned the things I needed to achieve my goals. I felt like I succeeded and I did. It was really nice to have my teachers with me. If it wasn't for them I wouldn't have achieved this. They understood when I couldn't come to class some days because of my children or other things. At the ceremony it was nice to dress up and try foods I had never tried before. It was nice to see that others saw I was trying to get somewhere in life.

My next step is to learn management skills. I want to own a small restaurant or coffee shop in a couple of years. I need to have the experience from different jobs to start my business and to teach my employees.

CHAPTER TWO

Research about literacy programs and students

THIS CHAPTER HIGHLIGHTS research related to literacy programs, particularly in relation to employment, and the students who choose to attend these programs. It briefly examines best practices in U.S. employment preparation programs and reveals that such approaches are uncommon in Canada. Then, I discuss program approaches in Canada and the U.S., and suggest reasons why the majority of programs in the U.S. and possibly in Canada have a predominantly skill and task-based perspective. Next, program outcomes and student achievement related to both practice-based and skill and task-based approaches are discussed. Following the program development research is a synopsis of research from a student perspective related to program participation and the complex notion that improved literacy leads to better job prospects.

Best practices in employment preparation programs

There is very little information available from a Canadian perspective on literacy programs that focus on the development of literacy as a pre-employment activity. This is quite different from programs that are active in workplaces for which there is a great deal more information. One researcher has noted that the combination of literacy development and vocational skills development is “unusual in Canada” (St. Clair, 2001, p. 132). For a discussion of best practices, I refer to programs in the U.S. that integrate literacy instruction and vocational skills. Murphy and Johnson (1998) describe the common characteristics of successful programs that combine literacy and work development. Success was measured according to the number of participants who found jobs or became work-ready, the quality of services offered and the ability of programs to serve the needs of clients with multiple

... the combination of literacy development and vocational skills development is “unusual in Canada”.

barriers to employment. The most successful programs engaged in the following kinds of activities:

- ▶ Learning activities focused on clearly defined employment goals;
- ▶ Partnerships with the welfare agency, other community organizations, and private sector employers for work placements;
- ▶ Hands-on work experience supported by the use of job coaches to provide on-the-job support and job developers to help find jobs;
- ▶ Acceptance of clients with multiple barriers (no creaming), early intervention to address problems, and support services for childcare, transportation and other personal issues;
- ▶ Strong record-keeping system that includes information on costs based on outcomes (not simply the number of contact hours) and achievement based on meeting work-related goals; and
- ▶ Continuous staff development⁶.

Underlying most of the best practices is a model of delivery that integrates literacy skills with employment skills. Imel (1998) states:

“Increasingly, evidence demonstrates that the emphasis on just getting people into employment will not result in employment for self-sufficiency” (p. 2). In a synthesis of research on U.S. welfare-to-work programs Strawn (1997 in Imel) revealed that neither programs emphasizing job-search strategies nor those focusing on adult education alone had long-term effectiveness in increasing participants’ earnings and job tenure. Instead, states Imel, “the most effective welfare-to-work programs share a balanced approach that mixes job search, education, job training, and paid and unpaid work experience”(p. 2).

Table 2.1 presents a checklist of best practices based on a national study of welfare-to-work literacy and job training programs in the U.S.

⁶ When one of the instructors read the list of best practices, she commented on the last point — continuous staff development — and the lack of professional support staff had while developing the program. Instead of receiving training, they were called on to provide training to others. It was challenging, she explained, to be different because it often led to feeling professionally isolated.

TABLE 2.1: Best practices in integrating literacy, learning and work

- **Are basic skills integrated with other workforce activities?** Are academic, vocational, and job placement activities fully integrated (on-site, if possible)?
- **Does your program have clearly defined goals and outcomes that relate directly to success in the workplace?** Do you assist students in setting clear and appropriate goals for themselves that take into account their skills, interests, and possible career options? Does your program have clearly defined goals? Do you track program costs per outcome (not just seat-time)?
- **Do you collaborate with Social Services and educational institutions?** Have you asked local colleges, school boards, and other human and social service agencies to share resources and expertise?
- **Are private sector employers actively involved?** Have you asked the private sector for information on the local labor market, wages, and education and training requirements for various jobs?
- **Does your program include hands-on work experience for students?** Is work experience available on-site or in another convenient location? Do you pre-screen work sites and select them based on the degree to which they model appropriate professional practices for students?
- **Is a staff member responsible for providing students with individual assistance in addressing problems that could interfere with attendance?** Is someone available to assist participants individually with issues such as childcare, transportation, physical or substance abuse, housing, etc?
- **Are support services available?** Do you provide students with information on local health clinics, clothing banks, support groups, and career counseling services? Are you accessing training and employment support money from social service agencies?
- **Does your curriculum include both job readiness skills and life skills?** Does your program offer computer, job readiness, and transition-to-work training? Do you recruit outside speakers to lead workshops on labour issues, cultural understanding, well-being, etc?
- **Does your staff participate regularly in staff development activities?** Are instructors formally trained? Do they participate in special trainings, conferences, and other professional development opportunities?

From *What works: Integrating basic skills training into welfare-to-work* by Garrett Murphy & Alice Johnson. National Institute for Literacy, 1998 <http://www.nifl.gov/nifl/whatworks.htm>

Note: Some terminology was changed to reflect a Canadian context.

Which approaches are most prevalent?

Although there have been no studies that lead to an understanding of what programs are doing in Canada, we can begin to develop a bit of a picture of program practices. A recent study on assessment practices (Campbell, 2006) found that the majority of programs in Canada used assessment tools developed by literacy program educators that were deemed authentic with regard to the ways in which literacy knowledge is used in various contexts. In other words, the tools reflected the various literacy practices found in the home, at work, in the community and at school. Although the study did not look at learning activities or even how learning activities are related to assessment practices, it is possible to argue that if programs are using assessments that reflect how literacy is used in various contexts, they could also be engaged in learning activities that support the development of literacy practices.

Other evidence suggests this may not be the case. Many provinces, including Ontario, have systematically defined literacy progress and ability based on the development of literacy skills. For example, the literacy program funder in Ontario, the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities, Skills Investment Branch, developed a learning framework, commonly referred to as the Matrix, that outlines literacy development based only on skills without any mention of tasks, practices or critical reflection. A more commonly used companion document is *The Level Descriptions Manual*. Both documents are fundamentally skill-based. Although the latter does make reference to the ways in which skills might be used in day-to-day life and the accompanying tasks that could demonstrate this skill development, there is no mention of the sociocultural contexts that shape literacy, or of the ways in which programs might encourage critical reflection. Since these are the only documents that define literacy development widely available to instructors, and since programs report progress and abilities based on these documents, it can be argued that programs in Ontario likely have a skill and task-based perspective to literacy development. An important question to ask is: Do these reporting requirements shape practices in literacy programs or do programs develop activities distinct from the skill and task-based measures demanded by accountability systems?

Many provinces, including Ontario, have systematically defined literacy progress and ability based on the development of literacy skills.

Two large American studies found that most programs in the U.S. follow a schooling approach. According to both Beder and Medina (2001) and Purcell-Gates et. al. (1998), the majority of U.S. programs do not support the development of literacy practices or critical reflection; rather, they focus

on the development of literacy skills and tasks almost exclusively. Beder and Medina state that 16 out of 20 classes examined in their research were engaged in discrete skills instruction evidenced by the use of commercially produced workbooks, learning and recalling factual information, and a predominance of instructor-led lessons. Only four of the 20 classes were engaged in activities aligned with the development of literacy practices and critical reflection. These classes focused on the development of more complex thinking and knowledge, used authentic materials, and viewed the instructor as a facilitator. Similarly, Purcell-Gates et al found that the vast majority of programs focused on learning activities that were not related to the actual contexts or life situations of students, and most often these activities were developed without student input. Again, these findings suggest that most programs are not developing literacy practices or critical reflection but are instead engaged in the development of literacy skills and tasks.

The tensions between skill and task-based and practice-based approaches

Tensions, described below as a discrepancy or disconnect, exist between skill and task-based and practice-based approaches. Such tensions are expressed in different ways, including:

- ▶ The reasons students enter programs (to find a job, complete their formal education or help their children) compared to how they view literacy (as a set of skills);
- ▶ The delivery of vocational skills conflicting with the delivery of school literacy skills; and
- ▶ The ways students value and understand school learning differently than work learning.

Malicky and Norman (1995) found a marked difference between the reasons students expressed for entering a literacy program and their view of literacy. Although they had goals that were most often practical in nature, they viewed literacy in a skill-based way. The authors suggested this was a result of their past school experiences. The authors didn't feel this was a mismatch though because students appeared to believe that a traditional education was an avenue to improved employment opportunities. In contrast to students, instructors viewed literacy from both a practical and skills perspective, but developed programs that were usually skill-based. "Some instructors recognized the discrepancy between what they believed should be done and what they were doing, but generally felt constrained by their institutions and, according to one instructor, the students as well" (p. 80). In addition, they also

found that the skill-based perception of literacy was pervasive across programs despite their different mandates, i.e. community programs, academic and vocational. The authors suggest there is a need to critically examine program practices in relation to the actual goals and purposes of programs.

St. Clair (2001) revealed how literacy or basic skills instruction was not only seen to be removed from vocational instruction but was also assigned lower status in an employment preparation program designed to integrate literacy development with cook training. The literacy curriculum:

- ▶ Was delivered at a separate time and place and by different people than the vocational component;
- ▶ Focused on the development of basic skills related to cooking with a smattering of critical pedagogy, whereas the vocational instruction was predominantly hands-on;
- ▶ Didn't incorporate the vocationally-based cook training manual into its curriculum;
- ▶ Contained very similar basic skills education for a variety of different vocational programs; and
- ▶ Contained learning activities that were similar to those done in elementary school.

Compounding the curriculum-based separation was an overall distinction between the perceived value of the knowledge and skills being learned in each program component. The literacy instructors and their work were deemed to be of lower value and less credible compared to vocational instructors, and at times there was animosity between the vocational and literacy instructors.

I also uncovered tensions, or a disconnect, between the literacy and work-related learning components in our employment preparation program⁷ (Pinsent-Johnson, 2005). The classroom setting that was closely aligned with a schooling approach to literacy learning was not able to make a direct connection to work learning. The classroom could only provide learning *about* work in which students were distanced from real work practices. School-like activities became a barrier to learning work by adding yet another layer of literacy learning that needed to be achieved. For example, activities in the workplace literacy classroom retained their school-like structure despite the goal of the classroom setting, which was to provide literacy development

7 This research was focused on our program during its first phase of development. Findings from the research were used to implement later changes.

linked to the workplace in general and the on-site coffee shop in particular. When students were learning to use fractional measures, they were introduced to the concept using a carefully prepared worksheet and not during a baking session with the tools, recipes and conditions for using the measures that were required. Instead of opening doors and providing support, the learning that occurred in the classroom setting sometimes became a separate learning activity that had to be learned *in addition* to the main activity.

School-like activities became a barrier to learning work by adding yet another layer of literacy learning ...

The literacy learning that occurred in the coffee shop setting, on the other hand, did have a more direct connection to work and even to the students' home lives. It was in the coffee shop that students learned a new literacy practice, i.e. using recipes to bake at home, that they incorporated into their home-based food preparation routines. The coffee shop provided the opportunity to learn literacy as it would actually be used. In this way, students were not just learning *about* work but were instead learning *for* work and learning *at* work.

How can such tensions be reconciled? St. Clair suggests employment preparation programs use a collaborative approach in which literacy and vocational skills are delivered simultaneously. In addition, instructors should work together to develop a curriculum that addresses the “demands of the workplace and the needs of the worker”, and measures of success that capture more than skill-based achievements need to be developed.

Vocational and literacy instructors do have a great deal to learn from each other regarding what matters to them, and why. Basic skills educators have to be prepared to explain how they can contribute specialized and valuable knowledge to collaborative programs, and how interweaving literacy with pragmatic training can create a fertile learning environment for learners (p. 147).

Do literacy skills transfer?

One of the driving forces behind a skill and task-based approach is the idea that these skills are transferable. In other words, once students gain a base of literacy skills in a literacy program, they will automatically be able to use the skills in a variety of settings outside the program. Depending on how one looks at literacy, the notion of transfer changes. When literacy learning development activities are closely aligned with the employment setting, as in a program that has an integrated work and literacy design, transfer is more likely

to occur (Taylor, 2000; Taylor & Ayala, 2008). But when literacy skills alone are looked at, transfer is extremely limited. Only the most basic skills, such as reading left to right and basic decoding, transfer from one literacy application to another (Mikulecky, Albers, and Peers, 1994).

The pervasive idea that literacy skills learned in school are generic and transferable has also been challenged. When ‘non-standard’ workers, i.e. casual, part-time, or contract, were asked how they used their school literacy in their current work and how they learned for their work, most said they learned on the job (Falk & Millar, 2002). “Basic skills are not transferred but are instead re-contextualized by new forms of setting-specific or situated learning” (p. 53). Study participants explained how they could not simply apply the literacy and numeracy skills they learned in school, but had to re-learn new practices in different contexts, then use them frequently. “The terms generic and transfer are wrong and misleading... People are good at communicating from having learned to do so in a variety of contexts, *not* because they apply some other skills they have from somewhere else. Therefore, to learn to be good at it, you have to have the contexts for learning” (ibid.). The researchers also found that speaking and ‘personal presentation’ skills are the primary communicative practices and literacy and numeracy are used to support these. In essence, effective and successful communication practices are “driven and defined” by the learning needs of a specific setting or context; this success then promotes the development of self-efficacy, self-esteem and self-confidence, which when combined with knowledge and skills help to form a new student identity. Finally, it is only by practicing and applying new skills in context that they will be learned and retained. Employment training and job-readiness programs that are only a few weeks in duration cannot possibly provide the time nor often the specific setting needed for learning to be effective. In light of the study’s findings, the researchers suggest programs focus on the kinds of *learning* adults need to meet their goals rather than simply focusing on the kinds of literacy and numeracy deemed to be lacking. Their work raises some important questions about whether we can make any cogent use of the notion of transfer when it is viewed only as skills.

... it is only by practicing
and applying new skills
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What happens when practices are developed rather than skills and tasks?

A compelling reason to focus on the development of literacy practices is that a broader and wider literacy achievement is recognized when practices are assessed. Research has found that while improvements in literacy skill development—measured most often using standardized assessments—are

minimal (Beder, 1999; Brooks, et al., 2000; Smith & Sheehan-Holt, 1999), improvements in the use of literacy practices in daily life are more prevalent. Purcell-Gates, et al. (2000) found that the more a program used authentic materials, the greater the increase in literacy practices outside the program. Similarly, Bingman, Ebert and Smith (1999) described increased use in three of the eight literacy practices they analysed: paying bills, working with numbers on the job, and greater use of memorization skills. Moulton (1997) said adult literacy students began to see progress only after they made a conscious effort to use their new literacy practices in a setting other than the classroom.

“The degree of authenticity in the activities and materials used in adult literacy instruction was significantly related to the likelihood that adult literacy students in those classes will report change in frequency and/or type of out-of-school literacy practices” (p. 56).

Related to the active use of literacy are the positive changes that students experienced on a personal level. Using self-reports, numerous studies have found that participation in a literacy program led to increased self-confidence, self-esteem, and self-image. Beder found that students were able to achieve their personal goals through participation in a literacy program. In addition, their self-image improved and self-report data suggested parents increased their involvement in their children’s education. Other studies have shown an increase in self-esteem (Bingman et. al., 1999) and an increase in community involvement (Ebert and Bingman, 2000). A recent study of community literacy programs in Ontario (Parkdale Project Read, 2006) describes a range of personal changes, or what they call non-academic outcomes, including increased self-confidence, cultural awareness, wellness, finding voice, greater independence, risk-taking, opening up to learning, community and relationship building, greater listening skills and the confidence to request assistance when needed.

At the core of the positive impacts related to practices is a change in identity. According to Wenger (1998) identities are constructed as an individual engages in a productive activity in a community of practice. In my thesis research, one of the instructors said the greatest impact of the employment preparation program was on the students’ changed identity, and this change occurred in the work settings. She explained how the students began to recognize that they have skills that could lead to a job or a better job. This supports the idea that adults seek to develop literacy skills in order to “change what they can do, how they are perceived, and how they perceive themselves in specific social and cultural contexts” as Stein (1995, p. 10) noted.

At the core of the positive impacts related to practices is a change in identity.

Employment and literacy

The relationship between employment and literacy level is not as straightforward as it initially appears when simply looking at international adult literacy statistics. According to the International Adult Literacy and Lifeskills Survey (IALLS), Canadians with lower levels of literacy have lower rates of employment and lower earnings; they also work in occupations with lower skill requirements. Eighty percent of adults at IALLS Levels 4 and 5 are employed; 70 percent of those at Level 2 are employed; and 57 percent of those at Level 1 are employed. In addition, the higher the proficiency in literacy, the more workers tend to earn, particularly women: 25 percent of men earning \$60,000 or more are at the lower end of the literacy scale; whereas only 10 percent of women at the lower end earn \$60,000 or more. Finally, people who work in more knowledge intensive jobs (education, health, market service industries, public administration, and defense) have higher literacy scores.

Confirming the direct link between literacy level and employment, Kapsalis (1998) found that literacy skills were a strong predictor of employability amongst adults who received social assistance. Annual earnings levels were correlated more with literacy level than education level. Social assistance recipients had lower levels of education and literacy than non-social assistance recipients. In addition, social assistance recipients had lower literacy levels than non-social assistance recipients, even though both groups had the same level of education. Finally, higher literacy levels were associated with work that required daily literacy activities. He also suggested that social assistance recipients who were working were more likely to engage in literacy activities at home than those who were not. The study concluded that there may be a “virtuous cycle between work and literacy, whereby higher literacy leads to more employment, while more employment improves literacy skills” (p. 2).

When the IALLS data were used to determine the impacts that literacy skills had on earnings amongst the general population, Green and Riddell (2001) found that literacy had a large impact on earnings, and each additional year of education increased earnings by 8.3 percent. Contradicting the findings of the above study, the authors suggested that education level—and not work experience—had a greater impact on literacy. They suggested that work experience had little effect on literacy. They also found that literacy skills “seriously impact” how well immigrants adjusted to the labour market, and parents’ education level did not impact their children’s earnings as adults. The authors emphasized how the combination of literacy and education had the greatest impact on earnings, further supporting the ideas of human capital.

Literacy levels are not the only reason adults are unable to sustain supportive employment without depending on social assistance. Smith (1999) argues that the labour market and its lack of permanent, full-time jobs that can provide a salary above minimum wage⁸ plays a significant role. The real question is what has more of an influence on an adult's ability to find a job that can sustain his or her family? Is it the types of jobs available or literacy levels? Most often it is "single parents (mostly women), persons with disabilities, older workers, Aboriginal people, youth, and undereducated workers" (p. 15) who are trapped by a labour market that offers few opportunities that will enable them to support themselves and their families.

Literacy levels are not the only reason adults are unable to sustain supportive employment

About 16 percent of Canadians are earning less than \$10.00 per hour (Saunders, 2005). Most of these workers are women with low levels of education. In addition, young people, people with disabilities, Aboriginal people, lone parents, and recent immigrants, particularly visible minorities, are part of the low paid profile. It has become increasingly difficult for individuals to move out of this group as a result of government cutbacks in social assistance, unemployment insurance and skills upgrading programs. Once in a low-wage job, most are stuck there for long periods of time. These jobs tend to be low quality without benefits and pension plans, have less access to employer sponsored training, have low rates of union representation and are often temporary or part-time.

A U.S. study found greater earnings disparities *within* similar literacy skill groups than *between* skill groups (Devroye & Freeman, 2001). In other words, workers with the same literacy scores experienced greater wage differences when compared to workers from various score groups. Using the National Adult Literacy Survey data, Raudenbush and Kasim (1998) confirmed findings that the majority of wage disparities were found within occupations and not between them. They suggested that discrimination and occupational segregation may explain earnings differences experienced by women and ethnic minorities in the U.S. "Teaching people to read and write won't create jobs that don't exist, make it easier to get by on the minimum wage, or get rid of discrimination" (National Anti-Poverty Organization, 1992).

8 General minimum wage rates as of May 2008 for each province follow: British Columbia \$8.00, Alberta \$8.40, Saskatchewan \$8.60, Manitoba \$8.50, Ontario \$8.75, Quebec \$8.50, New Brunswick \$7.75, Nova Scotia \$8.10, Prince Edward Island \$7.75, Newfoundland and Labrador \$8.00, Northwest Territories \$8.25, Yukon \$8.58 and Nunavut \$8.50. <http://srv116.services.gc.ca/wid-dimt/mwa/index.aspx?report=report1>

Similarly, while researching a vocational program for women, Hull (1991) found many societal barriers beyond the individual's literacy abilities that prevented the women in the program from gaining secure and self-supporting employment.

... there are many other complex factors in their situations which push literacy from a central concern to the periphery. These factors include short-term, narrowly focused vocational training; the lack of childcare at work; part-time employment with no benefits; workplaces where employees have few rights, stressful tasks, and low pay; and workplaces where women of color inherit the most tedious jobs an industry can offer. To blame the problem on illiteracy in this instance, and I believe in many others, is simply to miss the mark."

Clearly, there is more than one way of looking at the relationship between literacy, employment, and earnings. Compounding the relationship between low literacy and earnings are societal structures such as discrimination, job segregation, and a growing number of low-paying, non-unionized and insecure jobs. Simply raising literacy levels, as human capital theorists suggest, will not necessarily lead to greater personal and societal prosperity.

Adults and participation in formal learning

When participation rates in formal education are examined, the lower the literacy level, the lower the participation. Based on IALLS, 70 percent of those at Levels 4 and 5 participated in some form of education, while only 20 percent of adults at Level 2 participated in adult education.

"While we pay lip-service in Canada today to the importance of facilitating the development of human capital, we offer little help to low paid workers to access learning opportunities" (Saunders, 2005, p. 49).

Myers and de Broucker (2006) found that those who are highly educated (university) are getting five times more education and training than those who have lower levels of education (high school or less). Adults with less than a high school level of education would benefit just as much or even more from educational opportunities compared to those with higher levels of education. A number of external and internal factors may affect participation rates:

- ▶ Pressure to respond to immediate job opportunities;
- ▶ Economic cost of returning to school and a financial aid system not designed with the mature adult in mind;

- ▶ Lack of interest, lack of confidence;
- ▶ Lack of awareness; and
- ▶ An unresponsive learning environment.

Yet there is considerable unmet demand for educational opportunities amongst this group. Employers are more likely to support training for higher skilled employees than lower skilled employees.

Employers are more likely to support training for higher skilled employees than lower skilled employees.

“Despite substantial rhetoric around the importance of lifelong learning, there are few programs and policies to support less educated adults who wish to upgrade their skills. Few workplaces offer skills upgrading opportunities to less educated adults.” (p.5)

Low literacy levels do not equate to a lack of learning desire. In a breakthrough study completed over 20 years ago, Arlene Fingeret (1983) showed us that adults with low literacy are part of a social network in which they seek assistance from others with specific kinds of literacy tasks, and in turn contribute their own knowledge and understanding to the social group. This means they likely engage in a variety of learning activities and endeavours. Wright & Taylor (2004) helped to describe these learning endeavours in their examination of the informal learning activities of Canadian adults with low literacy abilities. Similarly to the previous study, they also found adults will call upon a resource person or group to get assistance with learning and establish a network of trusting relationships that they can depend upon. In addition, the adults:

- ▶ Use prior knowledge to transfer learning from one context to another;
- ▶ Learn by doing or trial and error;
- ▶ Use observation and modeling; and
- ▶ Develop personal strategies and learning systems.

Quigley (2000) states that undereducated adults engage in informal learning as often as adults with a high school and post-secondary education. In addition, their rates of participation in formal education programs such as high school would jump substantially if prior learning assessment and recognition (PLAR) was more widely available.

Ziegahn (1992) found that adults with low literacy viewed learning as separate from literacy. They valued learning in order to understand something, to see results, to respond to a challenge, and to pass on knowledge, but they placed a low priority on formal education, usually due to negative memories of their own experiences in school. “As long as they first disassociated learning from

schooling, respondents could talk enthusiastically about what they learned” (p. 47). In addition, their reasons for not participating in literacy programs were related to the ways in which programs emulated traditional schooling environments, and not to a lack of desire to learn. Similarly, Quigley (1993) found that adults who resisted attending programs did so because they felt adult literacy programs perpetuated the negative factors that led to their negative school experiences in the past. Yet, the same adults valued opportunities to learn and wanted their children to gain an education. Quigley concludes that programs need to “de-school” their marketing and image in order to attract students who would normally not attend a literacy program.

... their reasons for not participating in literacy programs were related to the ways in which programs emulated traditional schooling environments, ...

Adults with less than a high school-level education (those at Level 1) engage in a variety of informal learning activities, and would likely participate in more formal learning opportunities that met their needs. They need to have access to a variety of learning opportunities that are ultimately meaningful and useful, whether that means employment preparation with on-the-job-training or prior learning assessment and recognition that leads to high school credits. Adult literacy programs are expert in working with this group of adults and are well-positioned to create the programs needed, but they may be confined by chronic under-funding and traditional interpretations of literacy as an autonomous skill that needs to be developed before engaging in other learning opportunities.

For those adults who do end up enrolling in a program, what motivates them? Long and Middleton (2001) said over half of all 338 callers to literacy information lines had intrinsic goals, such as personal, social, or improved general education; whereas, the remainder were motivated by more extrinsic goals such as employment or retraining. From my own experience during six years of meeting students as they first entered the program, I found that some students had very practical goals and viewed literacy as a resource while other students had more personal goals and viewed literacy in a much more complex way. Simply enrolling in a literacy program suggests that students may have gone through a period of self-reflection and evaluation about who they are and what they need to do to make some sort of change in their lives (Fingeret & Drennon, 1997). Students view literacy and what it can or can't do for them in ways that are more complex than the way international adult literacy surveys view literacy. Their understandings, purposes and meanings need to be considered alongside the statistics.

Summary

The research included in this chapter raises many important issues and questions related to students who attend programs and the roles of programs in working with students.

- ▶ Very few programs in Canada combine literacy with job training or employment preparation, contrary to best practices identified in the U.S. (and initiatives in Australia, New Zealand and the UK). This may be the result of the way literacy learning is entrenched in school-like perspectives and the dominance of these ways of knowing.
- ▶ When employment preparation and literacy learning is combined, it's best to develop fully integrated and collaborative partnerships.
- ▶ When employment preparation and literacy learning was combined in our program, instructors shifted their focus away from developing only skills and tasks to developing practices and critical reflection.
- ▶ Most programs in the U.S. (and perhaps in Canada) follow schooling approaches, despite the fact that students are more likely to make consequential gains in literacy development when practices are developed.
- ▶ One of the reasons programs may be tied to a traditional skill and task-based approach is an over-reliance on the idea that a base of literacy skills will automatically transfer to different contexts; in order for transfer to occur, it likely needs to be explicitly supported.
- ▶ The relationship between IALLS and employment is complex and not nearly as straightforward as some suggest. It is likely that access to secure and well-paying jobs, particularly for women, is just as great a barrier, if not more, to employment than an individual's literacy level. Compounding the issue is a lack of access to and participation in, training and education for those with less than a high school-level education.
- ▶ Literacy programs have developed tremendous expertise working with adults who encounter multiple barriers to employment and education, including access. They are well-positioned to work with this group of adults but are often constrained by chronic under-funding and guidelines that limit their ability to respond.

What are some future directions for research to support a transition from a traditional skill and task-based approach to a practice-based approach?

- ▶ We need to know what programs in Canada are doing with regard to employment preparation. Are there in fact more programs than the literature suggests combining literacy learning and employment preparation?
- ▶ With or without an employment preparation component, what is the predominant focus of programs: skills, tasks, practices or critical reflection?
- ▶ We need to know more about the ways adults learn new literacy practices on-the-job, that is, without explicit program instruction.

Edmund's story

In a very direct and spare way, Edmund tells us so much about himself and his hopes for his future.



I FINISHED HIGH SCHOOL IN THE PHILIPPINES. I learned English there, but it wasn't enough. I tried the Adult High School but I didn't pass. I went to ESL class, then I came here.

I've worked as a bus boy at an Indian restaurant. I felt like an underdog because I had no education. I quit because he wanted to pay me under the table.

I felt like an underdog because I had no education.

I worked at a craft and gift store, doing carton assembly and some display. I only needed English there, no education. It was just a short term job. He let me go with no notice.

I also did some cleaning — housekeeping — it was night shift. That was not good when I was coming to school.



This is my bedroom in my sister's house. It is in the basement. The desk is where I study. I want to get out from that room. When I get a job maybe I can afford a small room for myself — a cheap one.

My sisters really push me to learn. Sometimes she — one has a job near here — drives me to school. She bought my bus pass. We help each other.



This is the room me and my brother used to share. The room I have now is only for myself. It is better.



This reminds me of back home. I'm happy here in Canada. There were not a lot of opportunities there. There's economic problems: no work, no job. People — friends there — got married, but they're still living with their parents. They have no chance to go to school — the problem is money.

I have a friend here. He's a bit older. He's from the Philippines too, but he grew up here. He's very intelligent — sometimes he terrifies me (I'm not sure that's the right word). He's doing accounting at Algonquin. He's graduating this summer. I feel out of place with him sometimes.

I put myself off. Math is difficult for me He's helping me with math. He's graduating in accounting.



This is the retirement/nursing home where my dad is. I'd like to work here or somewhere like this as a PSW. Maybe I'd get an opportunity to go on and learn more.

My Dad has Alzheimer's. I helped nurse him at home, before he went into the nursing home. I had to wash him, feed him, dress him, help him to the bathroom, give him medication.

I learned some things helping my father, but I need to know more so I can give proper medicine. I need training to know how to give the right food in the right way. I need to learn how to lift a person. I want to know how to handle situations, how to talk to people with mental problems.

I need to go to school and take a course. It's hard to learn about medicine. I think the rest is not too hard.

I need to go to school
and take a course. It's
hard to learn about
medicine.

CHAPTER THREE

A new learning program

IN THIS CHAPTER, I will briefly describe how our current program is organized, then highlight the changes we made that led to its current structure. In addition, the development of each of the four employment-related courses will be described by the instructor responsible for teaching the course. Hearing directly from the instructors may be useful for other instructors who are also in the position of developing programs or courses that connect literacy, learning and work. Then, I will discuss some of the challenges and breakthroughs encountered as we made such significant changes to the way we thought about literacy and began to change the ways we developed learning activities.

Current program

We are a school board literacy program. This means a school board hosts the adult literacy program by providing an administrative structure and space, but an external source of funding is used to cover all costs, including the classroom space and administration provided by the school board. Such an arrangement proved to be advantageous when developing the employment preparation component of the program. Advantages included an ideally located and easily accessed facility, use of a commercial kitchen and resource/copy room, co-location with a larger adult language program, and access to administrative support.

As a literacy program for adults, we structure classes and learning groups to provide academic, employment and personal/community focused learning opportunities. For example, we have a group of classes focused on academic literacy for students who want to obtain their high school diploma, a group of classes focused on personal and community learning for adults with either developmental or physical disabilities, and a third group of classes related to employment preparation—the focus of this book. These classes and groups are not so neatly arranged though. Students in a community program for

adults with physical disabilities may have both employment goals and academic goals, and two of the employment classes also provide opportunities for students to gain high school credits. We see about 300 students per year, have 13 instructors who work between 12 and 30 hours per week, five instructor assistants who work between 15 and 30 hours, and a part-time assessor/curriculum instructor, and we share a managerial and administrative team with a much larger English as a second language program. The focus of the book will only be on the four employment preparation components within the program, which currently comprises:

- 1 A course to help students enter personal support worker (PSW) training programs in the community;
- 2 A course to help students become childcare assistants in a childcare facility or run a home daycare;
- 3 A course to help students find work in retail settings; and
- 4 A course to help adults with developmental disabilities enter job placement programs in the community.

Before delving into details about the development of each of the courses in the program, you may be wondering why we think these programs work so well. The most powerful evidence of the success of the four employment-related courses is their appeal to students. Before we made significant changes, and even during the first three years of program change, our average attendance rates were about 50–60 percent. That means on any given day just over half of the students who registered for the class actually attended. Now, the average attendance rate for each of the four courses is 90 percent. Students complete the course or program component and rarely drop out (e.g., out of 44 students who enrolled in the childcare program over 5 sessions only one dropped out before completing the program). When students do leave before completing a course, they don't simply disappear but tell the instructor that they can't continue, usually due to unexpected personal and family situations. Often during this conversation, students arrange to return to complete the program once their personal situations have changed. Although attendance alone is in no way an indicator of program effectiveness, it did provide a means to assess learner engagement and gain support for the changes we were making. Another measure is the ability of students to meet their employment goals. About 80 percent of students are successful in finding a job in retail or childcare, entering PSW training, or gaining acceptance into an employment

About 80 percent of students are successful in finding a job in retail or childcare, entering PSW training, or gaining acceptance into an employment support agency.

support agency. While these indicators provide some concrete evidence of program success, the most valuable feedback has come from the students' and instructors' conversations that express their enthusiasm, interest and personal satisfaction.

Adopting new literacy learning approaches

Changing student profile⁹

One of the key reasons we began discussing program changes was our rapidly changing student profile. Within a very short period, the student population shifted dramatically from mostly Canadian-born students to immigrants, many of whom came to Canada as refugees with little formal education from their native countries. Although Canadian-born students continued to attend, their numbers had decreased, in part due to an increased availability of job training and academic programs in the community for students with stronger literacy skills. The students who did enroll encountered a variety of sociocultural barriers, and had lower levels of literacy overall.

Attendance became an issue for the instructors and a concern for the program. Instructors faced two different attendance related issues: sporadic attendance by many and persistence by a few. Most students faced a variety of home, personal, and health challenges that prevented regular attendance. In addition, the program structure and approach may not have met their needs. The emphasis on a schooling approach to literacy learning in preparation for higher levels of education was not likely meeting the needs of all students. Also, similarly to many literacy programs, we had continuous intake that meant students could join a class at any time. This presented challenges for both students and instructors. Students could feel lost in a class, not knowing a group that had already established a rapport. They could also feel lost in the curriculum. Although sets of skills and competencies defined student progress, they likely appeared abstract to students, leaving them unsure about how to judge their progress. The intake process also challenged instructors as they felt new students had missed important learning, or they struggled to work with students with a wide range of skills and abilities. Complicating the attendance challenge was a small group of students who persisted year after year. How can that be a problem? One of the instructors, Carol, explains: "We were seeing the same students coming back year after year. They were happy. They were quite content, but as teachers we weren't. It was difficult to feel

⁹ The following discussion of the changing student profile reflects the general literacy program more than the Adaptive Learning program, although some issues are common.

energized.” Carol and the other instructors working in the program at the time began to question the role of the literacy program. Was it intended to support people in some aspect of their life, which would mean making connections to home, community, academic settings and work? Or was the program intended to be a main focus of students’ lives—and for how long? These are complex issues that won’t be directly addressed in this book. I suppose, though, they are indirectly addressed because we gradually became a program that defined itself more as bridge or conduit for adults who wanted to move from one place in their lives to another.

... we gradually became a program that defined itself more as bridge or conduit for adults who wanted to move from one place in their lives to another.

Trying new ideas

After viewing a video of an employment readiness program, as part of a professional development day, program staff began to discuss how work-related learning could be integrated into the existing skill-based program. Shortly after, we met again to reorganize many of the classes. Instead of experimenting slowly with one or two ideas, the program decided to make sweeping changes and re-organized all of the classes. Our initial enthusiasm for change may have been overwhelming for both students and staff, leaving many feeling confused, frustrated and even angry.

“We actually built the program and had the students fit into it, which is not the best way to go about it,” explained Carol.

But other students seemed to thrive on the new approach. Students were able to sign up and participate in any one of three work settings: a coffee shop, greenhouse and office. Carol recalled how one student would arrive early each day he was scheduled to be in the coffee shop, but was often absent on the days he had more traditional skill and task-based learning scheduled.

Supporting the initial changes was special project funding from the program funder. This funding was used initially to research the skills most sought by employers when hiring employees without credentials and then to develop curriculum materials. A separate infusion of funding from the city was used to purchase the supplies and equipment needed to set up the three on-site work experience settings. The research portion of the project surprised us a little when it was found that employers consistently rated communication and interpersonal skills over literacy and numeracy skills. In other words, employers seemed willing to hire workers with little or

... employers consistently rated communication and interpersonal skills over literacy and numeracy skills.

no formal education and low levels of literacy but needed to ensure they could communicate well and fit into the work environment. This information was used to support our decision to create on-site work practice settings, where such skills could be learned. In addition, curriculum materials to enhance literacy and numeracy were also created.

After the initial changes were made, the program continued to make adjustments to respond to students and gradually created a variety of classes and small groups to address the academic, employment and personal goals of students. For example, there were classes to help students enter high school, a class for students who wanted to help their children with school-related learning, a class for women who were caregivers in their communities, and a class for students who wanted to find employment. After three years of restructuring, classes and learning groups were defined by common interests and goals, and not primarily by literacy level, activities were developed to mimic the kinds of literacy encountered in various settings, and instructors began to define success according to student goals and not just literacy skill level. We had made a transition from learning literacy *about* work and other domains to learning literacy *for* work and other domains. Although many significant changes had occurred in a short period, the program was still dealing with sporadic attendance, continuous intake and loosely defined classes.

... instructors began to define success according to student goals and not just literacy skill level.

Developing work placements

During the second year of program development, special project funding was used to continue the connections made with employers in the previous project and to explore the possibility of establishing work placements for students. Establishing work placements was a goal from the beginning but could not be done without additional funding to provide paid time for an instructor to establish such employer partnerships. There were a few reasons why the program felt it was crucial for students with employment goals to participate in a work placement in addition to on-site work practice settings.

- ▶ Most students had little or no work experience; no matter how much time they spent preparing for work in a literacy program, employers wouldn't hire them without experience.
- ▶ Compounding a lack of experience was the absence of employer references; again, most employers were not willing to take a risk on hiring someone without experience or a reference.

- ▶ Students needed to learn about work culture and work-related expectations more than literacy skills, and the only way they could learn this would be in a work setting.
- ▶ It was hoped that the connections made during a work placement would lead to a job opportunity.

Unfortunately, the idea to create placements outside the program was nearly discarded when we encountered a major bureaucratic hurdle: workplace insurance coverage. No employer would be able to accept a student without knowing they had workplace compensation in case of an accident. It is common in all other student-related work placements, such as in high school, college and university, for the educational institution to provide insurance coverage, but this is not the case for literacy programs. Having students enter a workplace or even a non-profit organization as volunteers is a way to get around the insurance coverage issue, but it is very limiting and does not provide the work experience that is most often connected to students' employment goals. Eventually, we did establish insurance coverage through the school board. The program funder continues to have the view that this is not their role.

After the initial placements were established, it was apparent how crucial a work experience component would be to a program attempting to help adults with multiple barriers to employment meet their goals. Without the opportunity to directly connect literacy to the workplace during the first year of the program changes, the learning that took place often fell flat and the students were the first ones to react to this by disengaging and missing classes. When we didn't have a direct connection to the workplace, students were only learning *about* work; activities were abstract and distanced from any real purpose, and as a result lost their meaning. But when the placements provided a direct connection to work, students were engaged in learning *for* work and *at* work; the activities had a clear connection and purpose and, most importantly, they held real meaning. (Refer to Appendix 1 for a work placement guide).

... when the placements provided a direct connection to work, students were engaged in learning ***for*** work and ***at*** work

Challenges with integrating literacy learning and work learning

As mentioned above, the biggest challenge to creating the work placements was securing workplace accident insurance coverage. People who attend literacy programs encounter nearly insurmountable barriers to employment, yet this group receives the least support that will actually help them get

a job. Unlike high school, college or university students, adult students in literacy programs do not have access to the experience, knowledge and skills gained through work placements. Why is this? Why are literacy programs not able to provide the opportunities that other students have? Part of the answer is related to the marginalized nature of this type of education, overly dependent on volunteers and poorly paid part-time employees, which generally receives little attention or notice. But the other part of the answer is likely related to the way our society patronizes an individual with low literacy skills: they are somehow deemed not ready to fully participate in adult life until they first gain a basis of literacy skills. A capable and independent adult is equated with an elementary school student, a child, simply because of weak literacy skills.

A second challenge to establishing work placements is the current system of counting contact hours to allocate program funding. When students went into their placements, there was some discussion as to whether or not these hours were ‘countable’ because students were engaged in an activity that was not directly overseen by the instructor at all times. This interpretation of program guidelines not only creates a barrier to programs in helping students find employment but it further entrenches programs in a skill and task-based approach to literacy education.

A third challenge is the message given to programs about the development of employment preparation programs or what is more commonly referred to as workforce literacy. While the funder supports adults in developing the literacy skills needed for employment, they do not see themselves directly involved in employment training¹⁰. Herein lies a key disparity between the funder’s approach to literacy development and the fundamental idea that learning work-related literacy cannot be done without actually learning work. The role of programs, as described in a recent series of presentations to literacy instructors, is:

- ▶ To help students become more employable, but not to directly help them become employed, through resume development, interview preparation and job search support;
- ▶ To focus on training readiness, but not engage in job training; and
- ▶ To teach transferable skills, but not the skills particular to one job (Learning Works: Establishing the Foundation, 2004).

¹⁰ The situation may be changing in Ontario as it begins to develop new initiatives.

Such an approach is driven by the assumption that literacy is generic and transferable, contradicting best practices as described earlier in Chapter 2. Currently in Ontario:

- ▶ Programs are discouraged from integrating academic, vocational and job placement activities;
- ▶ Programs are funded only on seat time or contact hours and not on outcomes;
- ▶ Collaboration with other agencies is supported only in limited ways and there is no extra funding to pursue more intensive partnerships;
- ▶ Hands-on work experience is somehow seen as a non-literacy learning activity and not supported; and
- ▶ There is no funding available to devote one staff person to support learning beyond the classroom.

Learning from research

As mentioned previously, I conducted my master's research in our program. This period of intense reflection coupled with an introduction to some theoretical ideas related to adult literacy learning helped me to better understand the complex interplay between students, traditional schooling approaches, work-related literacy, and teaching practices. The key finding was a separation between learning literacy and learning work. Literacy learning was associated with school-like experiences (e.g. learning to spell), whereas learning work was associated with doing or performing more practical tasks. For example, when students discussed their learning activities in the different settings, they often spoke about what they *learned* in the classroom and what they *did* in the coffee shop and on their job placements. One of the students said (the italics are mine),

When we are in the kitchen, we are *doing* the different things like baking, cleaning [and] cash. In school, we *learn* the reading, writing and grammar. [In] the kitchen, we work together like group, like real work. The class, we learn the reading and writing.

For this student, the classroom was equated with school and the coffee shop was equated with work, even though activities in the coffee shop also involved literacy, and indeed the classroom also involved “doing” activities. She learned

students often spoke about what they *learned* in the classroom and what they *did* in the coffee shop ...

skill and task-based skills (reading, writing and grammar) in the classroom, but she did work (baking, operating the cash register, and following public health regulations) in the coffee shop. Contributing to this perception were the students' values and the program approach itself. The predominant approach to literacy education was a skill and task-based schooling approach (this was perpetuated in the classroom setting), and the students who choose to attend programs likely value this approach (in contrast to students who resist attending programs because they emulate schooling approaches). Although we had a mixture of traditional skill and task-based literacy activities and hands-on activities related to work, the path from the literacy program to students' specific work goals was not always direct and clearly marked. Some students who entered the employment program thinking it was a workplace learning setting were confused when they were engaged in school-like learning; on the other hand, some students who wanted a school-like learning environment were often resistant to activities that did not look like school learning. Adding to the confusion was the idea that the coffee shop was a generic learning setting, preparing students for a variety of jobs; students did not share this point of view.

Learning from experience

One of the changes that we knew was working was the establishment of the work placements. The key to change seemed to be getting out of the classroom—literally and figuratively. Once the placements were established, we were able to see the direct connection between the ways literacy was used in specific settings and the kinds of literacy that students needed to learn to enter these settings as employees. In other words, we were able to see literacy learning at work. As students engaged in placements, work practice settings and even job interviews and entry tests, the dominance of the classroom receded and settings other than the classroom began to present new possibilities for learning. In this way, students engaged in literacy learning at work and were no longer only learning *about* work or *for* work in the classroom. The primary learning setting gradually evolved into something, and often some *place*, other than a traditional classroom, whether it was in a department store, childcare facility, the program-based coffee shop, or during the entry and interview process for a training program. With this shift in thinking, from seeing a workplace or work process as the primary 'site' of learning and the classroom as a secondary site, we began to define who we were and what we could do as a program. When comparing their approach to teaching, instructors noted the following specific changes in the chart below.

As students engaged in placements, work practice settings and even job interviews and entry tests, the dominance of the classroom receded and settings other than the classroom began to present new possibilities for learning.

TABLE 3.1: Comparing previous and current approaches in our program

Previous skill and task-based approach	Current practice-based approach
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Predominantly paper-based activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Focus is more on effective oral communication and fitting into a new setting
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dependence on workbooks and skill-based curriculum materials 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Most currently available materials aren't useful, except for some materials that address personal and social growth, so instructors often gather reading materials from authentic sources and create reading and writing exercises that are job-specific
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Skill and task-based content often remained unchanged to meet the needs of the students because there was a feeling that this was what students needed to learn; the focus was on them needing to change to learn the material, not on the material changing to meet the needs of the students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recognition that content will change depending on the needs of each group; also more of a balance between individual needs and the expectations of various workplaces
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reading was done primarily to become a better reader and not to learn to become a certain kind of employee 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reading is now done primarily to learn content; it is often combined with watching videos and doing an activity (e.g., learn about behaviour guidance from reading, watch a video to observe strategies and use new strategies during the placement)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assessments focused on skill development (e.g., weekly spelling test, grammar test, multiple choice test based on a reading passage) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assessments reflect what actually happens in the work-setting — focus is on case studies and real-life incidents to develop problem-solving abilities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reliance on general adult learning topics that students may or may not have an interest in 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Topics evolve from the specific work sites, so that learning content is aligned with student goals and interests
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Instructors often complained of having to constantly repeat material for people who were absent 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Able to move through a significant amount of new learning content without constant repetition because attendance is so good
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It was not always clear what the end result of program participation would be 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students have a clear view of the end result of the program
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Program and individual classes were defined only by literacy skill level 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Program and classes are now defined by employment goal
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Program learning was not recognized by anyone outside the program 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students are able to earn certificates that employers recognize (e.g., program completion certificate and other certifications from external agencies)

Developing courses to address employment goals

We continuously asked ourselves one basic question when considering different employment preparation delivery options: **Can we develop a program, course or workshop that can place itself on a pathway connecting directly to purposeful and meaningful work, employment training or an employment support agency?** It's important to describe what I mean by a pathway. It wasn't a matter of simply identifying students' employment goals and attempting to address these by collecting published materials and even authentic materials that were related to them. For example, a student wants to find work in a restaurant, so an instructor might gather applications, menus, lists of typical food items and use workbooks that help a student develop a resume, learn food service vocabulary, read work documents, etc. We had to do more than this. Placing literacy learning on a pathway that connects directly to work meant we had to ask the following questions before pursuing the development of any new ideas:

- ▶ What connections in the community are available?
- ▶ Which current students could benefit from this initiative?
- ▶ Which adults in the community could benefit?
- ▶ How would we deliver this?
- ▶ When and where would we deliver this?
- ▶ Most importantly, are we able to offer a learning opportunity that will be valued by the students and truly open doors for them, allowing them access to jobs or training they would not be able to get on their own?

The answers to these questions are very community specific and will therefore change from one community to the next, and even within a community over time. Every community will have its own range of services, employers and people that shape both the transition path and the role of the literacy program in supporting students along that path. For example, when we were investigating a partnership with an employment agency to develop work placements in the private sector, we quickly discovered there were none that could meet the needs of all our students. This situation may be very different in other communities (the situation is even changing now in our community) and will shape how a literacy program could support a transition. In addition, the kinds of jobs and the kinds of students in each community will also vary. Despite these differences, there is one thing to keep in mind: if there is no transition path to work,

Every community will have its own range of services, employers and people that shape both the transition path and the role of the literacy program ...

training or an employment agency in a community, then addressing the employment-related goals of students may look very different than what I am describing.

One important thing to note is that most of our partnerships and connections have been made within our own program or between our program and other closely aligned adult programs such as the English as a second language program. For example, an on-site coffee shop, operated by the students with developmental disabilities, attracts customers from the language classes; students also run the teacher's resource room and related photocopying service; we formed a partnership with the childcare program, accessed by parents studying in both the literacy and language programs, so students could have job placements; and a class of students with physical disabilities developed and hosted a training session for the PSW preparation students. By providing some of these details about what we did, it may spark ideas that could be used in your setting.

Developing the PSW Preparation course

When the course was first developed, it helped students access three different healthcare training programs but gradually focused only on the most difficult program to enter—PSW or personal support worker. As we made more connections with the City of Ottawa's case coordinators to help generate referrals to the program, we learned about their employment training initiatives, three of which were geared to healthcare training that didn't require a high school diploma: home support workers, patient sitters, and personal support workers. The home support program was a city initiative that included training and up to two years of part-time employment after training was completed. Students could enter at an LBS 2¹¹. Patient sitter was only a 10-day training program that LBS 2 students could also enter. Personal support worker was a five-month training program that required at least LBS 3 level to enter, or more depending on the trainer. A new instructor had taken over our healthcare class in the fall of 2003 (it was geared to personal goals and not employment at that point) and was eager to take on a new challenge when the possibility of preparing students to enter these programs was discussed.

The instructor, Susan, describes the kinds of changes she had to make to help students enter healthcare training and be successful in the healthcare field. She eliminated reading that did not have a healthcare focus, and most math work, since these jobs required few math skills. She retained journal writing

11 In Ontario LBS 1-5 is intended to equate to Grades 1-10 (LBS, 1998), although there are some discrepancies, based on program practice, with this alignment.

to support the development of writing skills and as a means to reflect on class based activities; grammar studies were maintained to prepare students to pass entry tests; computer activities were used to access health-related Internet resources and to develop overall computer skills; and she continued to support reading comprehension and vocabulary development using a collection of student stories about health-related issues. Most importantly, she added several activities: certifications in first-aid, CPR and safe food handling; use of an easy-to-read text about anatomy, as well as instructor developed materials to support learning basic anatomy, physiology, healthcare vocabulary and reading comprehension; use of curriculum materials provided by another school board's PSW preparation program; workplace scenarios and client case studies; resume development; studies on senior's health issues, such as Alzheimer's, arthritis, diabetes, and nutrition; and invited several guest speakers to the class to discuss health-related topics.

In some ways, the development of the PSW Preparation course was the easiest to do because, even though a practice-based approach was adopted, many classroom activities still resembled those used in a traditional schooling approach to literacy education. The students are not preparing to enter a workplace directly from this course, although some do, but are instead preparing to enter a five-month PSW training program, which has both an academic and a practical focus. "There is so much that they need to learn that is academic," explained Susan. "We do a fair bit of grammar and we also do a lot of content learning like anatomy and diseases. They are very appreciative and very motivated to learn personally and for their work lives. I try to adapt what they will need to do to get into those programs, like sample test questions and interview questions."

Initially, Susan pursued the idea of having a work placement for this group, but decided it wasn't as important to have this piece because the students would move on to PSW training that would provide a clinical placement. In addition, one of the main reasons to have a placement is to connect students with an employer who could potentially offer a job, but the majority of positions in this field required some sort of formal healthcare training and certification first.

Simply because the literacy learning is closely aligned with traditional schooling approaches didn't mean the instructor could assume what the students needed to learn based on a description of literacy levels. It was crucial for her to gather information from each specific healthcare training program that would then be used to inform the learning content. This information has often been collected and shared through the

... information has often been collected and shared through the students themselves.

TABLE 3.2: PSW preparation activities, resources and achievement examples

	Key learning topics	Key learning resources and activities	Examples of achievements
Program/job entry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Program entry-test practice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Instructor developed materials based on the knowledge and experience of past students who wrote the entry tests 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Copy of PSW training flyer and instructor-written note stating the student attended the test session Entry into PSW training
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Grammar, sentence structure and paragraph writing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Instructor developed materials <i>Grammar Spectrum</i> (Oxford Press) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Copies of grammar tests Writing samples
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Resume development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Classroom resume workshop 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Completed resume
Credentials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> First aid and CPR 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>St. John Ambulance First Aid Manual</i> (available when registered in course) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> First Aid and CPR Certificates, St. John Ambulance
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Foodborne illness and safe food handling 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> City of Toronto Public Health Department safe food handling training manual (available when registered in course) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Food Handler Certificate, City of Ottawa Public Health
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> PLAR — Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition for mature students, leading to high school credits 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Learning Strategies Course</i> (GLS10) developed by the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Completed PLAR assessments for credits in Grades 9 and 10 and PLAR application for senior credits
On the job	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Knowledge (anatomy and physiology) and study skills (skim and scan, main idea, memorization) needed to handle texts used in training programs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> PSW text book used in training course <i>This is My Body</i> (New Readers Press) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assignment on a related topic, including comprehension and application questions
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sector-specific vocabulary Knowledge of support worker role in home health care and long-term care facilities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sector-based newsletter for health care aides (from Freiberg Press) Steps to Employment in Ontario: Home Health Care (LCRT Consulting, 1999) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Copy of journal entry describing student's opinion and/or ideas on meeting a client's needs in a support role
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Over-the-counter and prescription medicine labels and instructions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> PSW preparation materials from another school board program 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Medication label assignment
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Message-taking and dictation skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Instructor-developed materials PSW preparation materials from another school board program 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Copies of spelling dictation and message-taking activities

students themselves. Susan described how students try entry tests, then return to the class to share information with her and the other students. “It has really helped improve the program and helped me know what they need to know. The student communication and collaboration has helped a lot. I feel like now they are getting some good support compared to a couple of years ago.” In addition, Susan has had to continually investigate training dates, changing entry requirements, employment opportunities, and program costs in order to help her students reach their goals.

Two years later, in partnership with the school board’s continuing education credit programs, a prior learning assessment and recognition (PLAR) process designed to help students gain high school credits was introduced. Using a combination of assessments and an application process, students can earn up to 26 high school credits, leaving only four to complete their Ontario Secondary School Diploma requirements.

Susan explains, since the introduction of the PLAR process to the PSW Preparation course, the entry-level literacy requirements have increased slightly and the vast majority of students want to enter a PSW program, as opposed to home support worker or patient sitter. We have seen many of our students reach that goal and go on to employment that is well remunerated. Being a part of these success stories reminds us of how the changes to the program have been the right way to go.

The importance of integrating high school credits with employment preparation

The development of a transition to high school within the employment preparation program has proven to be an important enhancement. Many students in the PSW Preparation course indicate that their long-term goal is to study nursing at the community college, however, the entry requirements for the two-year Practical Nurse Program are considerably more stringent than those for Personal Support Worker. In order to work toward their long-term goal, our students are highly motivated to complete the PLAR process at the end of their studies in the PSW Preparation course.

Once they have completed the PLAR process toward the end of their studies in the literacy program, students have the option of pursuing high school credit studies to complete their secondary school diploma. While individual students will complete PLAR with varying numbers of credits toward their diploma, the majority would be able to obtain the required credits for their diploma within one or two school terms of full-time studies at the adult high school. Alternatively, they may choose to complete the required credits part-time

through the continuing education credit programs, an option that many of our students choose for its part-time schedule that supports them in balancing their family, work and school responsibilities.

By providing a transition to credit studies within a literacy program, we are able to offer a small class setting and a supportive learning environment to adults who have a strong desire to obtain formal recognition for their studies, but may need some early support to get started on the pathway to a high school diploma. In addition to being prepared for their immediate goal of PSW training, our students are now on an academic pathway that has the potential to lead them to their long-term educational and employment goals. It is important to note that this enhancement to our literacy program could not have taken place without an initial investment of time and effort to establish an effective partnership with the continuing education credit programs. The credit programs are located in the same building, with some shared administrative resources, which greatly facilitated efforts to form a partnership. Over the course of many months, staff from both the literacy and credit programs worked together to develop this new way of facilitating the transition of literacy students into academic settings. During their last months in the literacy programs, students can now prepare to complete the PLAR process and obtain secondary school credits so that they may exit the literacy program with an established academic transcript in the Ontario secondary school system.

By providing a transition to credit studies within a literacy program, we are able to offer a small class setting and a supportive learning environment

Developing the Childcare Assistant course

Dianne describes how her family learning class became an employment preparation course to train students to work as childcare assistants. The idea for such a course was originally discussed between the childcare program coordinator and Carol when student placements were first developed in 2001–2002. During the process of setting up a student placement in the childcare, Carol and the childcare coordinator created a checklist of expectations that would need to be met if the student was to be considered for a future position as a Childcare Assistant. The position did not require educational credentials and there was no formalized on-the-job training. Upon reviewing the expectations, the childcare program coordinator recognized that most potential employees would need support if they had no experience in an organized childcare setting. Although it seemed like a good idea to develop a workshop or course to support entry into a Childcare Assistant position, we would have to ensure we could bring together enough students to create a separate class, and have the right instructor teach the course.

As part of the family learning class, Dianne had been accompanying her students into the on-site childcare for the children of the language and literacy students to read with the children each week. At intake the students said their goal was to help their children at school, particularly to help them with their homework. But when they got into the classroom they said they either wanted a job or wanted to go to high school. “Helping their children with school work was only a very small part of it,” explained Dianne. So the class with its focus on family learning was not really working.

Dianne’s class had also seen a decrease in enrollment. There were 16 students registered but the attendance was dismal, with often only a handful of students attending on any one day. The time was right to take on a new challenge. “Part of the decision,” said Dianne “was based on desperation because of the poor attendance.” In addition, she had previously worked as a kindergarten teacher, had begun to learn about the literacy and language program’s childcare procedures, and had been an integral part of the initial attempts at developing an employment program. With her experience in early childhood education and employment programs for adults, her knowledge of the childcare program and its needs, she was well positioned to take on a new challenge.

To recruit the first group of students, she asked her regularly attending students if they were interested in participating in a new Childcare Assistant course and two agreed, one didn’t and switched to a different program, and two new students joined the group. The transition was a challenge. Although she was encouraged to take her time to develop the program, she felt pressured to have enough content in place in order to tell the students what they would be learning. In addition, there were few readily available childcare learning materials at the literacy level of her students. Most things she found had to be adapted in order to be at the appropriate literacy level, and modified in order to address issues of concern in organized childcare settings. Dianne said she also experienced a real personal moment of doubt when the tutor of one of her students called her. The student had been in the family learning class and opted to make the transition to the Childcare Assistant course. She explains that the tutor called her and accused her of destroying the student’s dream of going to high school. The student did complete the program and she’s now working each morning in a childcare facility run by the language and literacy childcare program.

“It was a hard sell, though. I lost a few students [at the beginning],” added Dianne.

Most things she found had to be adapted in order to be at the appropriate literacy level ...

As Dianne shifted from family learning, which had a predominantly skill and task-based approach, to the Childcare Assistant course, which emphasized learning the practices of organized childcare, she re-experienced the same kinds of challenges when the program as a whole made the same shift three years earlier. As her class made the transition, some students were not supportive. They either didn't have an employment goal, didn't have a goal related to childcare or had a predominantly academic goal. "Now," said Dianne, "I only get people who are truly interested in working in childcare." The course has become so popular, mostly through word of mouth amongst the students and in the community, that it is never without a waiting list. Attendance has also changed dramatically, and now students rarely miss a day in the intensive five-month program.

Dianne explains the changes she made. She eliminated grammar and math activities and focused on topics that related to teaching in a childcare such as child development, behaviour guidance, safety issues, and developing childcare activities. She said she still does some spelling development, particularly related to childcare vocabulary. The students also get their certifications in first aid, CPR and food handling. She uses a series of videos designed to teach early childhood educators, and has a steady stream of guest speakers to discuss behaviour guidance, employment opportunities, setting up a home daycare, and fun childcare activities to teach young children. They also discuss and role-play different ways of communicating with children, something that has become a key learning activity in her class. "It's a lot of little things" explains Dianne, "Like what's wrong with asking a child, 'What are you painting?' when painting a picture."

An integral part of the course is the placement in a childcare setting. Dianne explained that the students are on placement for one full week at the beginning and end of each five-month term. In between, they go to their placement every Wednesday. Dianne has arranged her schedule so she can visit each student every other week to talk to the childcare supervisors about their work in the childcare and offer support and advice as needed. Dianne has had to work with the coordinator of the childcare program and each site supervisor to develop a consistent and valuable learning experience for her students. It has often been a challenging task to not only help students learn about working in an organized childcare setting, but to also help students learn about the variety of styles and approaches different supervisors might incorporate in their particular setting. The placement not only provides practical work experience, the first experience in an organized childcare setting for most students, but it also provides the students with an employment opportunity. Upon successful

An integral part of the course is the placement in a childcare setting.

TABLE 3.3: Childcare assistant activities, resources and achievement examples

	Key learning topics	Key learning resources and activities	Examples of achievements
Program/job entry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Resume development Interview strategies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Classroom resume workshop, including use of computer generated template Interview role playing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Completed resume. Read and completed OCDSB forms required for employment in the childcare program
Credentials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> First aid and CPR 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> St. John Ambulance First Aid manual (available when registered in course) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> First Aid and CPR Certificates, St. John Ambulance
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Foodborne illness and safe food handling 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> City of Toronto Public Health Department safe food handling training manual (available when registered in course) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Food Handler Certificate, City of Ottawa Public Health
On the job	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Childcare activities, including reading picture books, songs, and age appropriate art activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Collection of songs and a CD of children singing. Workshops given by childcare supervisors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Made a booklet of sensory activities to be used in the childcare. Learned songs and fingerplays well enough to lead circle time in the childcare Planned and organized an age appropriate art activity in the childcare.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Childcare topics including behaviour guidance, safety, rules and regulations specific to the childcare programs the students want to work in 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Guest speakers from the City of Ottawa Early Years Program Extensive reading and discussion on child development and behaviour guidance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Completed a child development project that included tracing a child from the childcare and paragraph writing on physical, social and cognitive developmental milestones of the child. Written tests
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Childcare placement once a week for a total of 90 hours 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Practical experience in a childcare. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Placement evaluation completed by the childcare supervisor

completion of the program, their names are added to the supply list for future employment. Dianne wrote:

I enjoy teaching the childcare assistant course very much. It is extremely gratifying to see my students obtain positions in the childcare centres. A couple of weeks ago, I visited one site to observe a student on her placement. To my delight, two former students, from the two previous classes, were also there. One was supplying and the other was working at her regular job. The pride I felt over seeing students working at a job they obviously like, using skills learned in my class, far outweighed any pleasure I ever felt over a perfect grammar test.

Developing the Retail Customer Service course

The Retail Customer Service course grew out of the original coffee shop setting that students used to learn employment skills. Problems with the coffee shop model and competition from a city sponsored food service training program offered by a private trainer forced us to re-examine the role of the coffee shop. It wasn't that the idea of the coffee shop and its related learning activities wasn't a good one; it was more of an issue of who was attracted to this setting. "We realized," said Carol, "that people weren't coming to us asking to make muffins." What they really wanted was an opportunity to learn to use the cash register. In addition, the program was losing students interested in food service to a large and heavily marketed private training program located in the same building. Although Carol and her co-instructor developed a program that used many of the same learning activities as the city-sponsored program, they were able to provide a much more supportive environment that was flexible enough to respond to a student's particular learning needs and pace of learning. That included finding placements outside of food service if requested. Most importantly, the instructors recognized that their students would not be able to support themselves and their families with work alone and would likely need to depend on some form of social assistance in combination with employment. "We were advising our single moms not to take the [city-sponsored food service] course because they had to sign a contract stating they would work full-time and move off welfare."

... they were able to provide a much more supportive environment that was flexible enough to respond to a student's particular learning needs and pace of learning.

In an attempt to try and bolster attendance, a partnership with the city's food service training program was explored later that fall. The plan was to have the literacy program provide some key learning focused on literacy and numeracy development for the workplace, in addition to personal

and social development activities that would help students identify their skills, overcome past negative learning and work experiences, and help them to handle stress and conflict. The food service trainer was enthusiastic and supportive, recognizing some key learning could be added to the program, and the instructors in the literacy program were willing to try yet another program delivery change. However, the funder of the training program was not so enthusiastic. Incorporating our components would mean that the city-sponsored training program would have to expand from 12 weeks to 18 weeks—a change that would cost the funder extra money.

Up to that point, Carol had been arranging individualized job placements for students. The students were participating in all three components of the employment preparation program: the coffee shop for work practice, the classroom to support their literacy development and job placements to help them explore different jobs and gain valuable work experience. She had successfully placed students in retail settings and had established some partnerships with major retailers. We also learned about a customer service program in another city and were inspired to try something similar.

A key piece of the coffee shop experience was maintained: the students would learn to use the cash register in the coffee shop, which continued to operate with a new group of students. Carol writes about the kinds of knowledge developed when students learn to independently operate the cash register:

It gives them hands on experience complete with real customers, money handling, and a necessary degree of pressure. It builds many transferable skills, such as greater confidence, problem solving, mindfulness, and learning to deal with conflict and stress related to difficult customers. It is a way for them to get their feet dampened gently in the world of work. Although most students feel anxious initially, they always feel proud and confident when they can finally go through the entire experience independently—from cashier to the counting and processing of daily totals and sales slips.

It builds many transferable skills, such as greater confidence, problem solving, mindfulness, and learning to deal with conflict and stress ...

Part of the initial phase of development included working with me to create a curriculum outline. An impetus for getting the outline done was to share it with the city's social service department, which was interested in a potential partnership. Again, we explored a partnership with the city. This time our program was to provide all instruction and the city was to provide the job placement piece. This was an important discussion and a potential approach for other literacy programs searching for a way to provide students with work

TABLE 3.4: Retail customer service activities, resources and achievement examples

	Key learning topics	Key learning resources and activities	Examples of achievements
Program/job entry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resume development • Interview preparation, body language 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resume Writing Manuals • Interview question of the day, authentic job postings from work placement, mock interview with unknown interviewer 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Completed resume, reference list • Formal evaluation from interviewer, student self evaluation and areas to improve
Credentials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • First aid and CPR 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • St. John Ambulance First Aid manual (available when registered in a course) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • First Aid and CPR Certificates, St. John Ambulance
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PLAR— Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition for mature students, leading to high school credits 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Learning Strategies Course</i> (GLS10) developed by the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Completed PLAR assessments for credits in Grades 9 and 10 and PLAR application for senior credits
On the job	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Retail placement twice a week for a total of 90 hours 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Specific work culture, norms, store manual, procedures, policies, and mission statement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Placement evaluation completed by supervisor and instructor
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cash register work experience • Develop customer service skills and experience 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • On-site coffee shop, in partnership with instructors • Cash register, money, computer • Serve customers at cash register 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cash register tally sheet, float ready for next day

experience. Despite the enthusiasm for the approach, the idea was not carried forward. A possible reason for this was that the city was beginning to use a formalized proposal process to develop their training partnerships. A proposal request for retail customer service was never posted.¹²

The first Retail Customer Service course began in the fall of 2005. It followed a similar format to the Childcare Assistant course: it ran for five months,

¹² This changed recently when the city did in fact contract a private trainer to deliver a retail training program, the same one who ran the food service program. The trainer is located in our building and will likely attract potential students. In addition, there is also a concern that, particularly for adults facing multiple barriers, the nature of some short employment training programs fails to address the sociocultural understandings needed to overcome barriers and obtain employment. To assist students in overcoming a lack of formal educational credentials, we have begun to offer Retail Customer Service students the Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition process that is offered in the PSW Preparation class.

integrated a placement once a week, and had only one instructor to oversee both the placement and classroom environments.

Carol writes about individual students whose lists of achievements provide the professional rewards pursued by every instructor.

It is the student who had a 'light bulb' moment after she realized she had wonderful attributes and transferable skills that she didn't know she had. It is the student who scored 90% on the Food Handler's exam after previously failing it in a fast-paced job-training program. It is the student who beamed after a successful morning at her job placement and told us she had never experienced this before. It is the gradual but steady move from marginalization to social integration.

It is the gradual but steady move from marginalization to social integration.

Developing an Adaptive Learning employment preparation course

The first step towards employment preparation in the classes for adults with developmental disabilities was to incorporate job-like processes. The Adaptive Learning instructor, Elizabeth, developed a variety of in-class jobs such as taking orders and preparing beverages during breaks or organizing the class library. Students then had to apply for the jobs they wanted, using written applications and interviews, and discuss how they might be suitable for the position. The first steps towards thinking about work, establishing work-related goals, and examining personal skills were being developed.

The one activity that signified the change between a school-like literacy program and a work-like program was the job application process she created for classroom duties. Students had always signed up for, or been assigned to, classroom duties, like washing the dishes after break or making the coffee for break, but when Elizabeth knew she had to prepare the first group of students for a new kind of program, she decided to set up a job application and interview process for each job. She explained how she created a very basic form that had a few key words for the students to learn, such as *strengths*, *position* and *contact information*. Her goal was to gently introduce work processes.

It was absolutely unbelievable how they enjoyed that. Their faces changed. Everything about them changed. I felt a little guilty because the jobs were so minor...but it became all about jobs, and I just couldn't believe the difference.

... but it became all about jobs, and I just couldn't believe the difference.

TABLE 3.5: Adaptive Learning employment preparation activities, resources and achievement examples

	Key learning topics	Key learning resources and activities	Examples of achievements
Program/ job entry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Skills and interests inventory Self-awareness Goal-setting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>A Dream that Walks</i> (available from Grass Roots Press) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Summary pages of worksheets from book
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Values 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>VOICE</i>¹³ (from the Employment Preparation and Upgrading Program) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Student self-evaluations from <i>VOICE</i>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conflict resolution 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Role play Scenarios and classroom discussion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Statement of achievement with an example of student using skills in one of the on-site workplace settings
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Resume development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Computer generated template 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Completed resume
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Interview techniques 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Role play Mock interviews 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Successful mock interview and evaluation checklist
On the job	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> On-site work placement in a coffee shop 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recipes Food labels Instructions from health department (hand-washing) and manufacturer (dishwashing) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Achievement checklists based on job descriptions
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> On-site work placement in a resource room 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Job descriptions Copy and laminating requests Instructions from manufacturers (shredder, photocopiers, laminator, binder) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Achievement checklists based on job descriptions

Next, a small group of students traveled to the main program site one day each week to work and learn in the coffee shop. The coffee shop at that point was the only remaining work practice setting of the original employment preparation program and had been struggling, particularly that year, to attract students. However, staff recognized the learning benefits that the coffee shop could provide to students in our program for adults with developmental disabilities:

¹³ *VOICE: A dynamic and interactive approach for exploring employment possibilities* by Nora Connolly was part of the project that also funded this book.

- ▶ An opportunity to integrate literacy and numeracy into a broader learning endeavor (operating a fully functioning coffee shop);
- ▶ A learning environment that looked like work and not school;
- ▶ A chance to develop teamwork and communication skills, and build self-confidence in a work setting; and
- ▶ A chance to show some parents and caregivers the strengths and abilities of students.

The small group who visited weekly experienced tremendous success, and a class of 12 students made a permanent move to the adult education centre. Not only would they be learning work skills in the coffee shop, but they would also begin working in the instructors' resource room. This second work setting would allow students to learn about work processes found in a copy room, a mail room or library. In addition, the emphasis in this setting was on completing a task independently, rather than as part of a team as in the coffee shop. Their instructor, Elizabeth, wrote,

I have never seen such instant empowerment, progress and success. These students have been faced with a new challenge and they have risen to the occasion. They are truly an amazing group.

The program later added a second class and both are involved in on-site employment-related activities that vary in intensity and frequency.

Reporting achievements for all courses

While the examples of achievements listed in the above tables directly reflect the goals of the students, in addition to the demands and requirements of the workplace, they only have an indirect connection to the reporting measures established by the program funder. As a result, the program has had to develop mediation protocols between the particularities of student achievement, which are a reflection of literacy practices, and the predominantly skill-based measures used by the funder. The key to such a mediation between skill-based and practice-based measures is to focus on the complexity of the texts rather than an abstract tally of skills accumulated by the student. In other words, a reporting level is assigned to the text based on its complexity, and not directly to the student. Using a set of guidelines, instructors rate the difficulty of each text in the student's portfolio to demonstrate how a particular student uses texts at various levels. It is the demands of the workplace and text complexity that are reported, and not the ability of a student to acquire a set of skills that may or may not be needed within a particular setting.

Program change

When we attempted change from the top-down, or tried to systematically manage change, it didn't work, but when change was supported from the top, and implemented from the bottom, it usually did work. The program-wide changes we attempted at the beginning when we revamped classes and teaching assignments, creating complex schedules, were met with frustration and resistance from both students and staff. Ultimately, this approach to program change was scrapped. We did learn our lesson, though. Similarly to other educational programs that, according to Louis (1994), have successfully implemented significant program-wide changes, we engaged in the following kinds of activities that led to lasting change:

... when change was supported from the top, and implemented from the bottom, it usually did work.

- ▶ **Took action before planning.** After our initial attempts at change, we didn't pre-plan, overly discuss or get hung up on ideas but focused on trying things out to see how they would work. Instructors were given the freedom and trust to try new ideas and approaches.
- ▶ **Generated vision from activities rather than basing activities on a vision.** We had inclinations and ideas of what could be done, tried them out and began talking about commonalities and themes later. It was only after the changes were made that we could reflect on what we did, why we did things the way we did, their impacts, and how these changes related (or didn't) to the ideas of others.
- ▶ **Developed a program-specific vision.** We defined for ourselves how others' ideas of employment preparation for adult literacy students could work for us. We were able to integrate the compatible ideas and expectations of others (funder, employers, students, referral partners) to create our own approach. This also allowed us to recognize and reject what was incompatible.
- ▶ **Had leadership preoccupied with the day-to-day management of change.** The program had a leadership team that was able to meet regularly together and with instructors to manage all issues related to program changes. (A leadership team may be uncommon, but it only takes one person to be on the lookout for problems and be able to address these.)

Although we ultimately discovered that lasting and effective change occurred from the bottom-up and not top-down, it never could have happened without

the right people at the top. While the actual doing of the changes had to be conducted by the people most invested in the changes, the environment for this to occur was established by those at ‘the top’. Without the right kind of leadership, there would not have been significant change in the program.

The same author referred to above describes effective change leaders as:

- ▶ Stimulators—people who might get things started then allow others to take action;
- ▶ Story-tellers—people who help others discuss and understand what they are doing, who draw connections to the ideas of others inside and outside the program;
- ▶ Networkers—people who spend their time coordinating and creating opportunities to get people together inside and outside the program always with the goal of contributing to the vision of the program; and
- ▶ Copers—people who pay attention to details, look for problems and concerns and respond to them using a variety of coping strategies.

In our program, no single person was the sole proprietor of all of these leadership qualities. There was a leadership team, of which each member engaged in the above activities to varying degrees at various times. In addition, the teaching staff also displayed leadership qualities within the boundary of their particular visions that related to each course and student population. Often, what was created for a particular course could then be used by others. In this way, instructors and managers together created the overall vision of the program.

... instructors and managers together created the overall vision of the program.

It’s important to emphasize that the program received additional funding, beyond its regular operating budget, to accomplish many of the program changes. The majority of the funding was used to pay an instructor to develop, maintain and supervise the job placements. This could not have been an additional task for a manager or classroom instructor to absorb into their already busy schedules. Program partnerships are challenging to establish in most situations. We faced additional challenges as we attempted to explain that we were a literacy program that also provided students with job training, placements and other employment preparation activities. Overcoming the perception that literacy learning and work learning are discrete educational activities for adults was and continues to be a challenge.

Summary

What we learned about program change

- ▶ Implement change slowly; pilot a new idea, develop a workshop or short-term project.
- ▶ Develop new programs only if they bridge the gap between the student's work-related goal and entry into the workplace or a training program. For example, there may be jobs available to students that they can enter without any sort of program bridging.
- ▶ Once the connection to the work-related goal is defined, then develop learning content.
- ▶ Partner (informally or formally) with employers and employment programs.
- ▶ Partnerships take time and effort; they need to be nurtured by someone who is able to dedicate regular and persistent effort; this may require assigning additional hours to staff or hiring additional staff.

What we learned about literacy learning

- ▶ Literacy can't be isolated from the way in which it is used outside the program; if it is, it becomes literacy that emulates schooling more than work.
- ▶ School literacy is different from work, community and home literacy; it can even be different from literacy for other educational settings.
- ▶ Students understand that work literacy and school literacy are different, but programs and the funder send confusing messages.
- ▶ An employment preparation program can readily provide both learning for work and academic preparation, but the differences between the two kinds of literacy learning need to be explicit for students and instructors.
- ▶ In order to integrate literacy development with employment preparation, a student needs to learn *at* work and *for* work, not just learn *about* work.
- ▶ It's best to use either the on-site or off-site work placements as the primary learning environment, not the classroom; the classroom then becomes the environment that supports learning in the work setting. In other words, the work placements drive the learning focus of the classroom.

What we learned about our students

- ▶ Although students might “plateau” at a low level when learning generalized skills, they can continue developing at higher levels if the learning is context specific and directly connected to their personal goal.
- ▶ Students at the lowest literacy levels have work goals and many do work; they do not have to acquire a foundation of skill and task-based literacy skills in order to participate in the workforce.
- ▶ Most students, particularly single women with children, who find employment without credentials, will not be able to support themselves and their families and may always need to balance employment with some form of social assistance; the goal of our program is to provide students with opportunities, but not to get them off welfare.

Geraldine's story

Geraldine introduces us to her family and home life, drawing our attention to the importance of support when thinking about employment preparation.



MY NAME IS GERALDINE. I am 52 years old and I am graduating next week. I am excited and a little nervous. I have never graduated before, wearing a cap and gown.

I am graduating from the Adaptive Learning "Employment Preparation Program". It is a two-year program for people with special needs. The program will help us find a job. I can explain what this program is because we have been practicing interview skills. If you can't communicate what you want to say, other people have no way of knowing what you are capable of or what you want. I want

If you can't communicate what you want to say, other people have no way of knowing what you are capable of ...

to work and be independent. I am on a fixed income and life isn't easy. I would like to work with blind people. We used to have a blind student in our class and I always helped him. I would like to help people.

I know it isn't going to be easy to find a job at my age. I have some health problems. I am recovering from surgery and waiting for radiation treatment for cancer. I have to take it easy for a while but I still come in to school two days a week. Over the summer I am going to do a lot of swimming for exercise and then I am going to try and get a job. I will have a job coach to help me. I will miss all my friends at school.

To get a job, I have to know how to fill out forms, speak clearly on the phone, learn more about handling my own money. You need a good attitude on the job. I would like a new life.



I can get anywhere I want to go on public transportation. It's important to be independent.

Bus training is easy for me. My mom used to bus train me when I was going someplace new. Now my boyfriend bus trains me. I learn the bus routes right away. I have lived in Toronto, Montreal and Ottawa. I can get anywhere I want to go on public transportation. It's important to be independent. This is a picture of a transit station.

I like the signs that tell you where to walk to be safe. This is easy for me.

Now, I live on my own. I used to live with my mom. When I was an adult I moved into a group home but that was a mistake, because you have to ask permission to go anywhere. It feels uncomfortable when you have to tell someone where you are going all the time. I share an apartment now with my boyfriend. We have been living together since the 80's. We have a special needs worker who helps us with our money. Some workers are very good, others were no help at all.



This is a picture of our kitchen. I am very proud of it. My boyfriend does the cooking but I am responsible for the cleaning of this room and the bathroom.



My boyfriend is responsible for cleaning the living room and hallway. Since I've been sick, Wayne (my boyfriend) does all the chores. He will do all the chores until I am better.

This is my bedroom, but it's not a picture of the room, it's a picture of my awards. They are end-of-year awards and when I graduated from the Adaptive Learning Program two years ago. There are also two "student of the month" awards and next week I will have another award to put up there.



These awards mean I'm learning new stuff. I was succeeding. When I look at them I think of helping people in the coffee shop at my school. I think about positive attitude. I'm always on time. I listen to teachers and co-workers. I'm learning to bake in the coffee shop. I improved my reading skills when I learned to read a recipe. I read the recipe for other students who had trouble reading. I read the recipe and they get out the ingredients. Ev (an educational assistant) copied some of my favorite recipes using very large letters. I have a problem with my vision. She laminated them for me and I can use them at home. I will always keep those awards on my wall.

This is a picture of my mom and I at a restaurant celebrating her birthday. Wayne was there and my sister and brother-in-law.



My family is very important to me. My mom has taught me a lot. She has encouraged me to be independent and she has taught me to ask for help when I need it. Each time I have had surgery I have stayed with my mom for awhile when I first got out of the hospital. My three sisters and brother all know I can be independent too.

I find math and reading a bit hard because of my vision. Sometimes life in general is hard.

I've learned a lot from working. I know I have to have a good attitude. Some of the workshops I have worked at were very good. People would show me the job I would have to do and I could do it well. But some places I have worked the boss would yell at me when I made a mistake. I know I have to have a good attitude but it's hard to get along with people when they yell at you. I get very frustrated and then I get confused.

... I think of helping people in the coffee shop at my school. I think about positive attitude.

Some schools were like that too. I had some very good teachers that taught me a lot. But I had some teachers that yelled at me and then I couldn't learn.



This is a picture of the coke machine in our apartment building. We didn't know there would be a coke machine downstairs in our apartment building. It was a nice surprise and we can get a drink or a treat whenever we want. It's nice to have a choice.



I love this picture. This is a picture of me behind the counter in the coffee shop at my school. I have job training in the coffee shop and the resource room in the library.



This picture tells me I can ask customers what they want and I can serve them. I use eye contact with the customers — that's important. If I make a mistake I can stay calm and ask questions. I don't have to be confused and frustrated. I've been through it and this picture means I can do it.

CHAPTER FOUR

Developing learning and assessment activities

THIS CHAPTER WILL PROVIDE greater detail about how instructors of the four employment preparation courses develop their own learning and assessment activities. No longer can they depend only on published materials to address the range of learning students need to meet their employment goals. In addition, so much of the learning is setting specific and varies from one setting to the next. It would be impossible to actually document certain work processes and expectations thinking they could be used by all students for all situations. Instructors don't simply gather authentic materials and bring them back to class. They are more concerned with understanding how the texts are actually used at each work-site, by different people for various purposes. Instructors are now more concerned with developing workplace culture, communication and credentials—the 3Cs.

Instructors don't simply gather authentic materials and bring them back to class.

Focusing on the 3Cs: Culture, communication and credentials

Rather than focusing on basic or generalized skills such as reading texts, numeracy and filling in forms, the literacy developed by the four employment preparation instructors is now focused on developing the 3Cs of the workplace: 1) culture, 2) communication and 3) credentials. Instructors focus on developing workplace *culture* so students are able to demonstrate their ability to do the job. This means they learn about stated and unstated expectations, problem solving on the job, recognizing and interpreting hidden meanings, and the procedures and processes of the workplace. Closely related to culture is the second C, *communication*, which allows students to demonstrate they belong and have a certain employee identity. This means students learn about specific terms and ways of talking that may be sector- or even site-specific. Such terms often indicate a knowledge of processes and procedures. For example, students in the childcare learn how to say “no” to a child in a childcare centre and students in the retail class learn what “Power

Hour” means at a downtown department store. The third C, *credentials*, demonstrates students’ experience through specific forms of documentation such as a first aid and CPR certificate, a food handling certificate, and high school credits. A focus on credentials has meant that students gain certificates valued by employers, they learn to “speak to their resume” in an interview, and develop a variety of strategies to complete entry tests.

Instructors develop curricula to address the 3Cs

Instructors and students do the following to develop curricula

- 1** Gather information about each work setting by going into that setting and talking to others, observing, experiencing and reading.
- 2** Use many of the expectations of the employers, employment trainers and support agencies as learning objectives.
- 3** Balance these expectations with the past experiences and current learning needs of students.

Learning activities are developed based on the ways in which literacy is used in specific workplaces, training programs and employment agencies *outside the program*. Activities are not based on a set of literacy standards or levels, nor can they be found in a set of published curriculum for specific employment sectors. Instead, to develop activities, instructors and students have had to look beyond the confines of the program and readily available materials to the actual workplaces, training programs and employment agencies that students will eventually enter. Although there are a variety of commercially published and program produced workbooks, curriculum and software that address employment, these are limited in their ability to provide students with the full range of understandings they will need to meet their goals. For example, the expectations for a student preparing to enter a welfare sponsored PSW program in Ottawa may be very different from a similar program in Toronto. Even entry requirements across programs in the same geographical location can be different.

Yes, there are some commonalities that are based on literacy skill development, such as an ability to write simple notes, read health-related material in a textbook, and develop health related vocabulary. However, knowing this information will not guarantee entry into a program. It is often setting-specific knowledge that predicts whether or not a student will be successful. To learn about these differences, both instructors and students have had to collect information about the learning content in specific settings. Below, the instructors describe how they have done this.

It is often setting-specific knowledge that predicts whether or not a student will be successful.

Carol: I have understood what my students need to learn by observation, speaking with the employees and being a customer. My students are a very important source of information. There is no curriculum, no book. The HR bulletin boards contain information about a company's mission statement, policies, procedures and training. They also feature employees of the month; this helps me to understand the qualities and skills my students will need to develop. Many of the businesses include my students in their morning staff meetings and training sessions. This is invaluable and really teaches them the specifics of the store.

When students attend the morning staff meeting while on placement, they hear who gets praise, what the sales were, and what has occurred the day before that may have become an issue. It's really great that my students are welcome that way. I want them to have that experience, and then the staff get to see them. They are dressed the same, and that is really important. It makes them feel important and valued. Then they bring that back to class, so the more they learn, the more I learn. I can't be there all the time. What they bring back to me, I then put into the program.

... they bring that back to class, so the more they learn, the more I learn.

I also visit my students during their work placement. This gives me an opportunity to clarify and explain things to the students and staff. It must be a win-win situation for the business in order for the placement to be successful. During these visits, I also learn about the qualities and abilities of the staff. It was surprising to learn that many of the employees do not speak English fluently, yet they are still successful. This really makes my students feel they can be successful too.

In addition, students go to interviews and bring back interview questions and questionnaires, which become our learning material. I also had a student bring back a copy of a retail training manual used only by that company. I will also talk to the supervisor and they tell me what they are looking for.

We spend most of our time talking. It's very casual, very comfortable and very safe. It's an intense five months and they are like sisters at the end of it. It's a lot of talking, discussing and learning.

Susan: Students would leave the class to try and enter a PSW training program, then they would return and share what they learned with me and the rest of the class about the interview and entry test, the kinds of questions they were asked about work readiness, and even about which programs were easier to enter. I now have a bank of entry test and interview questions that we can practice. (Susan has also established a connection with each of the programs

her students are preparing to enter, visited a program with her students, communicates regularly with programs and even provided one program with a sample entry test.)

With focused courses we can really develop an area of literacy for one sector. They don't have to have an extensive broad vocabulary. Maybe they are at LBS Level 2 in most areas but they are able to develop a higher level of sector-specific knowledge.

Elizabeth: After students start their employment placement with an employment support agency, they return to the program each Friday as guest speakers and share their work experiences with the rest of the class. Both the instructors and students learn so much about employers' expectations, problems that may arise and the learning needs of the students in these workplaces. This knowledge enhances previous knowledge of the workplace found through ads for employment, a company's list of competencies, and published materials such as *A Dream that Walks* (Hanna, 2002).

I also have a staff meeting after the coffee shop is closed. We often discuss procedures. They learn so much from each other, and more experienced students become role models.

Dianne: The learning content is based to some degree on the evaluation form developed by the supervisors. The childcare coordinator and supervisors expect students to have knowledge about child development and a certain level of skill when interacting with young children. I therefore need to teach child development and behaviour guidance. We also share stories about their placement in the next day's class. Sometimes they ask about what they should do to solve a problem, and sometimes they just talk about what they did.

The power of a schooling approach

Although instructors now use the expectations of employers (Retail Customer Service and Childcare Assistant courses), employment trainers (PSW Preparation course), and employment support agencies (Adaptive Learning employment preparation) to help develop their learning outcomes, they continue to feel the pull of skill and task-based perspectives. "Students sometimes ask about grammar rules. That's where I feel pulled," said Carol. "But there's pressure to get through the content."

Dianne said, "I had a hard time giving up the grammar lesson. I thought I should be doing that."

... literacy skills are developed depending on how they are used in specific work settings ...

This does not mean that literacy skill development, a dominant feature of a schooling approach, is now ignored. Instead, literacy skills are developed depending on how they are used in specific work settings and not how they are used in a workbook. The chart below demonstrates how the skill of learning about abbreviations might be addressed in a skill and task-based approach compared to a practice-based approach.

TABLE 4.1: Comparing approaches to learning about abbreviations

Learning about abbreviations	Skill and task-based approach	Practice-based approach
Who decides which literacy skills to develop?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Decisions about which skills to build are made based on a workbook or curriculum guide. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Decisions about which skills to build are made based on what documents are used and how they are used in the work setting.
How do the skills fit into the overall learning goal?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Not always apparent how the abbreviations are used or why they are important to learn if only a workbook is used. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students can clearly see how the abbreviations are used. Only those that are used in the work documents are developed.
How are the skills developed?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Often isolated from the ways in which they are actually used in documents. Even when documents are used, i.e. a recipe, the students may learn to use the skill in a skill and task-based manner (matching activities, dictations, word lists, etc.), not in the manner demanded by the document (recognize and respond using the right tools). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The abbreviation is introduced in the actual document, such as a recipe, and not isolated from it. It is also learned with the tool such as a measuring spoon and how the tool is used. A memory trigger is learned to help reinforce learning (e.g. tbsp. is bigger and has more letters, or b for bigger). Not necessarily written down unless required by the demands of the document and work setting.
How are they assessed?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Often assessed with a pen and paper test, i.e., match abbreviated form with word. The instructor then decides if learning is satisfactory. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assessed as part of overall learning purpose, i.e. if a tsp. is used instead of a tbsp. while reading a recipe to bake, the end result may not be satisfactory to the student.
Transferability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Likely won't transfer from one application to another (e.g. from a worksheet to a recipe). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Will likely transfer to similar contexts following similar processes and using similar tools.

It's also important to emphasize that literacy can be developed for specific academic contexts as well as workplace contexts —and that this is *different* than a skill-based approach. A skill-based approach ignores the settings that developing literacy will be used in. There is no effort to analyse specific literacy and learning practices in the academic setting that the student may be attempting to enter because there is an assumption that the student needs to develop a common base of skills that can then be transferred. This is likely a false assumption to make. Academic settings need to be analysed just as much as work settings to determine exactly how literacy is being used. The demands of a high school program for adults will be different from a college-based high school equivalency program, from a GED (General Educational Development) program and from a PLAR (Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition) program. Even though all four programs might lead to secondary school credits or a secondary diploma, all will have different kinds of literacy requirements.

... literacy can be developed for specific academic contexts as well as workplace contexts ...

Academic literacy development can be an important element within an employment preparation program. For example, it fits in very well in the PSW Preparation course where the goal is entry into a predominantly academic training program. It can also be a useful complement to the Childcare Assistant course where students may want to continue to develop academic skills for the future goal of entering a college-level ECE program. Academic literacy development may not seem to fit as well into the Retail Customer Service course, where there is no apparent academic link. However, a recent decision to provide an opportunity to obtain high school credits through PLAR has been enthusiastically received by retail students who view this as a means of helping them reach their long-term career goals. Finally, academic literacy development does not fit as well into the employment preparation course for adults with developmental disabilities. As a result, the degree to which academic practices are integrated into the content varies from class to class, and may even vary with the changing demands of a group within the same class.

Relating the 3Cs to achievement

When instructors were asked what they thought was the key indicator of achievement, they each discussed a different aspect of literacy as social practice. Carol said her students needed to know how to pick up on 'unspoken vibes.' In other words, they needed to learn about the values, expectations, pressures, beliefs, and meanings of a specific setting. Dianne's students were most concerned with gaining a deeper understanding of the ways people

carried out day-to-day activities, routines and interactions in the childcare settings. Susan's students had to focus mostly on gaining an understanding of the resources such as texts, materials, skills, feelings, and ways of knowing related to PSW training and the role of a PSW. Elizabeth was most concerned with helping her students develop positive and appropriate relationships with people. Below are excerpts from their conversations.

Carol: It's all about communication, which means being able to sell themselves, being comfortable with speaking and listening, following directions, and customer service protocols. It's very specific language and specific in different stores. They have to know the terminology in the job posting and be able to speak to it. They are asked about key words that appear on the job posting, such as problem-solving, team-player, suggestive selling, and multi-tasking.

They also have to know how to pick up on unspoken vibes. They don't sometimes understand all the unwritten rules and ways of doing things that a group has created. They might be doing something wrong but they're not being told they're doing anything wrong, but there are messages being sent. That's hard for a lot of people.

In one incident, a student entered the back stockroom wearing her coat and carrying her purse. The student later said to me, "I knew I was doing something that was not acceptable. I knew I was doing something wrong, but no one said anything to me." This was only her second day and she had breached protocol. As a loss prevention protocol, employees are not permitted to wear coats and purses in the stock room. These are such big things that you are judged on and determine whether or not you will be offered a job.

Dianne: Communication is also very important but it's more about their general language proficiency. We can learn the childcare talk, but they have to also be proficient overall.

They also have to know how to interact and play with children in ways that support child development and learning. They know how to interact but not necessarily how to sit and play. It may be a cultural difference. It's not just play but it's also learning. It's hard for them to learn that. The first thing I teach them before they ever go into a childcare centre is to get down to the children's eye level.

Dianne explained how a former student was judged negatively because she insisted on standing and refused to get down to speak to the children. When Dianne saw her supply teaching, she knew the supervisor would not be satisfied with her as a supply staff member.

Susan: The greatest learning challenge for my students, who are trying to enter a PSW training program, is quite different. To get into PSW training, the challenge is mostly academic. They have to pass an entry test that focuses on comprehension and English grammar. In general, they use material that has something to do with health. One provider has a test of English grammar and spelling. They are looking for Grade 10 English. If they enter my class with a reasonable literacy skill level (LBS 2+) they can get there.

It's easier to prepare them for the interview. The one thing they have to learn about the role of the PSW is to call the supervisor as soon as something goes wrong. They don't call the family or try to address a serious problem on their own. They really need to understand the roles and responsibilities of the job as a PSW. This is something they will be asked about at the entry interview.

Elizabeth: Communication is key for my students. It is also important to focus on interpersonal skills. For many of my students they need to understand how to be in a professional or collegial relationship, how to let go of negative interactions and promote healthy and respectful positive interactions. Getting the job is difficult enough. But for my class what's always in the back of my mind is helping them learn how to keep that job. That's where they sometimes lack success. They need coping skills. They need to accept they aren't perfect, and neither is anyone else. Just because [they] haven't yet done something doesn't mean they can't try it. It's about building their confidence and self-esteem, and accepting it's okay to make a mistake.

Making the transition from skills and tasks to practices

Carol: The traditional approach was clashing. It was a filler. For the students I had it wasn't that important, it wasn't necessary. I don't do anything with sentences, grammar or spelling. I tried that at first, and for me it was almost a safety net in case I ran out of things to do. Some students were really keen but they were the successful ones. They looked forward to that proof that they were smart. I did this for years: Monday you give the vocabulary and Friday you give the test. I stopped doing it. I found it was very obvious who was good at this and who wasn't. How much time could I spend on that? How relevant was it? Quite frankly it wasn't relevant. They now need to know words and expressions such as lingerie, suggestive selling and power hour. I started making it store specific. Take a phrase like 'power hour'. I never knew what that was before. It's those kinds of things, that's the kind of text. It's not very much, but it's the application.

I ask them, while they're in their placement, to not just parachute in, do their four hours and leave. They have to come back with the names of the designers, with the sales that are on that week, with the different kinds of bras. There was

a bra-fitting workshop and I had one of my students take it. It's that type of thing. I get them to go in and look for learning opportunities. They can read the bulletin boards in the staff room and bring that back. That's how I know the vice-president's vision because they bring me that information and then I can develop material from there.

Christine: I still get caught in this idea of literacy as this thing we have to explicitly teach. When I asked you [Elizabeth] what you do to help students read the recipes used in the coffee shop, I had it in my head that maybe you use a picture and do a matching-type exercise, or fill in the blanks, or some other similar activity. And you kindly said, "No, they read the recipe, walk to the pantry, find the item, bring it back, use the item as instructed in the recipe and know whether or not they are successful when they pull the muffins out of the oven."

That's what I'm trying to unravel, this idea I still have in my head when I hear the word literacy that it means something we have to develop, something we have to teach explicitly. It's sometimes a challenge to remember that it will be learned without a worksheet. Literacy learning doesn't have to look like school; it simply has to look like life.

Literacy learning doesn't have to look like school; it simply has to look like life.

TABLE 4.2: Comparing activities when learning to read a label

Skill and task-based activities to learn to read a label	Practice-based activities to learn to read a label
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Match printed text with a picture of the item • Choose item from a group of similar items • Identify text in isolation (re-write differently than label, remove picture cues) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read text in recipe, go to cupboard, scan products, retrieve item from cupboard • Use item as directed in recipe, i.e. scoop out one cup
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduce similar text sight words, i.e. brown sugar, white sugar, white flour • Analyse text based on phonetics and relate to similar words, i.e. brown relates to '--own' word family (clown, down, town, etc.) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Retrieve similar items from cupboard (brown sugar, white sugar, icing sugar, white flour, whole wheat flour) and identify each • Explain differences amongst sugars and flours • Go to grocery store and identify larger variety of sugars and flours • Choose items used in kitchen from grocery store shelf

Elizabeth: If I put the words they have to use to bake muffins on a reading test, lots of my students would not be able to read those words. But they can bake the muffins with the recipe. If they see a bunch of letters and know that they represent brown sugar, no matter how they figured that out, isn't that literacy?

When paper is used, the content is focused on personal development activities, rarely literacy skill development. Literacy revolves very much around actual jobs. That's about the only literacy that is taught, those recipes.

I can't say I try to improve their literacy, but it is improving simply by using a variety of texts to learn and do other things.

Dianne: I had one student whose reading improved a lot and I think it was simply because so many of the words are repeated. It would be interesting to see if she would do as well with a piece of text not connected with childcare.

Christine: We've talked about that idea before. We know that students can see tremendous development in a targeted, meaningful area that they are fully engaged with, but this may not transfer to other areas.

Elizabeth: Of course not. It's the same for any of us. I may know very little about computers, be uninterested and not be able to pronounce the words, but that doesn't mean I'm not literate, well maybe with computers. It's the same principle.

Susan: There may be some transfer. For example, in their decoding skills, and speed. I notice they produce their work much more quickly.

Carol: I see that the soft skills are developed—organizing themselves, their presentation skills.

Elizabeth: I think confidence has a lot to do with it. The better they get, the more they do, the quicker they do it and the happier they are. For students with developmental disabilities, and I think for all of us, success breeds success.

Using authentic materials

Discussions around the use of authentic materials in adult literacy programs arise from a certain perspective. When thinking about what is authentic or not authentic, discussions focus on literacy activities that are done only for school purposes compared to activities done for real-life purposes. I've made many similar comparisons throughout this book. The perspective is often one in which a tutoring pair, class or program maintains its role as a literacy learning program but makes connections to the day-to-day activities that students participate in. Then, authentic materials are collected from various settings

and brought into the classroom or program. They are in essence removed from the ways they are actually used because the people, setting, activities and even resources may change. There is though a different way to think about the use of authentic materials. From the perspective of the instructors who are so actively engaged in learning environments other than a classroom, such as a job practice setting or job placement, there is little distinction between authentic and not authentic. In fact, instructors rarely use the term as they discuss the types of materials and resources they use.

When using authentic materials, it is important to:

- ▶ Analyse how the materials are actually used in specific settings; as soon as the documents are removed from the setting that they are actually used in, they lose their authenticity;
- ▶ Support students in using the materials the way they will be used in that setting; the activity can quickly become a skill and task-based activity when the document is disengaged from the people who use it, the way it is used and meanings assigned to it; and
- ▶ Balance the need to provide learning support with the loss of authenticity if the document is removed from the setting; most students recognize the artificiality of attempting to complete documents outside of the setting they are used in, and may question the purpose of completing documents differently than the way they are used.

as soon as the documents are removed from the setting that they are actually used in, they lose their authenticity

Comparing skill and task-based and practice-based approaches

The chart that follows compares learning in our former program, when a skill and task-based approach dominated, with learning in our current program, which uses more of a practice-based approach driven primarily by specific settings that students want to enter. Although the chart presents the two approaches separately, program activities are not always so neatly aligned, and instructors may incorporate elements of both approaches depending on the learning activity and student requests. It is useful though to make a comparison of the two approaches in such a defined manner to help think about different possibilities. The main idea to keep in mind when comparing the approaches is the concept of teaching literacy differently from the way it is actually used. For example, if a student needs to complete a form at work that only requires point form, is it necessary to insist the student learn how to write using complete sentences? Is learning to write a complete sentence an

integral indicator of being a more literate person or is it only important when that skill is needed to complete a specific activity? Does an inability to write grammatically correct sentences make us less literate if we are able to handle the literacy demands of our daily life?

TABLE 4.3: Comparing skill and task-based and practice-based approaches

	Skill and task-based approach	Practice-based approach
What is being learned (content, ways of thinking about literacy)?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Generalized and often abstract knowledge that is assumed to be easily transferable to different contexts (transfer may require planning and overt instruction) • Focus was on learning literacy skills (phonics, punctuation, complete sentences, etc.) and tasks (letters, forms, newspapers, etc.) in isolation from a real application or use; such skills are seen as potentially useful for some unforeseen application • Content was divided into subjects such as grammar, spelling, reading, math, etc. and it may have been difficult for students to see how these connected to the way they used literacy at work and in the community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Context specific knowledge that may or may not be transferable • Focus on learning the social practices (thinking, communicating, relating, doing, understanding) of a specific setting; literacy skills are learned but only those that are integral to a specific use • Content components are an integral part of the overall learning goal, i.e. students can recognize how smaller components of learning are directly related to overall purpose and goal
Who/what decides what should be learned?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Depending on the class focus, the curriculum may have been preset by a publisher, or the program • Even in a student-centred program, decisions about what to learn may have been determined by the student, but how learning occurred was guided by a pre-set curriculum or a set of outcomes and performance indicators produced externally, by the funder, program, or a publisher 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decisions about what to learn and how this needs to be learned are guided by the demands of the setting in which learning will be used; rarely is this recorded in a book but is part of the knowledge and practices of the people in particular settings • After analysing these settings, students, instructors and employees (i.e. work placement supervisors) are involved in determining what needs to be learned
What is the role of the literacy instructor?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gate-keeper and nurturer; determined who moved on and when, who was successful or not based on levels 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bridge and interpreter between literacy learning and demands of a setting outside the program, between sociocultural expectations and students' experiences, and between the students' ways of knowing and other ways of knowing

	Skill and task-based approach	Practice-based approach
Where does the learning usually occur?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Within a classroom or class-like setting, namely a place separate from the domains (home, community, work) in which the learning was to be used • Classroom became a world unto itself, and also became an escape for some 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Within the actual setting in which new learning will be used or within a setting that closely mimics the real thing • Classroom becomes a secondary learning environment, a place to reflect on, discuss, and experiment with new knowledge from the primary learning setting
How do students and instructors engage with text?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on manipulating symbols and representations that took the place of real objects (tools, equipment, materials), i.e. students learn about fractions using worksheets and diagrams • The text was always the primary focus of learning activities; there was a pressure to ensure that all activities had a text element 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New learning is not separated from the real objects (tools, equipment, materials) that are used in various contexts, i.e. students learn about fractional amounts when doubling or halving a recipe while baking • Texts are an aspect of learning; they are part of an array of learning activities that may or may not have an apparent connection to text
What experience or prior knowledge is needed?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Content is learned in a “building block” format that assumes preceding blocks must be learned before moving on; people are grouped according to level or which building block they are currently working on 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Both novices and experts are engaged with the same content (e.g., during a work placement a student works with others who have experience)

Changing roles for instructors

When instructors were asked to describe their changing roles as the program shifted its approach, they discussed how they were more of a nurturer when the program was immersed in a traditional skill-based approach, but became more of a mentor as the program evolved. Susan explained the change in her role (*italics are mine*).

When I first began it was a program like many others in which we just wanted to help people. That's a really good reason for coming to work and working with the students, *but is it really helping them just because you want to help?* It was more about that before. We think that being a very literate person is good, and we would help them be happier and reach their goals. Thinking that's what it was all about more or less, just strengthening their ability to be participating and productive citizens. I was there, teaching them but not to the same degree. Now it's more of a mentor

role combined with teacher. I really teach; I push them. I have to because they're getting credits [in partnership with high school credit program for mature students]. They have to produce.

Carol quickly summed up how she perceived her current role: "It's mentoring, professional mentoring with a good heaping of personal involvement. They have problems, barriers, that's why they're here. There's only so far you can go professionally and emotionally. But they learn that they can trust you."

**It's mentoring,
professional mentoring ...**

According to Dianne, her role has also changed significantly:

"I felt I was teaching them before but when I was teaching, they weren't learning." She went on to explain how the childcare assistant course that was developed in partnership with a childcare centre encompasses a set of expectations that students must meet in order to pass the placement portion of their course. "There's a pass and failure component to mine. We've gotten stricter and I've gotten better at handling that. I feel like I give them the tools in class and they have to apply them in the childcare." In essence, she has become the trainer for the childcare centre.

Carol agreed that she also has expectations based on both the specific demands of the work placement and her own awareness of the demands of the workplace in general. "I treat my class like a work placement. I have all these expectations that I tell the students. I have to do this to prepare them for the placement. They have to get there on time. If they can't get to the class how will they get to a job?"

All four readily agreed that their jobs have become more satisfying and meaningful. Carol said, "I feel I'm a better teacher. I know I am. I'm very focused. I've become more invested in my students." And Dianne added, "It's now a lot more satisfying. We see results."

Summary

The most striking difference between a traditional skill and task-based approach to developing literacy activities compared to a social practice-based approach is the amount of learning and understanding required by each. Not only does a skill and task-based focus have a restrictive view of the learning needed to achieve employment goals, but the learning it does deem to be important (the accumulation of literacy skills and application of these skills to complete specific tasks) is context specific and may not always transfer from the classroom to a particular workplace setting. In effect, if only skills and tasks

are taught, students will develop a much narrower range of abilities that may be difficult to transfer. They will not form a base of confidence and knowledge that can be used in other settings. A focus on developing practices, on the other hand, opens the potential for learning as it addresses an array of knowledge, skills and abilities, many of which are far more challenging and complex than a narrowly defined set of skills and tasks. Most importantly, practice-based activities support the development of career-related skills that likely do transfer from one setting to another: skills such as negotiation, collaboration, problem-solving, as well as knowing how to balance values, expectations, pressures and meanings, and gaining acceptance in new and different workplace communities.

... practice-based activities support the development of career-related skills that likely do transfer from one setting to another ...

Marlene's story

Marlene talks about all the steps she took to get a job, and how this job is a stepping-stone for her before entering a healthcare training program.



MY NAME IS MARLENE and I'm from the beautiful island of St. Lucia. From the age of 5 to 14, I went to primary school. Then I did 1½ years in vocational school, which I didn't complete. I'm 31 years old and I have three kids.

I came up to Canada on March 11, 2003. When I came here I wasn't thinking about school at all — I was thinking about being a PSW (Personal Support Worker).

Early in 2005, my deceased fiancé's aunt suggested I go ahead and upgrade my English, since I wanted to become a PSW. I contacted the school board and talked to Christine (Intake Instructor). She suggested that I go to the Health Care

Preparation class. Whilst I was in school, I started working as a housekeeper at The Ottawa Mission.



This is my co-worker and he's making the bed for one of the clients. He started working after me and, one day whilst he was working with me, we started talking. Then I asked him how he came to learn about The Ottawa Mission. He told me a friend of his told him and he sent in his resumé before mine. Then he told me the Manager of Human Resources called him and she told him they took another girl because the girl had more experience and qualifications than him. I asked him when that was and he said a week ago. Then I knew the girl was *me!*

When I went to the interview, every time I answered her questions she would say, "That's what I'm looking for! ... That's what I'm looking for!". If it wasn't for here in this class, I don't think I'd be there. Without all I learned ... I don't know ... I would have gone blank or whatever. The last question, she asked me to "sell myself" and say why she should hire me. I said, "I'm a hardworking person, I'm reliable, I'm honest" and I kept on going on and on.

I think First Aid is a good thing to have because of the people there at The Ottawa Mission. Some of them will come in and they're drunk and they can fall and break their leg or something, so you never know what can happen. I'm really happy I did the First Aid here at school — if something happened at work, I feel I would know what to do.

When I went to the interview, every time I answered her questions she would say, "That's what I'm looking for!"



These are just safety tips at work ... things you need to know. It's on the bulletin board. If something happens, you know who to go to in what department. On the large poster it says first you do First Aid, second you get to the hospital. If something happened to a client you let a co-worker know and stuff like that. The fourth step is about WSIB. The rest of the things on the board are about safety, coping with stress and stuff like that.



Here I'm putting clothes in a dryer. They gave me training — it's really big that machine. Just one-on-one training, what to do and how to go about doing it. You can't put large amounts of clothes in the dryer. You have to set the machine using the keypad. As you can see, they have instructions. After you finish, there's a certain way to fold everything. You can't put the hospice stuff together with the shelter things. Because some of the hospice people are really sick, they can't wash their things together with the shelter clothes. Some of the people are in a 6-month program for drug and alcohol addictions. They stay there for 6 months and

then after that they get a certificate and they leave the shelter.

From the interview, she told me some of the clients are nice. It's safe ... they're really nice. Some of them are really nice. For me, it's not difficult.

I knew about working with people because back home my first job was in a factory and we had to work together. It comes to the same thing — you can't be mad at that person. Back home, if you have a problem with one person, you have a physical fight. Here, it's totally different. You just go to the supervisor. If I go back home, the way I'm doing it here is the way I'll do it there — the same.

Working on a team, you respect everybody — you have to respect their opinion. I really came about working as a team from here at school. Doing our work, if one person doesn't know something and that person will ask. We will then talk about it. Working in a team in the class, well at work it's the same thing. For example, if I'm doing the hospice and I'm done, I'd go and help the person in the laundry room or go on the first floor and help them or something like that.

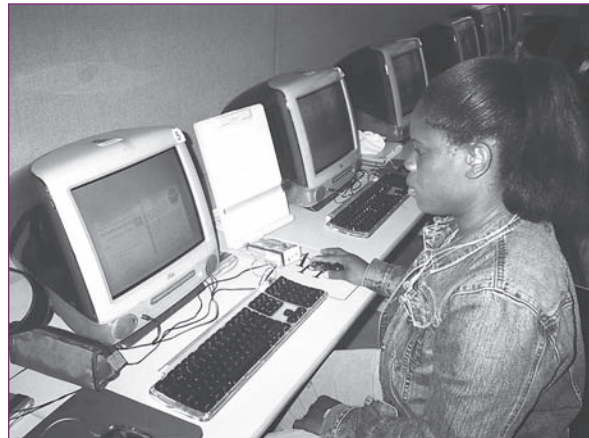
Working in a team in the class, well at work it's the same thing.

One day, I was mopping the floor and I only put one 'wet sign' and a co-worker told me "No, you have to think about the people here. Some of them are old and they could fall." He was really nice about it. The PSW told me another time, too. She said, "When they're upstairs they can't see us mopping, so when they come down the stairs it's good to have a sign there." She was really nice about it, too.

Back home three years ago, I didn't even know how to put a computer on. When I came up here, my deceased fiancé's secretary put little sticky things to show me what keys to use. My neighbour helped too. Here at school I learned a little more, like using the shift key for capital letters, the tab key, and printing just a part of something.

A friend had a resumé, so I looked at hers and did mine the same way. I went to the OCISO (Ottawa Community Immigrant Services Organization) job search workshop. I knew I wanted to be a PSW. I took a sheet, put down my occupations and education in pencil. I typed it in on my own computer and my neighbour finished it for me for formatting. At school, I worked on my resumé, too. I added some things and formatted it.

This is one of the PSWs at work. To be a PSW, she told me that you have to know computers. She said they have to clock in, record stuff on the computer, and they have to do some daily reports before they leave. That's really what I want to be, a PSW. Just to care for people.



Even though I'm not a PSW, as a housekeeper I go into people's rooms to clean and sometimes they talk to me. One guy, every day I have to go and see him and he'll talk to me. One lady, she shows me her daughter's pictures. Although we talked about it in class, how some people would be lonely, now seeing it with my own two eyes, I can really feel for them.

Some of them don't like us doing their rooms every day. If they won't let me go in, just in case the nurse comes and she sees the garbage in there, I write it down, the room number and everything. If they ask me about it later, I can take out my paper and show them. There's one guy who doesn't care. If they don't see me, some will leave a note on my cart saying 'Clean my room'.

I need some more training because everybody's not the same and, although the PSW job's the same, a certain agency and the way they do it is totally different. I need to learn how to cope with elderly people more, how to work with these people more, doing things the right way. I have to go to school to do the PSW course and the placements.

For the PSW entry test at the training college, I needed to learn about health and the infection cycle. I had to study English because my English wasn't really that good. I learned more at school and it helped me with that test. But with the other PSW entry test, it was more about how to go about helping people and doing things. I studied all that here. For all the questions, I really knew what to write because I studied it here. You must also know how to read and understand it.

That picture's about food handling certification. I did it this term at school and I just got my certificate in the mail! I'm thinking about being a PSW and it's really good to do. It's really safe to know what you're doing — working with different people. If the people are really sick, you can't have them getting sicker and sicker. And I never know what can happen with my job, so being able to work with children and the elderly, it's really good.



CHAPTER FIVE

Connecting theory and practice

IN THIS FINAL CHAPTER, I bridge theory and practice using what I'm calling a social practice analysis tool. The tool, essentially a set of guiding questions, is based directly on descriptions of literacy as social practice developed by David Barton and Mary Hamilton, which were briefly introduced in Chapter 1. The intent of such an analysis is to change the way we look at literacy from skills and tasks to practices. It can be a challenge to see something differently at first, and we have to push ourselves beyond what we already know. The social practice analysis tool can be a way to start seeing literacy differently. After a while, it will no longer be needed as new ways of looking become more familiar. Following an explanation of the analysis tool, I will provide two examples of how it can be used and relate these to the development of student learning plans and related learning and assessment activities. Then I will make a connection between a social practice perspective of literacy and learning outcomes, using very similar theoretical ideas. Finally, I will introduce possible ways these ideas can be used to develop assessment activities, and to even initiate different kinds of discussions about accountability.

The social practice analysis tool can be a way to start seeing literacy differently.

A social practice analysis tool

What does it really mean to say we now understand literacy as social practice? To better understand what literacy as social practice is, I refer to¹⁴ the following description from Barton and Hamilton (1998) and Hamilton (2000). Understanding literacy as social practices means literacy is shaped by:

¹⁴ I changed the name of one of the four terms from artifacts to resources to make it more accessible. The meaning is maintained.

- ▶ The **settings** within which the activity takes place, including the physical setting and the values, expectations, pressures, beliefs, and meanings of that setting, e.g., an activity that is carried out in a welfare office, at a library, or in a classroom;
- ▶ The **activities** performed by the people engaged in the literacy activity including the routines that might regulate that action, e.g., completing an application for unemployment benefits, or reading a memo from a supervisor outlining new safety procedures;
- ▶ The **participants** interacting with written texts including persons who may not be present but still have influence, e.g., the harsh childhood teacher who is present in the student's mind when doing a certain literacy activity; and
- ▶ The **resources** of the activity, including tools, texts, materials, skills, feelings, and ways of knowing, e.g., a student who uses the Internet to find information, but has difficulty controlling the scroll bar and mouse, is motivated by the content, but is predominantly an oral learner.



Hamilton (2000) suggests we can use photographs to begin to understand literacy as more than a set of skills on the page. A picture can be used to 'record' a literacy event (an activity that involves people interacting with text) and can then be examined to *infer* the practices (the unseen elements that shape the event). For example, in the above photo, we see the *setting* for a literacy event is a room devoted to learning about health. We can infer that there is a tone of seriousness and focus on a particular task. I also know that the room is a classroom and this in itself carries its own set of values and beliefs. The main *activity* is deciphering and understanding a first aid training manual. One of the women (second from the right) seems to be leading the activity while two others are supporting her directly as they are both focused on the same text. The woman leaning to manipulate the stuffed animal is likely providing support by using the animal to demonstrate directions in the text. The *participants* in the event appear to be working in a collaborative way. Although one seems to be leading the activity at this point, there is nothing

to suggest that this role is fixed. The instructor is not visible, and the women appear to be their own teachers. *Resources* include two open manuals, the stuffed animal being used to help understand the text, which consists primarily of illustrated instructions explaining standardized first-aid procedures. Both the content of the text (first-aid vocabulary and procedures) and the learning approach (reading to learn how to do instead of simply doing) would be unfamiliar to the students. Insights like these (and there may be many others) help us to see how literacy learning is influenced and shaped by a variety of seen and unseen factors.

TABLE 5.1: A social practice analysis tool

Elements that shape literacy as a social practice	Questions to Guide an Analysis
Describe the <i>setting</i> , within which the activity takes place, including the physical setting and the values, expectations, pressures, beliefs, and meanings of that setting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where does the activity take place? • How does the setting affect the activity? • What is the overall feeling in the setting? • What is accepted and not accepted? • Who/what decides what is accepted or not?
Describe the <i>activities</i> , performed by the people engaged in the literacy activity including the routines that might regulate that action	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What tasks are being performed? • How do people work together? Who helps and who doesn't? • How do people talk to each other? • Who or what decides how things are done?
Describe the <i>participants</i> interacting with written texts including those who may not be present but still have influence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who is part of the activity? Who isn't? • What are people's roles (e.g., who is the boss)?
Describe the <i>resources</i> of the activity, including tools, texts, materials, skills, feelings, and ways of knowing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What tools, materials and equipment (including computers) are used? • What skills, such as literacy, numeracy, and technology, etc., are needed? • What kind of previous knowledge and experience are needed? • What kinds of critical thinking, understanding, and problem-solving are needed?

Such a description cannot only be used to help us see what a particular literacy activity looks like, as suggested by Hamilton (2000), but I think it can also be used to guide the development of learning activities. Also based on Hamilton's (2003) work, I developed the chart below. The responses to the questions can be used in the students' learning plan and/or the instructors' teaching plan.

Although the instructors in our program never used this tool to develop their own course curriculum, they were in fact answering each of the questions in their own way as they carried out their analysis of the specific workplace settings their students hoped to enter. I'm presenting it now as a possible way to readily grasp the understandings instructors developed about literacy as a social practice over many months, even years. One of the most striking aspects of these questions is that only two of them directly address skills and tasks.

The analysis tool can be used in a variety of ways to help gain a thorough understanding of literacy as a social practice. For example, it could be used to analyse a workplace activity in which literacy plays a role, the difference between school-based and work-based activities that occur in one program, or the activities (both directly and indirectly literacy-related) integral to performing a specific job. To illustrate a way to use the tool, I will analyse a literacy event that actually occurred at a work site. Then I will provide an example of how the tool can be used to analyse a specific job. In addition, I will provide an example of one approach that could be used to take the results of the analysis and use them to develop a student's learning plan and related learning activities. Finally, the tool will be compared to a traditional skills and task analysis that is commonly used in workplaces to determine the learning needs of workers.

Analysing a literacy event

Senait had lived in Ottawa for eight years before entering the employment preparation program. She lived on her own and did not have any close family members in the city. She had come to Canada as a refugee from Eritrea with the intention of finding work in order to sponsor her mother and younger sister. She had not worked before coming to Canada but did manage to complete high school before immigrating. She attended ESL classes off and on for five years and found work cleaning offices in the evenings. She lived in a partially subsidized one-bedroom apartment and held on to her dream of sponsoring her family.

When she came to the employment preparation program she said she wanted to find a job other than cleaning, which was becoming arduous. She was attracted to the idea of learning to use a cash register, which she hoped would be the skill she could market to employers in order to find a job other than cleaning. Her goal was to find full-time employment in a retail setting and save enough money to begin the sponsorship process.

As part of the program, a job placement at a discount department store was arranged. The first day at her placement was a disaster. She arrived late, leaving the placement instructor waiting for nearly half an hour. Finally, she appeared and explained that she had taken the wrong bus. Attempting to salvage the first day, Carol suggested they talk about the issue later and not let it interfere with the meeting she had pre-arranged with a store supervisor. They were late for the meeting and had to page the supervisor.

While in the employee staff room, Senait was directed to a locker and given a combination lock. She, like any employee, would be able to put away her personal belongings before starting her placement shift. She had never used or even seen a combination lock before. Senait looked at Carol then stared at the lock in her hand.

Then, Senait was given a page of alphabet stickers and told to put her name on her locker. She froze. Again, she was faced with a task that had absolutely no connection with any of her past experiences. This third potential failure was too much, and Senait simply stared at the colourful letter stickers. Carol recognized what a devastating impact this was having on her student. She mentally kicked herself for putting Senait in this position. She quietly asked the supervisor for some time alone with Senait to show her how to use the lock and to help her place her name on the locker. The supervisor understood and added it wasn't the first time such a situation had arisen. Carol now has a selection of combination locks and stickers for her students to use before entering a similar situation.

she was faced with a task that had absolutely no connection with any of her past experiences.

If literacy and numeracy in this instance were only viewed as a set of skills, then this would lead to the assumption that Senait didn't know how to write her name and didn't know how to count. This was not the case. There was an accumulation of sociocultural factors that shaped this moment, which are outlined below.

TABLE 5.2: Analysing a literacy event

Describe the <i>setting</i> , within which the activity takes place, including the physical setting and the values, expectations, pressures, beliefs, and meanings of that setting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff locker room at a discount department store • Supervisor followed procedure for all new employees, although student was only on placement; maybe done to help make student feel welcome • No one else in the locker room at the time so all attention was on the student • Senait was late on the first day of her placement
Describe the <i>activities</i> , performed by the people engaged in the literacy activity including the routines that might regulate that action	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Senait was supposed to unlock, place her coat in, and then relock her locker, before continuing orientation with the supervisor • She had to find letters for her name, peel off and place in order to identify the locker assigned to her • From the supervisor's point of view this was a very superficial activity, but from the student's view it was a huge challenge • It was crucial for the job coach to intervene in a way that didn't make the supervisor think there was an issue and didn't embarrass the student
Describe the <i>participants</i> interacting with written texts including those who may not be present but still have influence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supervisor who would be overseeing placement • Job coach who brought student to first day of placement and who was to help support the student • Senait who was very nervous and had little confidence in her abilities
Describe the <i>resources</i> of the activity, including tools, texts, materials, skills, feelings, and ways of knowing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Combination lock that a student had never used before • Peel off letters on a sheet of paper with many As, Bs, Cs, etc. • Senait knew how to write her name but had never seen or used letter stickers before • She had also never used a combination lock before

Analysing a job

The second analysis demonstrates how the same questions can be used to analyse a job. In this example of a cashier's job, I have gathered information from a grocery store's job ads, observations while being a customer at the store, and a conversation with a former cashier. This kind of in-depth analysis is an ideal way for students and instructors to gather information about a specific work environment that a student may want to enter. It's important to note that this kind of analysis is very setting specific, and could change from one work-site to another.

TABLE 5.3: Analysing a cashier's job in a specific setting

Setting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Busy 24-hour grocery store chain that uses part-time staff for the majority of shifts • Hard to get predictable shifts each pay period; schedule is made up every two weeks and changes often • Often understaffed and cashiers are asked to work extra shifts to cover • All cashiers follow a company guide that suggests speed and accuracy targets • Cashiers who become the employee of the month are the ones who meet these targets consistently • Overall excellence in customer service is not rewarded and can actually lengthen transaction times • Targets are measured by the software system which tracks time spent on each transaction, number of errors, and number of items scanned • Key attributes listed in a recent job ad for a cashier at a large grocery store chain: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • customer service, experience with cash system, team player
Activities	<i>Scanning/bagging</i>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scan items and input barcode manually as needed • Bag items and adjust bagging for canvas or other bags provided by customer • Resolve price discrepancies between amount on screen and customer's price seen in recent flyer or on a display sign • Call stock room staff for price checks • System will freeze when three items or more are scanned improperly; supervisor must be called to unlock • Memorize codes for products with inventory stickers such as fruit • Memorize prices of loose bakery items such as rolls • Refer to price list reference built into software as needed; need to know names of produce and bakery items • Sometimes help load seniors' personal grocery carts • Encouraged to make small talk about customers' products, e.g. "Isn't that new sauce great, I just bought some myself", etc.
	<i>Money transactions</i>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Money transactions • Quickly calculate amount received from customer and match with total on screen • Count change as needed and match with total on screen • Seniors often use cash and will count exact payment which can cause delays • Different card-swipe procedures for debit and credit cards • Verify receipt total with total on screen • Issue receipts and request signatures as needed for cash-back and credit card transactions • Occasionally must inform customers that their transaction cannot be processed • Students often request cash-back • Due to recent fraud, all cash-back requests must include name and phone number of recipient; this often leads to complaints

Participants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mostly young students from the nearby university work as cashiers; high turnover • Primary customers are students from the nearby university and seniors from a nearby apartment complex • Supervisor works at courtesy desk, seems to be very busy and resents having to assist cashiers who make errors • Store manager works in office behind one-way glass that overlooks cash line
Resources	<div><i>Scanning/bagging</i></div> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Store uses a graphic-based point of sale software/scanning system that displays the price of each item as it is scanned or inputted • Texts include price code stickers, prices, names of produce and bakery items • Skills include basic computer skills, specific skills needed to operate store's software system, customer service interaction skills, product identification • Doing several tasks at the same time, i.e. scanning, checking screen for accuracy, chatting with customer and bagging • Each cashier is given company guidelines to read; although the guidelines are not formally presented or discussed, failure to comply can lead to dismissal <div><i>Money transactions</i></div> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Graphic-based point of sale software/scanning system that displays the price of each item as it is scanned or inputted • Hand-held debit machine for customer use • Separate receipts for debit and credit card transactions • Texts include software program, debit machine messages

The analysis could also be used to determine what a student would have to learn not only do a particular job but also to meet the entry requirements of that job. The following kinds of job entry activities could be analysed:

- ▶ Applying for a job under the conditions required by the employer;
- ▶ Passing entry tests;
- ▶ Negotiating funding with social service agencies to take job training;
- ▶ Attending a job interview;
- ▶ Developing a resumé that the student can 'speak to'; and
- ▶ Arranging for police checks and health reports.

In many instances, learning the entry requirements of a job are just as important as learning the skills and gaining the knowledge needed to perform a job.

Developing learning activities based on the analysis

Once information from the analysis has been collected, the following questions could be used to help shape a learning plan outline and related learning activities.

- 1 What are the barriers to entering this specific workplace setting? How can they be addressed and overcome?
- 2 What are the employer’s stated and unstated expectations?
- 3 What are the student’s expectations?
- 4 Can the employer’s and student’s expectations be balanced? How can this be done?
- 5 How will employers, students and the program know that expectations have been met?

After developing responses to these questions, the following learning plan outline could be used to help organize learning and assessment activities. (This is the same format used to describe each of our employment courses in Chapter 3.)

TABLE 5.4: Learning plan outline sample

	Key learning topics	Key learning resources and activities	Examples of achievements
Program/job entry			
Credentials			
On the job			

Limitations of a skill and task analysis and Essential Skills

It is not a novel idea to analyse jobs in order to support students who are engaged in workplace learning activities. A common method of analysis in workplace literacy programs is a skill and task-based analysis similar to the one below. In such an analysis, literacy and work skills are isolated and categorized using subject-based groupings like reading, writing and numeracy or math skills. The activities of work are artificially subdivided and the primary focus is the development of literacy skills and not literacy practices.

TABLE 5.5: Example of a skill and task-based analysis of a cashier's job

	Tasks	Skills
Reading	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Product labels and bar codes • Identify different products, i.e. apples, lettuces, etc. • Product price reference screen • Scanned information on computer screen • Company guidelines and memos • Receipts including credit card and debit transactions • Credit card signature and name 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read numbers, codes, symbols, labels, prices, abbreviations, memos, procedural text • Scan text • Compare texts in different formats, i.e. cash vs. listed price or receipt vs. monitor display
Writing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manual input of bar codes on keyboard as needed • Circle total on debit and credit receipts • Signature on cash tally 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Key in numbers
Numeracy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Add bills and coins when customer pays • Count out change • Calculate prices to ensure accuracy if there is a discrepancy with computer 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Select correct notes and coins • Add coins and notes for payment • Count out change (calculation not usually required)
Listening/ Speaking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Small talk with customers • Focus on products as suggested by store guidelines • Use PA system to call for a price check or supervisor • Request information to complete credit and debit transactions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Speak clearly • Ask questions as needed • Monitor response to adjust amount of small talk

	Tasks	Skills
Thinking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organize products for bagging • Deal with price discrepancies • Know when supervisor is needed • Know who to call if a difficult question is asked 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prioritizing • Classifying • Problem-solving

Compare this analysis of a cashier's job to the one done previously in Table 5.3.

What information is missing when only skills and tasks are documented? In an analysis based on literacy skills and tasks, both the depth and breadth of literacy as a social practice could be disregarded.

A skill and task-based analysis does not capture the complex interactions between people, the setting, the resources and activities brought to life in the setting, nor the myriad of feelings, reactions, values and ways of knowing that accompany them.

Similarly, the Essential Skills framework developed by Human Resources and Skills Development Canada (HRSDC), with its focus on the development of skills and tasks, may limit the ways we support literacy learning for work. The framework uses nine descriptors to define, recognize and develop the skills of Canada's workforce (HRSDC, n.d.):

- 1 Reading Text
- 2 Document Use
- 3 Numeracy
- 4 Writing
- 5 Oral Communication
- 6 Working with Others
- 7 Continuous Learning
- 8 Thinking Skills
- 9 Computer Use

Close to 300 occupational profiles for entry-level positions such as automotive service technicians, bricklayers, childcare assistants, cashiers, and retail sales associates have been developed. Each profile describes how the nine essential skills are used in the various jobs. It is interesting to note that none of the instructors in our program have used the profiles to develop learning activities, particularly the ones directly related to childcare assistant, nurse

A skill and task-based analysis does not capture the complex interactions between people, the setting, the resources and activities

aides, cashiers and retail sales associates. While there is some consideration for context in the Essential Skills profiles, it is limited to a description of *what* is being done and not the how, who, where or why that also shapes learning.

Knowledge and skills is an important part of the ‘context’, but so is ‘identity’ —being able to look and act like a worker in a particular context are intertwined. Knowing and doing are not sufficient without displaying the appropriate identity with confidence (Falk & Millar, 2002, p. 53).

While the skill and task-based framework and some of its accompanying tools can be useful in providing descriptions of certain occupations and general expectations, it does not provide the practice-based framework needed to delve into how this learning might be shaped by people, settings, values, regulations, and interactions. The profiles are not able to account for the setting-specific differences a retail worker would encounter in a national department store compared to a local clothing shop. Nor do they help instructors understand pre-employment learning and entry requirements, an integral aspect of our work in adult literacy programs. Overall, the Essential Skills profiles did not contribute to our program development, which focused on supporting the work, learning and literacy activities of adults who encounter employment barriers. However, the practice-based approach being used in our adult literacy program has proven itself to be an effective means of developing all nine of the defined essential skills.

A new way to look at learning outcomes

Instructors in the employment preparation program are focusing on not just literacy learning but learning in general. One could argue that all literacy learning is in fact just learning because literacy extends into our lives in so many ways that we may not even recognize it. For example, when Carol discussed how important it is for her students to learn the specific language of the workplace, her focus was on oral communication. At first glance no literacy or text seems to be involved, but where did these terms come from? Many of the ways of talking in a specific retail setting can be linked to texts such as training manuals, marketing materials and human resource procedural guidelines and protocols. Similar evolutions of ways of talking exist in childcare and healthcare. It is important to expand this discussion to include learning theories for the following reasons.

- It is actually difficult to discuss literacy *without* talking about learning because the two ideas are deeply connected.

- ▶ It's important to see how both literacy and learning theories have developed very similar ideas related to social practice understandings.
- ▶ Understandings of literacy can be strengthened by understanding learning (and vice versa).

More importantly, particularly for this chapter's focus, a description of *learning* as social practice provides a set of terms and ideas that can be useful in a discussion of assessment and learning outcomes.

What instructors said was most important for their students to learn can be neatly aligned with theoretical ideas of *learning as social practice*. Wenger (1998) suggests learning is *doing* when we are actively engaged in the social practices of a particular group; learning is *becoming* when we change who we are and how we think about ourselves; learning is *belonging* when what we do and who we are is defined and validated by the community we are learning in; and learning is *experience* when we are able to make meaning from our active engagement in the world. If doing, becoming, belonging and experience capture the learning process, then practice, identity, community, and meaning capture its outcomes. As a result of doing, we learn new practices; as a result of becoming, we learn new ways of seeing ourselves and change our identities; when we feel a sense of belonging, we have been accepted as part of a learning community; finally, these kinds of experiences will help us to generate new meanings for ourselves and our world.

TABLE 5.6: Connecting learning as social practice with examples from instructors

Learning Process	Learning Outcomes	Examples of how instructors describe what students must learn to reach their goal
<i>Doing</i>	Engage in new practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "They have to know how to interact and play with children in a way that promotes child development and learning."
<i>Becoming</i>	Identity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "They really need to understand the roles and responsibilities of the job as a PSW."
<i>Belonging</i>	Part of new communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "They need to know how to pick up on those unspoken vibes. They don't sometimes understand all the unwritten rules and ways of doing things that a group has created." • "They need to understand how to be in a professional or collegial relationship."
<i>Experience</i>	Gain new meanings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "They have to know the terminology in the job posting and be able to speak to it." • "They have to pass an entry test that focuses on comprehension and English grammar."

Implications for assessment in literacy education

Although Wenger's theory of learning as social practice was developed primarily to understand learning outside of formal learning environments (a classroom or training room), its principles can be used to guide decisions that are made when designing a learning program.

If we believe...that knowing involves primarily active participation in social communities, then the traditional format does not look so productive. What looks promising are inventive ways of engaging students in meaningful practices, of providing access to resources that enhance their participation, of opening their horizons so they can put themselves on learning trajectories they can identify with, and of involving them in actions, discussions, and reflections that make a difference to the communities that they value (Wenger, 1998, p. 10).

Using ideas of learning as social practice to guide how we think about assessment in adult literacy education leads to a completely different set of questions to ask about student progress and program outcomes. The table below outlines the kinds of questions to raise if we are attempting to describe achievements from a social practice perspective. Imagine the possibilities if these were the questions we were most concerned with when measuring the achievement of students and programs.

TABLE 5.7: Creating new kinds of questions to guide assessment practices

Learning Process	Learning Outcomes	Assessment Questions
<i>Doing</i>	Engage in new practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Is the student using new literacy practices in the specified setting?• What are these practices?
<i>Becoming</i>	Identity	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Has the student achieved a goal that was clearly linked to a specific setting outside the classroom/literacy program?• Has the student gained a new sense of self related to meeting a goal and/or related to participating in the literacy program?
<i>Belonging</i>	Part of new communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Has the student made a transition from the program to a new learning/work community?• Is the student an active and accepted member of that learning/work community?
<i>Experience</i>	Gain new meanings	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Has the student developed new meanings and ways of knowing?• What are these?

Practices form and inform literacy learning

In the first chapter, I highlighted the way in which Lytle and Wolfe (1989) describe literacy across four domains—skills, tasks, practices and critical reflection. I also suggested that a focus on practices helps to inform the development of skills, tasks and critical reflection; and, in turn, each of these elements informs practices. Now, I'd like to take this idea one step further and suggest that skills, tasks and critical reflection are embedded in social practices.

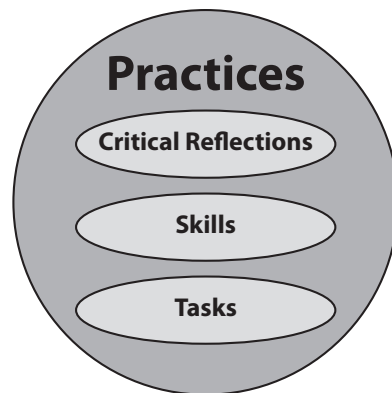


FIGURE 5.8: Skills, tasks and critical reflection are embedded in practices

For example, in the cashier job analysis, I analysed two key job practices—scanning/bagging and money transactions. The domain of literacy skills is aligned with the analysis of resources and includes understanding how to use a point of sale cash system, interpreting texts, codes, and symbols, basic computer skills, and memorization skills, etc. The domain of tasks is aligned with actions and includes scanning items, bagging groceries, positive customer interaction, various payment methods, etc. Finally, the domain of critical reflection is aligned with both the people and the setting, and includes balancing the employers' demands with customers' needs, negotiating scheduling, understanding when and how to ask for assistance and the implications of this, meeting the needs of a diverse group of customers, and questioning discrepancies between the employers stated values (customer service) and the values that are measured and rewarded (speed and accuracy), etc.

A focus on practices does not neglect the development of skills and tasks. Rather, it enhances their development by ensuring that only the skills and tasks that are used in a specific setting are developed. This is not limiting, considering that only the most basic literacy skills are transferable. There is no single set of identifiable literacy skills that can be developed to meet the needs of all adult life domains; therefore it is crucial to develop specific skills for specific uses, and these are informed by social practices. In addition, a focus on practices reminds us of the systemic and institutional demands that can become barriers; it is only through critical reflection that these become visible. Addressing such issues then reveals how apparently localized concerns, such as the cashier's speed and accuracy measures, are tied into more systemic and global rhetoric related to productivity and efficiency.

A focus on practices does not neglect the development of skills and tasks.

A practice-based accountability system?

Is it possible to create a practice-based accountability system? While the kinds of questions instructors and students can ask are a very useful way to measure personal achievements, can they be used by a program funder? Perhaps they can with some development. The provincial program funder in Ontario for example already has two key mechanisms in place — reporting on exit status and follow-up, and goal at intake (bold text in Table 5.9). Implementing the other reporting mechanisms presented in Table 5.9 would not be impossible. The potential of a practice-based accountability system is tremendous. Imagine the dialogue if, at all levels of program planning, we were focused on developing new literacy practices that ensure all students with employment barriers:

- ▶ Make a transition from the literacy program to a new learning or work community;
- ▶ Achieve personal goals and gain a new sense of self;
- ▶ Are active and accepted members of the community; and
- ▶ Develop new meanings and ways of knowing.

Imagine the dialogue if, at all levels of program planning, we were focused on developing new literacy practices ...

TABLE 5.9: A possible approach to reporting on literacy development

Learning Process and Outcomes	Assessment Questions	Reporting Mechanisms
<i>Doing</i> Engage in new practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is the student using new literacy practices in the specified setting? What are these practices? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Checklist based on social practice analysis tool and training plans
<i>Becoming</i> Identity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Has the student achieved a goal that was clearly linked to a specific setting outside the classroom/ literacy program? Has the student gained a new sense of self related to meeting a goal and/or related to participating in the literacy program? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Goal at intake On-line questionnaire or survey at intake and exit that explores learning confidence and growth
<i>Belonging</i> Part of new communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Has the student made a transition from the program to a new learning/work community? Is the student an active and accepted member of that learning/work community? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Exit status and follow-up at three and six months
<i>Experience</i> Gain new meanings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Has the student developed new meanings and ways of knowing? What are these? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Portfolio-based checklist categorized according to higher-order skills such as communication, working together, and problem-solving that are then assigned a value that can be recorded and reported

Summary

This chapter demonstrates a way to make theory work for practice. Extending the use of theory, specifically Wenger's description of learning as a social practice, to the area of accountability has been presented as a means of allowing programs to better respond to student needs and to improve overall program success. While this might be quite a departure from current accountability measures, I believe there is tremendous potential in looking at the ways programs are measured and held accountable using a social practice framework.

None of the instructors in the program have ever used the social practice analysis tool because they have learned to ask similar questions simply through experience. It would be interesting to see if they find the tool to be useful at this point or if it simply affirms their work and thinking about literacy development gained through experience. The purpose of introducing the tool is twofold: to connect theory and practice, and to provide some of the knowledge gained by years of experience in an encapsulated form that is ready to be put to use.

Catherine's story

Catherine focused her attention on the actual documents that she encounters in the workplace and describes the strategies she uses to deal with the texts.



MY NAME IS CATHERINE. I am the mother of two. I came to Canada in 1991. When I came to Canada, I spoke a little English. My first job was in Montreal for a sewing company making underwear. I worked there for ten years. I didn't have to read or write for this job. Then, I moved to Ottawa in 2001 and started to go to school. I work at three jobs: cleaning for a women's shelter and a private home, and as a childcare assistant in a childcare. I got the childcare job in 2004 after I took a childcare course.

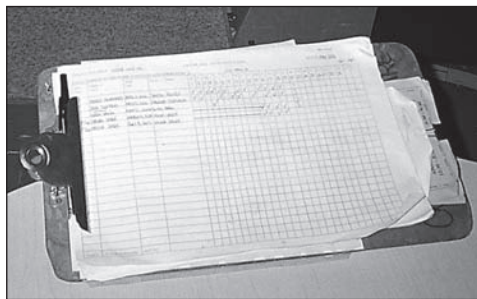
In my whole life two things bother me a lot. Not reading is the first. It is like you are blind. I see myself like disabled. For sure, I don't function well.

My jobs

I clean for a lady who is about 47 and works for the government. She leaves me notes to tell me what to do. One day I popped in. She was at home sick or something. I asked her "Is there something I can do for you?" She started crying. She was so down so I sat beside her and we talked, talked, talked. This was the first time I had talked to her. I had worked there for about a year. And I talked and talked and I said, "You have to be happy." I said "Listen, I come from Africa, I have two children, I have so many things going on in my life but you know sometimes it is hard because sometimes I have to be able to read every thing. And I am starting to have struggles doing my school work and my job." She asked me if I was working and I said "Yeah" and she said, "Oh, you are smart. You can do your ECE and go ahead." And I said, "That's my goal! But it is very, very hard for me because I started from the bottom and she was like "Ahhhh, I hear of people who never went to school but I never met one!" She was like "Anything I can do to help you to go to school. Anything, anything." I said right now I am working so I can't do much.

She prints and writes little notes to me. She used to write parts of words like T for thanks. It was like sending messages. Now she writes the whole word. It was hard, but now I know what she means. Every little note she writes, I get it. Sometimes I couldn't even reply to her but sometimes I did. Or, I go home, take my time, and find words and reply. Instead of giving the reply that day, I reply the following week. Because I wouldn't be able to do it, writing something when I have to rush, rush, rush. Reading and writing ... you need it everywhere, everywhere.

Reading and writing ...
you need it everywhere,
everywhere.

Reading and writing at work

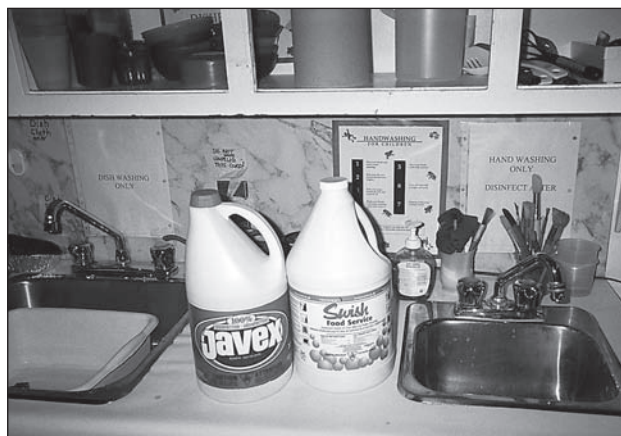
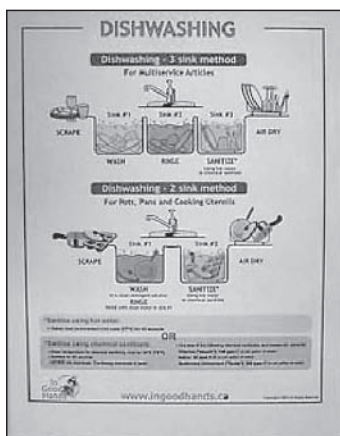
My supervisor at childcare leaves notes too. If I don't get it I call her. Sometimes I see just one word and I get it and I can figure it out.

This attendance sheet is hard to read. Some names are hard. First, I have to know the children's names and then find it.

I don't feel good about the file cabinet. All information is there. It is harder than attendance. I have to find things by matching. A coworker told me that every child had a file and how the file worked. By looking at the file, I figure it out alphabetically.

Three days ago a lady showed up to supply and there was no form for her to sign so I had to go look for the form for her to sign. I checked my bag and, thank God, I had the same, the yellow one, so I checked the number and then I saw where we sign.

At circle time you have to read books. It is getting better but it would be hard if I were working somewhere else, maybe, maybe, because there is just my supervisor and me and I am the person who is always doing the dishes. At circle time, she doesn't like to do the dishes, so I do the dishes and she does the circle. I don't think she knows that I have difficulty reading some books. I don't mind telling her, but I think she doesn't know. Sometimes I read to the kids so she doesn't know. For supply work, you have to fill in for the person who is away, so if they were doing the circle you have to do it. I pick the book myself, a book I know I am comfortable with.

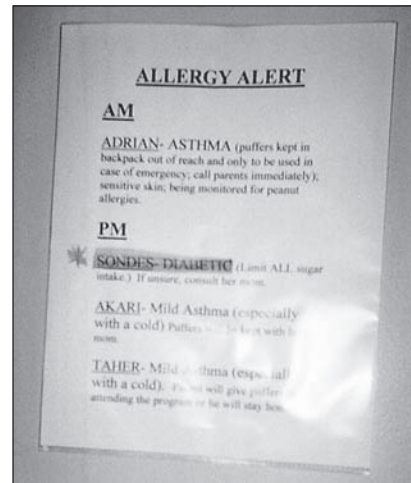
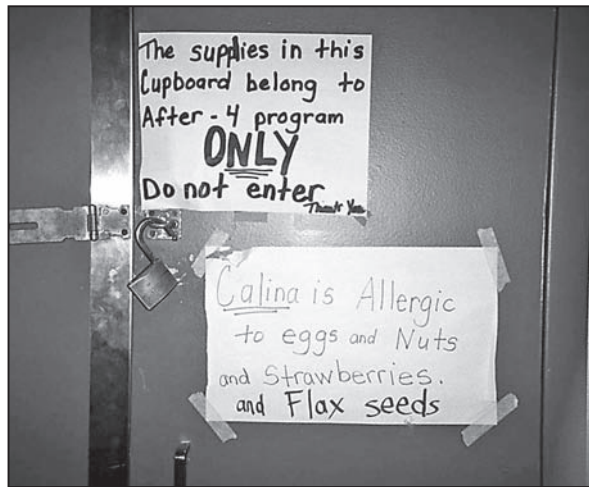


There are lots of signs I need to read at the childcare. This is a sign for washing dishes. It is a pretty good sign. It has pictures and we took it in the childcare course.

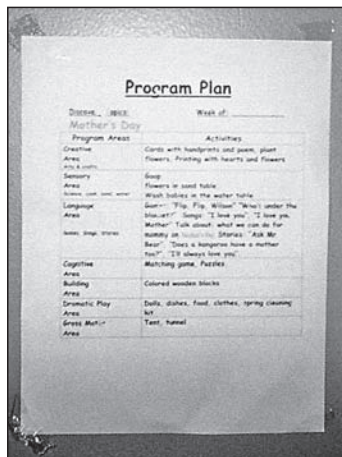
Swish and Javex, you measure. I can't read the labels to measure but I learned it in school. I learned this by doing, practicing in the placement.

I know the word allergy. I can figure out simple words like egg, peanut and dogs. If I don't know, I ask my coworkers.

I would have trouble with this one [below on the right] and would ask someone.



Every site is different. The program plan uses different vocabulary like gross motor. One time my supervisor asked me to do my own plan for the week. It involved both writing and reading. It was hard. I took it home. I had to find a picture of a shovel to know how to spell shovel. I had to go to books to find how



to spell stuff like art and car painting. At a bigger site, everyone has to do a daily plan, even for snack. It would be hard for me the first time and second time. For sure the first time would be *ahh* even though I want to.

Some signs are hard. Some are of the whole building. I look for the sign the first time I'm there and look for the word exit. I don't read the whole sign.

... but I try my best,
even with the little
time I have, to use it
to learn.

Right now the only thing that keeps me from learning is my work. That's the only thing I can say but I try my best, even with the little time I have, to use it to learn. But I don't get it. Maybe I don't study enough. Maybe there is something wrong with me. I know I do too much at home. Also, I always have something to do, for sure. But, you know, sometimes

I have a little time to study, so it is not anybody and it is not anything I can say. Because I'm working, I can't go to school as much as I should. So, I'm not going to blame anybody or anything. My reading is getting better. But, how I see it, if I don't go to school very often and I don't read at home, it goes down again. I think it should stay.

Learning on the job

Looking how people are doing it, that helped me learn. I copy. I learned a lot in a big site by watching others and seeing others' reactions. First I look.

For childcare, you need patience and communication and to accept people, children and parents, as they are. That's how I see it. Every child is different. Every person is different. Going to different places, working with people, you know every person is different. I get to know them and then I can deal with them.

I take people the way they are and I don't gossip. If someone says something to me about someone else I say, "Why don't you go and tell her?" I always knew people skills.

The job I want to have is the same job (childcare) but with an ECE diploma. It pays more. There are more job opportunities and I could learn more about my job.

People who help

My son helps. He reads everything. He says, "We have to sound it out". He helps me sound it out. So now, he helps me. If he gets notes from school, he reads everything.

If people know I have a problem they help, but I don't let them know. I feel embarrassed. Because of my level of speaking and my understanding, they don't know.

I get a bad feeling from hiding it. Surprised I can't get over it. People who are close to me, they don't know. Not even my best friends.

My parents don't know. My parents don't know, my sister doesn't know. Maybe my ex-husband knows, but he knows I am going to school so he doesn't know how I am doing now.

This guy, he is my best friend. I have known him twenty something years but he doesn't know me. He knows I am a smart girl. He knows I can do this. He keeps pushing me. "Go to college." He would be very surprised. Shocked.

People at church don't know me. Nobody knows me, who I am. They asked me to do the children's program. I am a deaconess this year. They offer me so many things to do. They see I can do it. That's how they see. "You can do this." I say, "No. I am going away." Because I know I can't do it. Reading the Bible, you know, you have to go to the front to read. Being a Sunday school teacher is not like playing with the children. You have to read to them. They call and offer me this and I say, "No". I don't know what would happen if I told them why. I would love to do things for them. I would really, really love to.

If people know I have a problem they help, but I don't let them know.

Conclusion and possibilities

UNDERSTANDING LITERACY as social practice not only expands our vision of literacy learning, but can also expand our vision of literacy program delivery. If programs look beyond skill and task-based approaches and focus on the array of communities and settings that adults participate in and want to participate in, then we can begin to envision new roles for literacy programs. The priorities for program development suggested by Falk and Millar (2002) are:

To establish the *need* for learning; second, to negotiate a common *purpose* for the projected activities; third, to design the necessary quality and quantity of *opportunities* for the learning events—formal and informal; fourth, to *embed knowledge, skills and identity* resource development strictly in achieving that purpose; fifth, to embed the learning as far as possible in meaningful *contexts*; sixth and finally, to *evaluate and celebrate* the achievement of the purpose and redefinition of further learning goals (p. 56).

What could program delivery look like if it adhered to the priorities presented above? Although the focus of my discussion has been on connecting literacy and work in an employment preparation program, these ideas reach far beyond the domain of work. Effective adult learning programs can have far-reaching societal impacts (Balatti & Falk, 2002), and can also be used to guide literacy program development in creating a variety of learning opportunities for adults.

Programs could look very different if their primary goal was to support the development of literacy practices, and program instructors could have a variety of different roles. There could be a continuum of programs and instructor roles with formal delivery structures at one

If programs look beyond skill and task-based approaches and focus on the array of communities and settings that adults participate in and want to participate in, then we can begin to envision new roles for literacy programs.

end, and informal structures at the other. For example at the formal end would be programs designed to help students develop primarily academic practices to be used to enter other academic settings such as adult high schools, colleges, etc. Programs might also partner with other adult education delivery organizations such as job trainers and public health educators to develop partnership delivery models in which literacy is embedded into the delivery of an array of adult learning opportunities. This could mean that the literacy educator works in another organization such as a community centre, or the health educator or employment trainer works with the literacy educator in the literacy program. Then, at the informal end of the continuum there could be a variety of initiatives and programs that support the development of literacy practices. Perhaps literacy educators would be hired to do literacy practice analyses of workplaces, including suggestions to the employer to support the development of literacy and other learning possibilities.

An important element of adult learning, particularly in relation to providing learning opportunities for adults who encounter multiple barriers, is to develop programs that combine services. One of the main criticisms of adult education and employment services is the absence of a cohesive and navigable system. In such a system literacy programs are too often isolated from related services such as job training, job counseling, skills upgrading and job placements. Seeing literacy as a skill to be acquired prior to accessing other adult training and education opportunities only entrenches the isolation. Literacy is an integral part of all adult education and training initiatives, and participation in these initiatives enhances literacy abilities. The development of literacy needs to be approached in a much more integrated and embedded manner. Understanding literacy as a social practice and not simply a set of acquired skills facilitates such an approach.

I would also emphasize that adult literacy instructors are a key element in providing services to adults who encounter multiple barriers. They, more than any other social service, employment service or health care provider, likely work with adults for more prolonged and intensive periods. They have gained a tremendous depth of knowledge and developed numerous programs and approaches to working with this population. Their knowledge extends well beyond literacy skill development, as they are involved in a variety of activities to support the overall well-being and employment, educational and community-related goals of adults. Adult literacy educators are a key resource in any education and employment system.

The development of literacy needs to be approached in a much more integrated and embedded manner.

Most of these ideas are not particularly new but they need to be repeated and emphasized. I hope that what I've also been able to provide is the inspiration and confidence to move these ideas forward. Perhaps our experiences, including our pitfalls along the way, the voices of the instructors and students, the introduction of supporting research, and a handful of strategies, could help to move these ideas into reality for your own programs.

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Appendix 1: A work placement guide

Purpose of a Work Placement

- ▶ To provide valuable work experience
- ▶ To gain an employer reference
- ▶ To learn work practices
- ▶ To see how literacy is connected to these practices and develop specific literacy practices
- ▶ To establish a connection with an employer who has available positions

Instructor's Role

- ▶ Provide literacy and learning support, intervention and interpretation.
- ▶ Guide the development of the parameters and expectations of the placement, balancing student needs and ability with employer's expectations.

Employer's Role

- ▶ Model typical work practices in a safe and supportive manner.
- ▶ Provide feedback and encouragement.
- ▶ Recognize the placement as a learning situation, not only free labour.

Student's Role

- ▶ Engage in the activities negotiated by the instructor, employer and student.
- ▶ Ask questions when needed.
- ▶ Seek support when needed.

Work Placement Overview

Before establishing a new work placement the following kinds of questions should be considered. If the response is negative, the viability of a particular work placement setting needs to be re-evaluated.

- ▶ Can students engage in the learning activities of a particular setting through either a work placement outside the program or a work practice setting?
- ▶ Do instructors and students have access to the learning content of a particular workplace through observation, collecting authentic materials, talking to people and actually working with the materials?
- ▶ Can instructors and students connect directly to the people in that setting? Can students participate in the setting alongside the other employees?
- ▶ Will students be welcomed and accepted into the setting? Will they value the learning that takes place? Will they see how it is connected to their employment goal?

Learning Activities

From our experience, a specific literacy challenge can usually be addressed at the placement site with assistance from the instructor. It is often the personal and social challenges that are more complex to address. These often become the focus of learning at the work site and also in the classroom on days when students are not on their placements.

Assessment Activities

Assessment activities focus on the work and literacy practices of a specific work site, work group or company.

Specific criteria can be developed based on the following:

- 1 Expectations of the employer for a student to become an employee, i.e. the job description.
- 2 Negotiations between the instructor and the employer to modify the job description in order to ensure the student is supported, challenged and not taking on responsibilities that could place the student in dangerous or vulnerable situations, i.e. not handling cash, not working alone, etc.
- 3 Goals and learning needs of the student, e.g., a student may need to focus on a certain aspect of the job to overcome personal barriers or to gain a specific skill.

Work Placement Models

In all models the work placement is integrated into the literacy program and the students participate in both a work placement and classroom learning at the same time. A placement is not tacked on to the end of a literacy learning session without follow-up and support. Developing a placement site takes time, patience and negotiation.

Off-site Model I

- ▶ A group of students with different employment goals work together
- ▶ The group's instructor oversees work placements in different sectors and at different locations based on students' goals
- ▶ One or two day(s) a week all students participate in their placement and the instructor visits each site to offer learning support
- ▶ Instructor directly addresses challenges (literacy, personal and social learning, communication, etc.) and/or notes more complex challenges that can be addressed in the classroom
- ▶ These work placement challenges form the basis of classroom learning activities

Off-site Model II

- ▶ A group of students with the same employment goal work together
- ▶ The group's instructor oversees work placements in one sector (childcare, food service, etc.) but these may be at different locations to accommodate all students on placement at the same time
- ▶ One or two day(s) a week all students participate in their placement and the instructor visits each site to offer learning support
- ▶ Instructor directly addresses challenges (literacy, personal and social learning, communication, etc.) and/or notes more complex challenges that can be addressed in the classroom
- ▶ These challenges form the basis of learning activities

On-site Model

- ▶ Use existing program facilities to create on-site work placements, i.e. a daycare centre, a resource room, a kitchen and lunchroom, a photocopy/mail room, reception, etc.
- ▶ Students could work alongside employees similar to an off-site placement

- ▶ One or two day(s) a week, all students participate in their placement and the instructor (or volunteer or instructor assistant) oversees each work site to develop and implement learning activities that mimic work practices of specific jobs and settings
- ▶ Instructor directly addresses challenges (literacy, personal and social learning, communication, etc.) and/or notes more complex challenges that can be addressed in the classroom
- ▶ These challenges form the basis of additional learning activities

Steps to take to develop placements

- 1** Determine community and program connections that could be used to secure placement sites.
 - Match connections with student goals and/or program focus.
 - Ensure worker's accident insurance coverage is in place if negotiating with private sector employees.
 - If no insurance coverage, focus only on sites that will accept students as volunteers in their organizations.
- 2** Ensure you are clear on the goals and purpose of the placements before approaching employers and organizations.
- 3** Develop a work placement agreement that outlines roles and responsibilities, contact information, placement goals and duration (refer to Sample Work Placement Agreement).
- 4** Use goals and purpose to develop an assessment tool (refer to Sample Work Placement Assessment).

Sample Work Placement Agreement

Student Contact
Name
Address
Phone
Email
Employer Contact
Name
Address
Phone
Email
Program Contact
Name
Address
Phone
Email

General Expectations
Days of placement:
Hours:
Absences/Illness:
General responsibilities:
Limitations:

Sample Placement Goals and Assessment

Learning Process	Learning Outcomes	Assessment Questions	Examples of Achievements
<i>Doing</i>	Engage in new practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Is the student using new literacy practices in the specified setting?• What are these practices?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•
<i>Becoming</i>	Identity	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Has the student achieved a goal that was clearly linked to a specific setting outside the classroom/literacy program?• Has the student gained a new sense of self related to meeting a goal and/or related to participating in the literacy program?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•
<i>Belonging</i>	Part of new communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Has the student made a transition from the program to a new learning/work community?• Is the student an active and accepted member of that learning/work community?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•
<i>Experience</i>	Gain new meanings	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Has the student developed new meanings and ways of knowing?• What are these?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•

Appendix 2: Photo story guide

TO CREATE THE PHOTO STORIES, instructors approached individual students to see if they were interested in participating. Instructors had to think about who would be willing to share their thoughts and feelings with others, who represented our student group as a whole, and who was able to devote some of their own time to the project. In exchange for their time, students were given a \$100 honourarium. The role of participating students would include taking photos, working with an instructor to discuss photos and write a description of the photos, and reviewing transcripts of discussions on two separate occasions. After explaining the project and their role, we obtained written permission from each student to use their words and photographs in the project. All but one of the students chose to use their own first names.

Before the instructors worked with their students, we met with one of the project's advisors to decide on a theme to explore, and a question to guide the picture-taking. The question we settled on was: What did you need to learn to do the job you have? (or what will you need to learn to do the job you want?). We wanted to hear directly from students what they felt was most important to learn in order to accomplish their employment-related goals. We included students who had completed the program and those who were still in the program. In addition, we came up with the following guidelines to keep in mind when working on this photo story project:

- ▶ Have students focus more on learning and not only the literacy activities in the workplace, in the program, in the home and possibly in the community.
- ▶ In addition to the kinds of learning we see and hear, encourage students to also explore the kinds of learning that are unseen, such as values, sociocultural understanding, and expectations.
- ▶ Ask students about the people who help/hinder their learning.

It was also important to ensure that students had the same idea of learning in their minds as the instructors. Sometimes when students talk about learning, they associate it only with a formal education setting, like our program or their children's school, or even their own past schooling experience. When talking about learning that takes place at work, in their homes or in the

community, their words describe what they do and don't always connect directly to the ways their accomplishments and actions also constitute learning. Instructors were encouraged to discuss these ideas with students before they began taking pictures.

The resulting six different photo stories appear between each section or chapter as an 'intertext', or text between text. They serve so many purposes and have become the most powerful and memorable part of the project, and this book. The photo stories capture, in a small way, who our students are. They also help to erase or at least force us to question the usefulness of the labels and categories that are most often used to describe the students in adult literacy programs.

Process We Followed to Develop Photo Stories

- 1** Meet with student to introduce project and its purpose.
- 2** Introduce the question to explore: What did/do you need to learn to do the job you have/want?
- 3** Discuss learning at work/for work; refer to support questions.
- 4** Ask: Can you think of something you could photograph to show people what you need/ed to learn?
- 5** Get picture ideas (people, places, rooms, books, documents, equipment, products, certificates, workplace signs, tools, etc.).
- 6** Tell students to take pictures. Take lots of pictures. Also encourage them to take pictures of things that weren't discussed.
- 7** Take two weeks to take pictures with disposable cameras supplied by the project.
- 8** Provide student with a project information synopsis for their employers.
- 9** Accompany student if needed.
- 10** Provide another camera if needed.
- 11** Have student return camera to you for development and printing.
- 12** Meet with student to choose pictures and have them describe each one — maybe choose 6–8 pictures in total.
- 13** To get words on paper, you can choose one of the following methods:
 - record discussion, then write up yourself
 - take notes and write up
 - have students write on their own
 - co-write with students (they write some, you transcribe some additional conversation)

14 Share and display for:

- use only amongst participants, or
- use with other programs, or
- use in community on the internet, in a newsletter, in a presentation, etc.

Note: Always ensure the students are aware of how and where the photo stories may be used.

Issues to Consider***Ensure student control and direction***

- ▶ Students are directing this, but you may have to provide some choices for them to get started.
- ▶ Help students come up with the things/places/people they may want to photograph.
- ▶ If students need the guidance, provide sample photo scenes.
- ▶ Students will preview the photos and choose the ones they want to use in the project.
- ▶ Students will also get a chance for a final approval of their photos and words.
- ▶ Ensure you have their informed consent in writing if you are to display the photos; tell the students where they will be displayed.
- ▶ You should now have hard copies of the student consent form and a brief project description for employers.

Camera issues

- ▶ We used disposable cameras purchased by the program that included pre-paid prints and a CD of digital images. The students were then able to preview their work immediately, decide which photos to use (or not) and keep the prints.
- ▶ Refer to *Tips for Taking Better Pictures* on the Kodak web-site.
- ▶ Encourage students to take lots of pictures with the disposable cameras and even use a second camera if needed (total cost for one camera and development was only \$12.50).

Connecting Literacy, Learning & Work

Connecting Literacy, Learning & Work tells the story of how an adult literacy program made a gradual transformation towards a practiced-based learning approach. If we believe that adult literacy education consists of a set of skills and accompanying knowledge that must be mastered before fully engaging in and contributing to community, work and family, then we will deliver programs that insist on separating literacy from the ways it is actually used and relegate students to the margins of society. But if we believe that literacy is an integral part of daily activity, inseparable from the way it is used in the community, at home, with family and at work, we begin to see adult literacy education in a different way.

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