

STATE OF THE FIELD REPORT

ADULT LITERACY

May 2006

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgments.....	4
I. Introduction.....	5
II. Literacy Experts and Organizations Consulted.....	6
III. Methodology	8
A. Parameters for the Study.....	8
B. Search Strategies	8
C. Analysis of the Gaps in the Literature	10
IV. Limitations	11
V. Definitions of literacy	11
A. Introduction to Definitions	11
B. General Literacy Definitions	11
C. Literacy Related to Different Contexts and Groups	12
VI. Generalizations, Gaps, & Profitable Lines Of Inquiry.....	16
A. Literacy Overview Comments.....	16
B. Concerning Canadian Research on Literacy	16
C. Concerning International Research on Literacy	16
D. Concerning History of Literacy.....	17
E. Concerning Theory and Literacy	17
F. Concerning Learning, Teaching, and Research-in-Practice.....	18
G. Concerning Literacy and Specific Groups.....	19
H. Concerning Health Literacy.....	21
I. Concerning Family Literacy.....	21
J. Concerning Literacy and Work.....	22
K. Concerning Corrections Literacy	22
L. Concerning Learning Disabilities.....	23
M. Concerning Literacy and Technology	23
N. Concerning Indicators of Change.....	23
O. Concerning Communities of Practice and Research	25
P. Concerning Changes in Public Attitudes and Perceptions.....	25
Q. CONCLUSION	26
VII. General Literacy: Literature	27
A. Overview of Literacy: Canada	27
B. Overview of Literacy: International	31
C. Government and Government-Related.....	35
VIII. History of Literacy	37
IX. Theory & Literacy	38
X. Learning, Teaching, & Research-In-Practice.....	40
XI. Literacy & Specific Groups	45
B. Francophone Literacy.....	47

C. Aboriginal Literacy	50
D. Women and Literacy	53
XII. Health Literacy.....	55
XIII. Family Literacy.....	62
XIV. Literacy & Work.....	65
XV. Corrections Literacy	70
XVI. Learning Disabilities & Literacy.....	72
XVII. Technologies & Literacy	76
XVIII. Indicators Of Change.....	79
A. Practice-Oriented.....	79
B. Policy & Program-Oriented.....	80
C. Government Reports	84
D. Longitudinal and Other Qualitative/Quantitative Studies/Reports Relevant to Change	85
E. Changes in Public Attitudes and Perceptions	86
XIX. Dissemination & Means For Sharing Knowledge	87
A. Journals in the Field of Adult Education.....	87
B. Adult Literacy Coalitions in Canada.....	88
C. Other Ways of Sharing Knowledge Across the Field of Literacy *	90
Additional References Used in This Report.....	94

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We were supported and guided by a committee of 17 adult literacy experts from across Canada. They unhesitatingly shared their knowledge in each of the areas of literacy included in this report, and did so in the midst of extremely busy schedules. They also gave generous input to formatting, organization, and the very scope of the report. These colleagues reflect the remarkable level of knowledge and caring that makes literacy in Canada such a vital field.

Finally, more than twelve literacy experts who were not members of this particular Committee – some from outside Canada – also contributed to the content seen here. They brought other perspectives and valuable content to the project.

Thank you all for helping create the most comprehensive state of the field study we have had in many decades in Canada. This work was undertaken with support from the Canadian Council on Learning, which bears no responsibility for its content.

B. Allan Quigley,
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I. INTRODUCTION

This study on the State of the Field focusing on adult literacy was conducted under the auspices of the Canadian Council on Learning. It is one of eight State of the Field reports on adult learning in Canada. The other reports include Gender & Learning, Culture & Learning, French as a Minority Language, E-Learning, Learning Communities, Social Movements, and Access & Barriers to Adult Learning. The full complement of reports, as compiled by the Steering Committee for this eight-report project, is intended to help advise the Canadian Council on Learning and to develop a knowledge baseline for the Adult Learning Knowledge Centre recently launched at the University of New Brunswick.

As seen in the opening of this report, seventeen literacy experts representing a wide range of Canadian literacy and educational organizations were invited to participate in the Advisory Committee. In addition, some twelve literacy individuals and organizations both in Canada and beyond were consulted. Two research assistants, Sue Folinsbee and Wendy Kraglund-Gauthier, were at the centre of the project throughout. They not only made valuable content contributions but made major contributions to the analysis, narrative, organization, and formatting of this report.

Timelines were tight for this study and guidelines were broad. This report should not be seen as an exhaustive or definitive study on adult literacy in Canada; rather, it is a fair representation of the knowledge base as of November, 2005.

It is recommended that this study be updated and expanded on a regular basis into the future.

II. LITERACY EXPERTS AND ORGANIZATIONS CONSULTED

Name	Organization /Location	Committee Member	Areas of Expertise/ Consultation
Eileen Antone	OISE, University of Toronto (ON)	✓	Indigenous peoples and their literacies
Suzanne Benoit	La Coalition francophone pour l'alphabétisation et la formation de base en Ontario (ON)		Francophone literacy
Mary J. Breen	Writer/Editor, Peterborough, ON		Literacy and health
Barbara Burnaby	Memorial University (NL)	✓	ESL and Indigenous literacies
Deborah Butler			Learning Disabilities
Kim Crockatt	Nunavut Literacy Council (Nunavut)		Indigenous and northern literacies
John Comings	National Centre for Study of Adult Learning & Literacy, Harvard University		US research
Wendy Desbrisay	Movement for Canadian Literacy (national)		Literacy policy
Guy Ewing	Toronto, ON	✓	Research-in-Practice, Communities of practice, literacy overview
Ann Marie Downie	Literacy Nova Scotia (NS)	✓	Practice in the Atlantic provinces
Christine Featherstone	ABC CANADA, Toronto		National literacy studies
Doris Gillis	St. Francis Xavier University (NS)	✓	Health literacy
Jenny Horsman	Toronto, ON	✓	Women and violence in literacy
Nancy Jackson	OISE, University of Toronto (ON)		Literacy and work, research in practice, and general literacy
Paul Jurmo	Brunswick, New Jersey (USA)		Literacy and work, and policy
Tamara Levine	Canadian Labour Congress (national)		Union-based literacy and clear language
Robin Millar	Centre for Literacy and Work (MN)	✓	Workplace literacy
Maria Moriarty	AlphaPlus Centre (ON)		Literacy overview, workplace literacy, research in practice, and francophone literacy
Scott Murray	UNESCO		Canadian and international research
Linda Phillips	University of Alberta	✓	Research and family literacy
Allan Quigley	St. Francis Xavier University (NS)	✓ Committee Chair	Research and international linkages
Rod Savoie	National Research Council of Canada		Research and e-Learning

Name	Organization /Location	Committee Member	Areas of Expertise/ Consultation
Linda Shohet	Centre for Literacy of Quebec (QC)	✓	Francophone literacy, health literacy, literacy and technology, policy
Cate Sills	NWT Literacy Council (NWT)		Indigenous and northern literacies
Yvette Souque	National Literacy Secretariat (national)	✓	Literacy policy
Suzanne Smythe	University of British Columbia (BC)	✓	Family literacy
Maurice Taylor	University of Ottawa (ON)	✓	Workplace literacy and informal learning
Audrey Thomas	Victoria, BC	✓	Policy and practice
Diane Wagner	Learning Disabilities of Ontario		Literacy and learning disabilities
Pierre Walter	University of British Columbia	✓	Literacy history
Brenda Wright	Saint. John Learning Exchange, Saint. John, NB	✓	Community-based literacy

III. METHODOLOGY

A. PARAMETERS FOR THE STUDY

The research team's primary goal was to provide a comprehensive picture of themes in adult literacy in the Canadian literature. At the same time, it was agreed that there was important literature particularly from the United States, Great Britain, and Australia that had had a significant influence on adult literacy in Canada and should also be included. It was also especially important to include practitioner-based research as well as academic literature and government reports. The team agreed that practitioner research, especially research-in-practice which reflected an important development in the literacy field, and was an important emerging trend in the Canadian literature.

The researchers began by developing an outline of the themes to include in the study based on their long history, experience and knowledge, and involvement in adult literacy. This set the parameters of the study. Over the course of the study, some changes were made to the outline based on the suggestions of advisory committee members. For example, literacy and technologies was added as a theme as there was ample literature to warrant a separate category. In addition, the English-as a-Second-Language focus was narrowed to only include works related to literacy. The researchers made this decision realizing that literature on English as a Second Language warrants a separate study on its own terms.

In general terms, the research content was selected based on the expertise and judgment of the expert committee members and the research team. Selection involved searching multiple databases, bibliographies, web sites, and publications, together with continuous consultation with the committee members and other advisors. The general criteria used by the committee included:

- a) major theoretical and/or research works with significance for the literacy field in Canada
- b) works that were recent and contemporary (the last 15-20 years), unless they were considered milestones in the knowledge base
- c) international studies from or conducted outside of Canada if they were considered to hold wide comparative or illustrative significance for adult literacy in Canada.

B. SEARCH STRATEGIES

The research team included one academic, and two practitioner-researchers. Each team member had worked in the field of adult literacy for many years; therefore, they embarked on the project with an in-depth knowledge of the adult literacy literature and where to search for it. The research team started the search of the literature using their own extensive knowledge in adult literacy. The search began with three extensive, well-established Canadian adult literacy databases. These databases were:

- National Adult Literacy Database (NALD)
- Directory of Canadian Adult Literacy Research in English
- Adult Research in Ontario and AlphaPlus (AlphaPlus prepared 4 reference lists)

At the same time, advisory committee members and researchers provided their own extensive bibliographies within their areas of expertise in literacy. The team also went outside the committee to contact key people who could provide additional Canadian references and sources to search, especially for francophone literacy. Further, the expertise of three scholars in major international organizations in the U.S.A. was solicited. In total, 31 experts in various areas of adult literacy provided references and/ or gave input into the report.

The introductory search methods provided a wealth of literature on all the contexts and groups that were a focus of the study. This led to further databases and websites to explore. Further web sites and databases searched included:

- ABC CANADA
- Adult Education Research Conference (AERC):
- Adult Literacy and Numeracy Research Consortium (ALNARC)
- Canadian Council on Learning
- Canadian Labour Congress
- Canadian Literacy and Language Network
- Canadian Periodicals Database
- Canadian Public Health Association
- Centre for Literacy of Quebec
- Centre for Education and Work
- Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education
- Conference Board of Canada
- Community Partnerships for Adult Learning
- ERIC Database
- Family Literacy Directory
- Festival of Literacies
- Frontier College
- Literacy Assistance Centre
- metro-boston Community Wide Education and Information Service (mbCWEIS)
- Movement for Canadian Literacy and 12 provincial and territorial coalition web sites
- National Adult Literacy & Learning Disabilities Center
- National Centre for Early Development and Learning (Family literacy)
- National Centre for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy
- National Center on Adult Literacy (NCAL)
- National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE)
- National Institute for Literacy:
- National Literacy and Health Program
- National Literacy Secretariat
- Research and Practice in Adult Literacy (RaPal)
- Répertoire canadien des recherches en alphabétisation des adultes en français
- Research in Practice in Adult Literacy (RiPal)

The researchers also searched the reference sections of the major works in the academic and grey literature as well as the many annotated bibliographies discovered. In addition, the team conducted further searches using Google, Google Scholar, Google Books, ProQuest, Medline, PubMed, SpringerLink and JSTOR using the following key word combinations:

- literacy and research-in-practice
- ESL literacy
- first language literacy
- Aboriginal literacy
- literacy and Aboriginal people
- women and literacy

- health literacy
- literacy and health
- family literacy
- corrections and literacy
- prison literacy
- literacy and justice
- workplace literacy
- literacy and work
- unions and literacy
- literacy and learning disabilities
- literacy and technology
- assessing adult learning
- assessing adult literacy
- measuring adult learning
- measuring change in literacy
- literacy and change
- literacy and measurement
- adult and literacy and assessment

The team stopped searching once the evident saturation-point had been attained—that is, once the same references kept re-appearing from the various experts, and no new relevant literature was being added—the team agreed it had attained most of the literature germane to its stated guidelines.

The research team did not focus on dissertations and theses on literacy because of the difficulty in gaining access to the in-house publications. However, there were particular dissertations and theses that were included due to their prominence and reoccurrence in the literature as identified by the experts on the and beyond the committee. In addition, there was a tendency to avoid conference proceedings because the researchers felt that the material presented at conferences was often duplicated in the published material. The researchers also excluded research that was identified as too location-specific, including most provincial and territorial reports.

The team used the organizational web sites listed on the previous pages to search for dissemination avenues and means for sharing knowledge. They also built dissemination avenues and means for sharing knowledge using their own knowledge and that of that of the 31 literacy experts consulted.

C. ANALYSIS OF THE GAPS IN THE LITERATURE

The gaps in the literature were analyzed by examining the titles, the content of the literature, and/or relied on the knowledge of its expert committee to decide on the content of each section. Key themes emerged from the literature itself and the literature was categorized by these key themes in each section. The team determined the key themes by examining the titles and/or content, and by counting the titles in each category for comparative analysis. The team also looked for trends by time period.

IV. LIMITATIONS

While every effort has been made to verify source references and locate updates on the Web site links, the research team and the Advisory Committee members were constrained by the limited time allocated for this project. Reliance on search engines, contributions from experts in the field, and existing bibliographies, Web sites and indexes were the primary sources and search approaches; however, this report should not be seen as the definitive study of all of the existing literature, materials, or networks in the field of Canadian adult literacy. Moreover, as noted earlier, the general criteria and guidelines for the study were broad, making the selection and decision-making processes less than exacting and less than perfectly systematic. It is hoped that future updates will overcome the limitations of this initial study.

V. DEFINITIONS OF LITERACY

A. INTRODUCTION TO DEFINITIONS

This section on definitions is not meant to be an exhaustive list of all the definitions that are in present use in the literacy field. Rather, the intention of this section is to provide an overview of some of the prevalent definitions that are presently in use in different spheres of literacy. This section provides the reader with some of the different ways of thinking about literacy and the tensions and different interests within these conceptualizations. The different meanings of literacy reflect some of the same patterns and tensions found in the review of the patterns of the research literature. They reflect the disconnect between policy, practice, research, and theory.

Similarly, with specific groups and specific literacies, there has been an attempt to provide some context for each group or particular literacy. The contexts provided do not pretend to include all the circumstances that might apply to each group or literacy. The description of the different contexts is uneven from one group of literacy to another. This unevenness, in part, represents the limitations involved in locating definitions and descriptions under tight timelines, and the degree to which each area has been researched. The differences reflected in these contexts provide insight with respect to potential gaps in the research and the importance of “one size doesn’t fit all.”

B. GENERAL LITERACY DEFINITIONS

“For everyone, everywhere, literacy is, along with education in general, a basic human right ... Literacy is, finally, the road to human progress and the means through which every man, woman and child can realize his or her full potential.”

Kofi Annan, Secretary General of the United Nations
(Thinkquest.com, 2005)

The New Literacy Studies literature, as arising mainly out of the United Kingdom, discusses literacy and theory in a framework of tensions between literacy as a psychological concept as opposed to a social construct – an individual cognitive skill as opposed to embedding or situating literacy within a social context in which literacy is acquired and used (see Barton, 1994; Barton, Hamilton, & Ivanic, 2000; Lankshear et al., 1997; Lankshear & Knobel, 2003; Prinsloo & Brier, 1996). These theorists favour a socio-cultural or social practice approach over mechanical skills of reading and writing. Literacy as a social practice emphasizes notions of power, politics and influence of social relations. This socio-cultural approach to literacy is referred

to as the New Literacy Studies in the literature. Literacy is used in the plural to refer to multiple literacies rather than one autonomous view of literacy.

In practice, industrialized nations work with a variety of definitions. The various International Adult Literacy Surveys (IALS), and IALSS studies (OECD, HRDC, & Statistics Canada, 2000) have defined literacy as “the ability to understand and employ printed information in daily activities at home, at work and in the community – to achieve one's goals, and to develop one's knowledge and potential.”

The IALS Backgrounder (National Literacy Secretariat, 1994) indicates that IALS addresses three categories of literacy on a five-point scale of complexity. These categories are:

1. **Prose literacy:** the ability to understand and use information from texts such as editorials, news stories, poems and fiction.
2. **Document literacy:** the ability to locate and use information from documents such as job applications, payroll forms, transportation schedules, maps, tables and graphs.
3. **Quantitative literacy:** the ability to perform arithmetic functions such as balancing a chequebook, calculating a tip, or completing an order form.

A random examination of the web sites and publications of some of the Canadian national literacy organizations and provincial literacy coalitions¹ offers some patterns in definitions of literacy. Some literacy organizations such as ABC CANADA, Literacy BC, Literacy Alberta, Literacy Nova Scotia, and the Saskatchewan Literacy Network use the IALS definition of literacy or a close version of it on their web sites.

The Saskatchewan Literacy Network and the Ontario Literacy Coalition (OLC), emphasize “reading the world”, not just reading the word. The OLC emphasizes literacy as a way to “understand our culture and the world we live in.” The NWT Literacy Council (2005) states in its vision that literacy is a right; it involves everyone, and is necessary for social, political, and economic participation in all aspects of life.

The Centre for Literacy in Quebec’s definition (2005) goes beyond definitions like IALS to stress the complexity of literacy as “culturally defined” and the fact that literacy varies from context to context. This definition includes phrases like “multiple literacies”, as well as emphasizes critical thinking in relation to information and literacy as a human right. Frontier College defines literacy as “learning for life” and also as a fundamental right. Frontier College acknowledges literacy as more than reading and writing. Frontier’s definition includes understanding, and using literacy, and focuses on literacy as a way of “strengthening culture” and “gaining knowledge”.

In summary, there are a variety of ways that literacy is defined in theory and practice. The theory stresses definitions that relate to literacy as a social practice. Large international literacy surveys like the IALS use a definition that focuses on skills in three categories of literacy. In a sampling of Canadian literacy organizations, there is a focus on literacy skills for all aspects of life but in some cases, an inclusion of the social. In addition, some of the definitions show evidence that literacy has expanded beyond traditional ideas of basic reading and writing. The idea of multiple literacies, while used by the theorists, is not reflected to any great extent in the definitions examined here.

C. LITERACY RELATED TO DIFFERENT CONTEXTS AND GROUPS

In order to provide a brief introduction in this section for the reader, the research team reviewed mostly major Canadian works in the literature that emerged from their searches. The aim was to capture the essence of each of the different contexts and groups of research. The team attempted to find multiples sources for

¹ Websites were retrieved on November 2, 2005.

these descriptions and to summarize the common themes. In some cases, it was difficult to find multiple sources for descriptions that would properly inform this section. This was especially the case for ESL and first language literacy, women and literacy, francophone literacy, corrections literacy, and learning disabilities and literacy.

1. Aboriginal Literacy

Aboriginal concepts of literacy (Antone, Gamlin, & Provost-Turchetti, 2003) are holistic and rooted in Aboriginal culture. Ningwakwe (n.d.) states that Aboriginal concepts and definitions of literacy use the Medicine Wheel model of learning. In this model, learning, including literacy learning, focuses on spirit, heart, mind and body, not just gaining knowledge. The National Indigenous Literacy Organization (2005) emphasizes the circle of culture, sharing, learning and survival as essential concepts in Aboriginal literacy development.

2. ESL and First Language Literacy

The Centre for Canadian Language Benchmarks (2005) refers to ESL literacy as having little or no literacy in one's first language. Florez and Terrill (2003) refer to ESL learners with literacy needs as literacy-level or literacy learners. These are learners with six or fewer years of education in their native country of origin.

The need to be literate (Geronimo, Folinsbee, & Goveas, 2001) is part of a larger tapestry in the daily life of newcomers. Literacy is embedded in a host of larger issues such as discrimination in housing and employment, low self esteem, and activities and paperwork in daily life. Often basic survival skills take over developing literacy skills.

Geronimo, Folinsbee, and Goveas (2001) also found in their literature review that ESL literacy was mostly equated with English literacy, and that in surveys, speaking English was equated with literacy in English. They discovered that there is little reference to literacy in one's first language, what is sometimes referred to as heritage languages. Recommendations from the authors include having bridging programs for newcomers who have low literacy in their first language.

3. Francophone Literacy

Benoit (personal communication, November 11, 2005) states that the needs of Francophones are diverse. Francophones include people born in Canada as well as those who come to Canada and have decided to live and learn in French.

Francophones can often feel isolated, especially in areas where the number of Francophones is low. Learning in French often brings them out of isolation. Literacy learning can help learners develop their sense of belonging to a community of French-speaking people. They can become reacquainted with their culture, or they may want to strengthen what skills and knowledge they have.

Many studies have concluded that it is better to learn in one's mother tongue first. Adults whose mother tongue is French – particularly those who attended a French language elementary school – will learn better because their reference models are French. It is important to ensure that Francophones have an opportunity to learn in French, wherever they live in Canada.

4. Women and Literacy

Lloyd (1991; 1994) as well as Horsman (1999) have found that women often experience literacy programs within a context of invisibility, violence, poverty, isolation, and discrimination. Lloyd states that the literacy programs that women participate in focus on fixing individuals rather than focusing on the larger systems that women are situated in. Lloyd notes that, for women, particular barriers such as program schedules, childcare, transportation and counselling, support services, and appropriate curriculum affect their ability to participate in literacy programs. Thus, if taken with mainstream adult education research on women's ways of knowing

and learning (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986), literacy for women in adult literacy programs needs to be understood from the context of their learning and their lived experiences.

5. Health Literacy

Health literacy is a relatively new term that means different things in various countries and contexts (Centre for Literacy, 2005; Institute for Medicine, 2004). The earliest definitions focused narrowly on competencies of individuals to read and understand information in the larger healthcare system such as medical information and instructions. Current definitions have expanded from earlier ones to focus more on access to information, making informed choices, and affecting larger systems.

6. Family Literacy

Family literacy definitions focus on more than the skills of reading and writing (Action for Family Literacy Ontario, 2004; Centre for Family Literacy, 2005; National Centre for Family Literacy, 2003). The focus is also on building strong relationships in the family and in the community. The emphasis is on both the learning of both children and adults. Moreover, the Movement for Canadian Literacy (MLC) (2005a) also emphasizes that undereducated families may have rich literacy practices and notes that early literacy skills are the foundation for future learning.

7. Corrections Literacy

The Movement for Canadian Literacy (2005b) states that offenders tend to have literacy skills at a rate 3 times lower than the general population. The MCL also notes that offenders are also more likely to have learning disabilities and more likely to have literacy challenges that contributed to their being imprisoned in the first place. Literacy challenges also contribute to offenders' chances of receiving fair treatment by the justice system throughout their lives.

8. Literacy and Work

Literacy and work presents itself as contested terrain in the literature. Moreover, the literature of the policy documents (Belfiore, Defoe, Folinsbee, Hunter, & Jackson, 2004; Castleton, 1999b) in the industrialized world tends to blame the worker for lack of skills. Castleton questions these unexamined assumptions and notes that they are often taken up by workplace partners who view these ideas as common sense. Castleton emphasizes that there are silences through the stories that are not being told about workers' skills, abilities and working conditions.

Although definitions (Belfiore, et al., 2004; Folinsbee, 2001; 2005) of workforce literacy vary, the literature illustrates that one thing in common is the expansion of conventional definitions beyond reading, writing, and math. The literature also shows that the broader definition is closely aligned with worker productivity and global competitiveness in industrialized countries. Folinsbee (2005) also found that workforce literacy is seen as including both the employed and the unemployed with workplace literacy being both site and sector specific.

Blunt (2001) discusses the different interests of employers and labour with respect to literacy. Whereas employers may focus on productivity and customer service, labour is concerned about broader participation and enhanced workplace democracy. Folinsbee's (2005) findings were similar. Employers were interested in literacy for changing job requirements and saw literacy upgrading as a way to improve productivity, safety, quality, etc. Labour saw literacy as an important part of protecting and empowering working people.

9. Learning Disabilities and Literacy

The Movement for Canadian Literacy (2005c) describes learning disabilities and their impact on literacy development. The MLC states that learning disabilities are a lifelong neurological disorder that can severely impact the learning process. Learning disabilities include problems related to visual memory and reversals in writing, poor auditory memory and speech, problems with hand-eye coordination, and poor organization of

time and space. Individuals with learning disabilities often have conceptual problems that which affect social interactions and peer relations (Movement for Canadian Literacy, n.d.). Similarly, behaviour disorders have also been recently included in the learning disabilities literature (Corley & Taymans, 2001).

10. Technologies and Literacy

The OECD (1997) argues that technology is a vehicle for improving literacy instruction and learning. Technology is seen as a tool to provide new opportunities and reach new people. As well, it is a way to encourage learners to be more creative. Technologies typically included in literacy work are television, radio, computers, interactive video and the Internet (UNESCO Institute for Education (1997). The International Reading Association (2001) also asserts that students must become proficient in the new literacies of information and communication technology (ICT) in order to become fully literate in today's world. The Association believes that it is the responsibility of literacy educators to prepare students for a future that will require these new literacies.

VI. GENERALIZATIONS, GAPS, & PROFITABLE LINES OF INQUIRY

A. LITERACY OVERVIEW COMMENTS

This first section, Literacy Overview, contains literature that either has a broad, national, or international focus or does not fit into any of the other more specific categories. It includes government reports and studies, divided by research originating in Canada and research originating outside of Canada.

B. CONCERNING CANADIAN RESEARCH ON LITERACY

The Canadian literature has recently become dominated by a focus on numbers and statistics related to people who have literacy challenges, especially studies and reports arising from or in connection with the various International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) reports. Close to 40% of all the literature, including government reports, in the Canadian overview section focuses on numerical descriptions and analysis of the Canadian population with respect to literacy, together with implications of the statistics.

The clear majority of government reports from 1989 to the present show an increasing statistical focus on the topic of measuring the size and scope of literacy among Canadian adults. Such surveys include Thomas's (1983) Adult basic education and literacy activities, 1975-76, Calamai's (1987) Broken Words: Why 5 million Canadians are illiterate, the Survey of Literacy Skills used in Daily Activities (1989), the Reading the future: A portrait of literacy in Canada (1996), and Highlights from the 2003 International Adult Literacy and Lifeskills Survey (ALL) (2005). These, and other studies based on survey reports, are sometimes co-authored with an international agency such as the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).

There are also a number of associated federal government reports that provide an overview of the literacy issue in Canada. These reports come out of different federal government departments and span the last two decades. Still, additional government reports focus broadly on interpreting the results of adult education and training surveys in Canada over the last decade. Government reports make up about 30% of all Canadian citations in this category. There are also a few papers that respond to or challenge the IALS and a few that focus on comparisons between Canada and other countries.

A second major focus of the Canadian literature is on trends and developments in literacy. Approximately 30% of the references, including government reports, relate to literacy issues, overviews, participation in literacy programs, access to literacy programs, and literacy practice. Most of these works span the last decade but have been eclipsed in number by statistical reports.

In addition, almost 20% of the references relate to literacy policy. These policy documents are recent, with the majority of briefs, reports, and articles published in the last three years.

Approximately 10% of the references published over the last three decades refer to an overview of literacy and literacy work in Canada as meta-analyses.

There are also a number of important firsts in the overview reports, including the 2003 report on literacy by the federal government's Standing Committee on Human Resource Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities. Also, a 2003 federal government report responds to the Standing Committee's report.

C. CONCERNING INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH ON LITERACY

Examining the wider, international literacy overview context, there are similarities and differences between Canada's literature and literature from the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia. Similar to the Canadian literature, there are many overview survey works on literacy and literacy work from these countries as well as reports and articles on research directions for literacy, literacy policy, and practice. One difference is that in the literature from the United States, United Kingdom, and Australia, there is a stream of literature that focuses on the social nature of literacy and critical perspectives related to cultural identity as well as using and researching literacy in social contexts. Another evident difference is that since 2000, there is an emerging focus in the United States on standards for adult literacy education, outcomes, and the beginnings of evidenced-based research. By comparison, there are fewer governmental reports on the numbers of adults with low-literacy in every other country. This may not be because they do not exist, but it is possible they are not as easily accessible as the Canadian reports listed here.

The scant literature on adult literacy found from Latin America, Asia, and Africa places a much stronger focus on tensions, barriers, and critiques of policy and practice.

The analysis of the data suggests that what is significantly missing in the overview literature on literacy is a balance of perspectives from the lived reality of people with literacy challenges – both in and out of programs – including what their literacy practices are, how well programs serve their needs, and, if they are less than effective, why this is the case.

A further gap that appears is the evident absence of broad-based studies on learning itself. Entire areas of self-directed and informal, and non-formal and incidental learning seen in mainstream adult education research are largely absent in the literacy literature reported here. These are important gaps in the literacy research that need to be addressed in terms of social policy and educational pedagogy. However, the dominant focus on numbers and literacy surveys speaks to a comparative strength in gauging the size and scope – if not the complex nature – of the literacy issues facing this nation. The questions that emerge from these evident gaps and strengths in the overview literature lead the Committee to ask which literacy perspectives, what conceptual frameworks, and what types of issues will be selected as the focus for future policy?

D. CONCERNING HISTORY OF LITERACY

References in this section refer to the history of literacy or to literacy as part of adult education. There were only seven references identified on the history of adult literacy and/or adult education and literacy for Canada. These references are piecemeal at best. They focus on specific aspects of adult education such as the work of Frontier College or the Antigonish Movement. Adult literacy history references are mostly contained in works that focus on the larger field of adult education.

The lack of a coherent history of literacy in Canada is a significant gap in the literature. A comprehensive historical perspective and implications for the future would be helpful to inform present-day and future policy, practice, and research.

E. CONCERNING THEORY AND LITERACY

This section contains literature that theorizes about literacy and learning or is concerned with the theory that is associated with literacy. The majority of books and articles found on theory and literacy appear to view literacy as being socially constructed, whereby reading and writing are embedded in the social context rather than existing in standardized, monolithic, or autonomous constructs of literacy.

The term “Literacies” has begun to appear in recent years in the titles of some of the references, as does the phenomenon of power. When comparing Canadian and international differences, most of the works on literacy theory come out of the United Kingdom and the United States, not Canada. One interesting and promising trend has emerged from the U.K. and, largely, school-based scholars with writing on the New Literacy Studies. Here, in particular, literacy at any age is seen as part of the social context and part of lived experience. To separate literacy as lived into a learning commodity is, for this new school of thought, to reduce literacy to an artificial language construct.

Turning to gaps in the research, one rapidly growing demographic area in Canadian society that did not emerge as a stand-alone area of study was “seniors’ literacy.” This would seem to be an unexpected gap in the knowledge base given the large numbers of seniors with low literacy skills found in so many of the surveys. However, one explanation may be that funding support for adult literacy education through the latter half of the 20th century has been explicitly and implicitly aimed at literacy for the workforce. With the baby boom beginning to enter retirement, governmental policy and funding may need to be reconsidered in this regard. Secondly, there is an obvious gap in literacy theory from Canadian context and experience. Conceivably, the New Literacy Studies could help bridge that gap but the fact this arises speaks to the high level of pragmatism that exists in policy and practice in adult literacy in Canada. Further missing in the research as found is a robust or even strong set of connections between literacy theory and policy, literacy theory and practice, and literacy theory and research. These connections should be seen as a two-way street where each aspect of literacy informs the others. Research in these vital connections would enable deeper developments of current theoretical perspectives and lead to better-informed policy, practice, and service to learners.

F. CONCERNING LEARNING, TEACHING, AND RESEARCH-IN-PRACTICE

This section focuses on all works that are related to the learning and teaching of literacy in community-based, tutor-based, and more formalized educational settings such as school boards settings and community colleges. It also includes literature on research in practice and connecting research to practice.

One trend in the Canadian literature since 2001 is the emerging presence of communities of practice, in particular the nascent literacy Research-in-Practice movement. Slightly more than 30% of the Canadian references in this section focus on Research-in-Practice. The Canadian articles and research reports on Research-in-Practice come mainly from Alberta, British Columbia, Ontario, and Nova Scotia. Connections between research and practice, and the Research-in-Practice movement are also in reports and articles from the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia. The primary themes that appear in the Research-in-Practice literature focus on the learner and improving practice. These themes are reflected in topics such as teachers’ knowledge through research, effective practice, literacy as socially constructed, researcher-practitioner collaborations, and learner-determined outcomes.

Over 40% of the references in the Canadian literature research in this section focus on areas related to learners: learners’ lives, how they learn, learner outcomes, their perceptions of themselves and their literacy, and why they do not participate in programs.

Literature from Canada, the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia reveals a trend towards a focus on participatory, inclusive and collaborative research and teaching approaches to adult literacy education practice. Over 30% of all of the references refer to this type of approach. Learner-determined outcomes and progress, learners’ voices, transformation, support for learning, impact of these approaches on learners’ literacy practices, literacy as a social construct, and the role of ethnography are examples. Significantly, this theme of learner-centred participatory approaches has been constant over the last two decades and may be seen as more than trend, but rather as a permanent track in the research and reported practice of Canadian literacy.

While Research-in-Practice is a recent and promising phenomenon in the Canadian literature which, we believe, deserves further attention and support, an evident gap in the research in this area is the absence of synthesis and analyses of the disparate and, at times, contradictory findings about teaching, learning, and how they relate to further areas of research and literacy policy. A second apparent gap is the clear lack of connection between literacy theory and literacy learning and practice. It would appear that theory – with a comparatively large presence in the knowledge base – has limited relation to policy, to practice, and to teaching and learning.

G. CONCERNING LITERACY AND SPECIFIC GROUPS

This section includes works that relate to specific groups such as ESL and First Language literacy, Francophone literacy, Aboriginal literacy, and women and literacy.

1. ESL and First Language Literacy²

While the focus of this study was not English or French and second language learning, nevertheless, the significant literature that the committee wanted to be included clearly indicates an absence of literature on second language speakers who have literacy challenges in their own language. Most of what has been written on ESL literacy as reported here appeared in the early and mid 1990s. Many of these works are from the United States, and the focus is largely on second language acquisition, not on first language literacy.

A more complete survey of the English and French as a Second Language literature is still needed and first language literacy is a serious gap in the Canadian knowledge base.

2. Francophone Literacy

There is very little literature on Francophone literacy. What does exist spans the last three decades and focuses nationally or provincially, mostly on Quebec and Ontario. There are a few overview reports that examine the issue of Francophones and literacy in Canada with respect to the scope of the issue, equity considerations, and action planning.

The Quebec literature began to emerge in the late 1970s through the 1990s but there is little recent literature. The literature that comes out of Quebec includes references on literacy and language as an issue, the impact of literacy challenges for Francophones, and a vision for literacy in the province. There are a number of reports that come out of Ontario. These works include the scope of the literacy issue, literacy training available, and the workplace literacy experience. The few recent works from the last five years have a practical focus.

3. Aboriginal Literacy

The majority of the references found and included in this section are of Canadian origin. Significantly, Aboriginal literacy literature has mainly appeared in the last eight years; over half of the references found are from the last five years. The literature focuses on the nature of Aboriginal literacy and language development, on approaches to literacy and learning, and most effective practices. These works take place within an explicit cultural framing of Aboriginal literacy. There are also several national and territorial policy papers on Aboriginal literacy and several government reports. However, the same observation can be made here as in the ESL and First Language section: the majority of the studies are not concerned with first language issues or the nature of first language

² This research focused only on ESL and first language literacy. The field of English as a Second Language is well established and is not dealt with in the literacy theme. The theme of ESL will require follow up through a separate focus and its own research study

acquisition. Given the threats to the future of indigenous languages in Canada, this should be considered a serious gap in the knowledge base.

It is also noteworthy that this reported literature is not typically published in traditional adult education journals. Rather, this literature tends to be in the form of unpublished manuscripts, or published by Aboriginal organizations, literacy associations, or smaller journals. A few reports are published by territorial literacy councils. Further study is needed to understand how effectively such research is being disseminated within the Aboriginal community, and it is recommended that much more focus and support should be given to this growing body of knowledge in the Canadian context.

It would seem advisable to build on the recent work in Aboriginal literacy through further research to understand better what works in practice, and how Aboriginal knowledge can better inform literacy policy at provincial, territorial, and federal levels of government.

4. Women and Literacy

The literature on women and literacy is sparse. In the Canadian context, there is a small cluster of work from the late 1980s to the mid-1990s that focuses on feminist perspectives, empowerment, and women-positive approaches. There is also a stream of Canadian work on women, education, and violence from this time period as well, with one more recent 2005 resource on the same topic. The Canadian publications on women and literacy appear to have declined in the last five years. The few citations in the recent international literature on women and literacy focus mainly on profiles and experiences of women in literacy and education, and on advocacy for support for women's learning.

The literature on women and literacy tends to be published in a mix of traditional adult education journals along with other journals focusing on women and education such as *Women's Studies Quarterly*, and through women's organizations and women's publishing companies.

Given the numbers of women who are learners in literacy programs and the vast majority of women practitioners in literacy, this should be seen as a serious gap in the research. Current understandings about women's learning and literacy and how this might relate to both practice and policy is not only sparse, but the trends seen here suggest this area is falling far behind research-based publications in other sectors of the mainstream field of adult education.

H. CONCERNING HEALTH LITERACY

There has been a growing body of literature on health and literacy in North America, starting in the late 1990s and building exponentially to the present. Almost twice as many references appear in the last five years as compared with the last five years of the nineties. The majority of the current literature tends to be published in an assortment of health care and health related journals and is being published by health-related and medical organizations, as opposed to adult education organizations and in adult education journals.

The bulk of the health literacy literature focuses on connections and intersections between health, health care, and literacy. However, based on what was found for this study, there is a tendency to use a deficit approach to talk about lower literacy skills and frame issues around “choices” and individualism. Secondly, with a number of notable exceptions, there tends to be a focus on low literacy skills and barriers to health, rather than the complexities of health as understood and lived by the population with lower literacy skills.

Examination of health care systemic issues is in the minority. There are only a few references to readability of health-related materials and effective communication with those receiving health care. It is noted that while the main body of literature research on literacy has moved away from a deficit approach, terms such as deficient knowledge, low literacy, poor literacy, treating literacy, illiteracy, shame, and inadequacy still appear with frequency in citations and research frameworks in the last two years. By contrast, the few adult education references found that focus on learning, participatory education, and integration of health and literacy show promise of addressing these evident gaps.

As a further observation, in the last few years the health literacy literature has begun to reflect more crossover research and increasing collaboration between the health care and adult education fields, particularly in the Canadian context. Overall, in this area of the literature there is also a move to focus on a broader approach to health literacy, on wider literacy and health outcomes, on new directions for a research agenda for health literacy, and on literacy as a social determinant of health, with implications for policy and practice. However, the focus and applications of this rapidly growing body of literature tend to be on the health field rather than on the literacy field of practice. The noted gap in this area is the need to strengthen literacy practice and policy through health literacy, not only to inform, but to possibly reform health practice and policy.

With several Canadian federal government reports published in the late 1990s that examine literacy and health, health literacy is a clear area of growth in the research landscape that shows promise, especially in view of the recent collaborations between health care and adult education research.

I. CONCERNING FAMILY LITERACY

The majority of the family literacy literature found in this study comes out of the United States. There are some overview references that focus on concepts of family literacy, family literacy practice, and directions and issues for research, but again they largely arise from an American context. Many of the research studies have concentrated on families and how they use literacy or on the results of participation in family literacy programs. There is also a stream of research that explicitly focuses on socio-cultural contexts for family literacy.

Conversely, there is very little research on family literacy in Canada. The few references found mirror some of the American focus on research on the outcomes of family literacy programs. There is one overview book on family literacy in Canada written in 2001. Cultural areas concerning, for instance, family literacy and Aboriginal people in Canada, family literacy and immigrant groups in Canada, or pedagogical issues of learning/teaching differences within families concerned with literacy are noticeably absent.

Family literacy is the single area within literacy studies that bridges child and adult literacy, school-based and adult based education, and offers opportunities for understanding the longitudinal effects of literacy across the lifespan and among generations. It warrants far more Canadian research, especially as it relates to benefits and outcomes for adults and children in the family.

By contrast, virtually every other educational system is based on the separation of families based on age levels. The literature that arises from child/adolescent or adult educational settings is to be found in separate research “silos”. This area of research is of great importance in promoting intergenerational literacy, sustaining cultural and heritage literacy, and ensuring that family literacy gains a significant place on the agenda of provincial and federal governments.

J. CONCERNING LITERACY AND WORK

There is a substantial amount of Canadian literature of literacy and work. The steady stream of literature in this area began to accelerate in the early nineties and now focuses on both incumbent workers and dislocated workers, and on preparation for employment for those not in the workplace. This literature has a tendency to reflect three different viewpoints: business, labour, and adult education perspectives.

There are a number of adult education publications over the last 15 years that lay out the landscape of workplace literacy in terms of initiatives of business, labour, and workplace education practitioners; some of which also focus on policy and practice. There are other recent works that examine the nature of workplace learning and worker learning. The adult education perspective found includes topics such as workplace and workforce literacy issues, welfare to work, critical perspectives on literacy and work, participation in literacy programs for employment, and outcomes.

From a labour perspective, there are a number of reports and articles that focus on literacy and learning as they relate to workers and the labour movement. This focus tends to be on labour approaches and perspectives, often with visions and advocacy for worker learning.

From a business perspective, there is a clear focus on the cost of literacy, economic benefits and returns on addressing literacy, overcoming barriers to the workforce, and on the benefits of enhanced literacy to small businesses.

In the international references cited from the United Kingdom, United States, Australia, and South Africa, there is a strong stream of literature that focuses on critical, socio-cultural perspectives and the nature of literacy and work as contested terrain. Some of the first examples of this literature came out of the United States in the early 1990s. This stream appears in the recent Canadian literature as well as issues of literacy and work as contested ground, but it is not the predominant theme. Other areas reflected in this international literature include welfare to work, state and federal government policy, trends, and literacy and employment.

What is obviously absent in the research on literacy and work is research that links literacy theory to the workforce and workplace education practice. Neither are workers’ literacy practices in the workplace nor in the labour movement well connected to literacy theory. This is particularly important given the strong government focus on workforce and workplace literacy in recent years.

K. CONCERNING CORRECTIONS LITERACY

Very little literature was found on corrections literacy, either in general or as originating in Canada. What is available is mainly from the last decade. There is only a total of seven Canadian references. This literature includes the status of prison educators, making transitions from prison to the community, and prison

education and its impact. The American literature also focuses on making a transition into the community and literacy learning behind bars. This entire area can be seen as a significant gap in the knowledge base – one that holds great importance for those who comprise this highly marginalized, often forgotten population.

L. CONCERNING LEARNING DISABILITIES

The literature on literacy and learning disabilities is remarkably limited. The majority of the literature is from the 1990s, with very little published in the last five years. There are only five Canadian references. Some of the literature focuses on learning disabilities in general; some references reflect the issues and trends with respect to literacy and learning disabilities. Other literature addresses the effect of learning disabilities on literacy skills, how to screen for learning disabilities, and how learning disabilities can be addressed in literacy programs. Dominated by “how-to-do publications”, this area is seriously under-researched if contrasted with the school-based literature. It would seem that learning disabilities and literacy is a particularly important area for future Canadian research.

M. CONCERNING LITERACY AND TECHNOLOGY

The literature on literacy and technology is current and it is growing. The literature found on this topic begins seven years ago, and is being produced in the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, and Australia. There are approximately three times as many references in the literature for the last five years than for in the entire decade of the 1990s. However, there are only a comparative few for Canada, however recent.

The literature in this area reflects both the possibilities and challenges of technology in literacy learning. The possibilities are reflected in studies on “expanding access”, “empowering literacy learners”, “new conceptions”, “transformations”, and “harnessing technology to serve adult literacy”. Topics such as “online learning and social exclusion”, “challenge of information technology”, “e-learning and the challenges of adult literacy”, and “life at the margins” reflect the challenges being addressed in this area of research. The focus of the literature is on both learners and instructors. The major topics include the connections between literacy and technology, the use, integration and impact of technology in literacy programs, and practitioner and learner attitudes toward this use and integration.

It is clear that there is a need to build on this promising area of current research if we are to have a better understanding of the possibilities, challenges, and outcomes related to using technology in literacy into the 21st century.

N. CONCERNING INDICATORS OF CHANGE

This section includes any research related to tests, surveys, or measurement studies that might give some indication – or suggest the possibility of future indication – of change in learning, policy, or demographics, etc.

1. Practice-Oriented Research

The majority of the literature related to change in this practice-oriented section focuses on linking research to practice through research in practice, action research, reading-based research, theoretical reflections, and program evaluations. Approximately half of these references refer to, or arise from, the recent Research-in-Practice movement. The preponderance of this literature has been written in the just the last six years.

This section reflects current attempts to link research to practice and particularly to develop a Research-in-Practice movement across the field that will ultimately change practice based on practitioner research. The literature shows that there is a growing tendency to inform new ways of doing work in practice through situated practitioner research.

However, the literature illustrates that while there is an attempt to link research to practice, there is no explicit attempt to link literacy theory (such as the New Literacy Studies) in these research to practice connections. As noted earlier, theory often does not inform either research, policy, or practice; nor does it often inform research into the connections among these aspects of the literacy field.

2. Policy and Program-Oriented Research

As noted earlier, the emphasis here is on measuring and surveying; thus, “counts and amounts” dominate in this section. Over one-third of the citations focus on data, or on an analysis of numbers from large-scale literacy surveys or studies or discussions about these data. These references focus on describing literacy levels across different populations numerically. Topics in this area are concerned with implications of numbers, comparisons across countries, and research design and methods. The imbalance in this area raises questions of whether the complexities of literacy and literacy practice are becoming atomized into a field of numbers. Again, theory is not well represented here and connections among practice, theory, and policy are absent. Further, there is little on policy as it relates to specific groups, as named in this report. Policy research focused on women, Aboriginal people, people of colour, and adults with disabilities was not found.

Close to 20% of the references have to do with progress and outcomes in mainstream literacy programs. About half of these focus on progress and outcomes from the learner’s perspective. There are references to persistence, learners’ outcomes, and change. The other half focuses on outcomes in terms of accountability. In these citations there are references to evidenced-based, efficiency, and performance. Other references focus on testing, assessment, evaluations and research methods.

These findings could be seen as in several ways. One way is to interpret the dominant focus of describing the literacy problem through large-scale surveys as a welcome means to advocating that literacy education holds and increases its place on the political agenda. Conversely, the growing focus on numbers and percentages of people who have literacy challenges can be seen as a reification of abstract issues and unseen people who need to be fixed, remediated, or corrected. Defining or shaping an entire area of literacy and learning in statistical terms raises questions on how concepts of literacy, and hence, literacy policy, will be affected into the future. Another way of looking at these citations and the gaps versus strengths is to suggest that there is a need for more balance in literacy research; statistical analysis on one hand and the perspectives of learners and practitioners are both needed to build this field. And, once again, notably absent from this section is mention of literacy theory or connection of theory to policy.

3. Government reports

As with the last section, there is a great emphasis on large-scale surveys of populations’ literacy rates. The focus of almost all the government reports is on measuring and surveying. The citations focus on data or analysis of numbers from large-scale literacy surveys, discussions about these data, and methodology.

4. Longitudinal and Other Qualitative/Quantitative Studies/Reports

This section includes longitudinal, qualitative, and quantitative research related to literacy research. Two areas dominate this section. One is the focus on numbers and scope of the literacy issue through large-scale quantitative surveys and discussion about the design and results of those surveys.

This area of the literature shows continuous connections with the various IALS studies and the ALLS as was released in 2005. The other area that dominates is a focus on the outcomes of literacy programs. This outcomes area of the literature reflects two perspectives: the perspective of learner-related outcomes and the perspective on outcomes as related to the effectiveness of systems and accountability.

Although there is a comparatively solid body of work in this area, what is absent is an attempt to study learners and their learning and changes /outcomes on a longitudinal basis. Also, there is little comparative research, especially of a qualitative nature, that looks across programs and across sectors of the learner population. Further, there is almost no focus on practitioners in this section and almost nothing on adult literacy learning, with the exception of Livingston's (1999) study on informal learning that includes mention of literacy. There is very little on the literacy practices of adults with literacy learning challenges and little or now attention specifically on the groups named in this study, including women and Aboriginal people.

As in other sections, there is a notable absence in this literature to connect with literacy theory.

In summary, the literature as reported in this study provides a distance picture of the size and scope of the literacy problem from a perspective of numbers of people with lower reading, writing, and numeracy skills. There is little focus on learners and practitioners to help us understand what is working, what could work better, or how literacy theory informs any part of practice or learning. There is no connection with on-the-ground experience that leads back to literacy policy.

O. CONCERNING COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE AND RESEARCH

The only well-defined community of practice found by the Committee was Research-in-Practice. There are 18 web sites from the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, and Australia that focus entirely on, or include, research-in-practice findings and discussion. There is also an active Web forum as hosted by the Literacies journal that has given considerable space to Research-in-Practice (RiP).

If Research-in-Practice findings and discussions are being disseminated on websites, one has to ask if print dissemination is the one-best-way to link practitioners with research. It would be useful to know how practitioners learn about new approaches, where they turn to be informed, how they share knowledge beyond their own programs, and how they use – or do not use – these websites. Perhaps electronic communication is the most viable way to engage this field at this stage of RiP movement. Further study is need and it is suggested this would be a very promising line of study if practice-based findings are to be shared effectively.

P. CONCERNING CHANGES IN PUBLIC ATTITUDES AND PERCEPTIONS.

There is virtually nothing in this category. The two notable studies found were conducted by ABC CANADA; the latest was released in 1999. An important question that arises is what is the capacity and willingness of government, agencies and consortia to undertake such studies. Given the heavy investment from government on studies like IALS and ALLS, and the publicity around the results, it would be extremely useful to explore the degree to which the public has become more knowledgeable or supportive of literacy suggest Or, they may have developed contribution-fatigue with literacy having become but one more in a long line of national and international “causes.”

Q. CONCLUSION

Overall, the literature shows several trends. One dominant theme reflected in the literature is the “counts and amounts” surveys that help to measure and define the size of low literacy in Canada. They provide a high profile focus on literacy statistics as they relate to descriptions of the problems surrounding low literacy. The majority of this literature has been published or sponsored by the Canadian government and its partners. Some of this research allows for comparisons of current literacy rates (e.g., ALLS) and those of a decade ago (e.g., IALS), and they also allow for a common platform for comparisons among nations.

By contrast, there was minimal research of this magnitude found on the lived experiences of adults with literacy challenges, on their learning experiences in programs or tutorial situations, on practitioners’ experiences, or on the everyday literacy practices of people with literacy challenges. This imbalance has the potential for literacy policy, research, and practice to further focus on numbers rather than the lived experiences of learners and practitioners.

Another finding is that there is little connection between current literacy theory and research, policy, and practice. Even though there is a steady and growing number of studies and publications on literacy theory throughout the industrialized world, they remain, for the most part, isolated from the other literacy realities.

Based on a review of the literature, the profitable lines of inquiry include areas where:

- little has been done or where research seems to have entered a period of hiatus,
- areas are growing and developing, and require more research, and
- areas are strong and leading the way in the field.

It depends on one’s perspective and frame of reference to suggest which of these might be deemed the highest or lowest priority.

The areas that have recently received attention and show current strength and promise for the future include Research-in-Practice, literacy and health, Aboriginal literacy, literacy and technology, literacy and work, and literacy policy. Conversely, those areas that have received little or no attention, or no recent attention, but warrant far more consideration include the history of literacy, women and literacy, family literacy, corrections and literacy, ESL and first language literacy, francophone literacy, literacy and learning disabilities, and public perceptions about literacy. As discussed, the area of overview surveys and their attendant discussions are the strongest and are playing a very important role in supporting literacy.

In all cases, it can be agreed that the Canadian field of adult literacy is under-theorized and has had inadequate attention paid to its rich history. Similarly, there is an overlaying need to make stronger connections between literacy theory and research, policy, and practice. It is also critical to ensure that there is a fair balance and informed exchange between the findings of large quantitative, empirical research studies and qualitative, interpretive research. Each line of systematic inquiry has much to offer.

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VII. GENERAL LITERACY: LITERATURE

A. OVERVIEW OF LITERACY: CANADA

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