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For those of us of a certain age, the term "adult literacy" conjures images of recently arrived immigrants participating in English-language literacy classes to find or to get ahead in their jobs or to take a citizenship exam. Similarly, we might think of those high school dropouts wanting that GED and taking "refresher" courses to make it happen. But as readers of this journal can attest, the world of adult literacy is far more extensive and far more variegated than anything that used to be associated with the term "adult literacy." While some communities still offer basic English language courses to those who cannot speak English or for those who wish to gain a greater proficiency in reading or speaking the language, the notion of "literacy" has expanded along with ways that communities and other organizations have developed to encourage literacy. Even in this current economic crisis, a great variety of literacy programs are offered to a great variety of clients with very specific needs. In this synthesis, I seek to review some of the major trends in adult literacy and provide some basic information for the interested reader. I do not mean this essay to be exhaustive but to offer a review of some interesting recent research published in a variety of journals on different approaches to adult literacy. As such, I will explore programs in this country and innovative approaches throughout the world in English and other languages. The aspects of adult literacy that I will survey here include the psychological and social factors that participants in literacy programs bring to the tutoring experience, non-governmental agencies and literacy, concurrent and transnational literacies, technology, and literacy for specific purposes.

More-or-less traditional adult language classes still exist and exist to serve adult learners who either failed to complete secondary school or who recently arrived in a new country. Marion Terry interviewed students in one such program in Manitoba, Canada. She notes that students who drop out tend to be somewhat impulsive as high school students. Further, the perception of school instruction as being somehow divorced from "real life" was a pervasive theme in the interviews (34). A significant number of the interviewees were either recent immigrants to Canada or were the children of recent immigrants and thus reported feeling alienated in high school (36). Terry suggests that these variables and perceptions, which affect dropout rates, are what school systems can impact. Further, adult literacy programs need also to engender a sense of connectedness between client and program. Indeed, Lex McDonald and Elizabeth Jones discuss the services provided by a Clinical Social Worker in an adult literacy program in New Zealand. They suggest that the inclusion of a social worker provides a "holistic" approach to a literacy acquisition program in that their unique skills

can lead to the alleviation of various sorts of anxiety on the part of adult learners and allow them to concentrate on the work of literacy acquisition (70).

Adult learners have literacy options other than traditional public-funded programs, however. With states and municipalities facing budget reductions in the US and economic downturns throughout much of the world, it has fallen to various non-governmental organizations to offer literacy services to those who need them. Churches, mosques, and other religious organizations have been quick to fill this void. Converts to Christianity or Islam are encouraged to read the sacred texts as a deep understanding of both faiths requires a knowledge of these texts. In a 2007 article, George Openjuru and Elda Lyster report on such literacy efforts in Uganda. In the village of Bweyale, where the two dominant indigenous languages, Bantu and Luo, are predominantly spoken with a relatively high degree of illiteracy, English serves as a *lingua franca*, although English speakers are seldom able to read the language (100). The article suggests that encouraging participation in language-rich religious activities (reading scripture aloud during Sunday services, choir practice, and church council meetings) led to a higher degree of local language and English literacy for Anglican converts than it did for Catholic converts as the former were allowed a greater degree of participation in church services and church business (106). Additionally, the Anglican converts were encouraged to carry Bibles with them wherever they went and to read this "status symbol" to others (108).

Similarly, writing in the journal *Language and Education* in 2006, Andrey Rosowsky describes the literacy practices at a mosque in the United Kingdom. The community of Pakistani immigrants served by the mosque must offer children instruction in Arabic for the purposes of reading the Qur'an and provide supplemental instruction in English that the local schools cannot provide (530). Here, older children, those who had been in the UK for longer periods, provide the "mediated practice" in scriptural and English-language literacies that in other cultures falls to the parents (533). As the "fusing" of two languages is often something that children have an easier time with, this innovative approach provides literacy instruction and practice that allows young people (and often older immigrants) the opportunity to navigate through the language expectations of two cultures and the dictates of the Islamic faith.

This "peer tutoring" approach described above exists in secular settings as well. George Hunt writes about a project that was the result of cooperation between South African and UK universities. In a setting where English is the lingua franca, smaller language communities are fighting to preserve minority languages (81). Responding to a scarcity of written material in Xhosa, a program of additive bilingual literacy was created, one that sought to maintain English proficiency as it encouraged the development of reading skills in another language. The program described here asked participants to tape-record stories in Xhosa. Teen-aged students with facility in written Xhosa transcribed these stories (87). These older students shared the stories with younger Xhosa-illiterate students and adults to encourage Xhosa literacy and preserve the language respectively. Sadly, the program failed for a variety of reasons. Yet this notion of

"parallel literacy" has been studied in other South African settings. Recognizing that the decline of local languages is a result of apartheid, Banda notes that there is a parallel need to teach the local languages and provide instruction in English for everyday purposes (92). This study is one of the first to document how adult South Africans actually use English and local languages in areas such as internet use and commerce. What is interesting here is the role that online language communities play in preserving local languages and in encouraging facility in English. The challenge, as Banda sees it, is to provide necessary literacy practice in English while encouraging the acquisition of literacy in local African languages (127).

Technology continues to be a fertile area for research in adult literacy, and the past few years have provided rather interesting explorations of how various technologies can assist in helping adults to acquire literacy skills. Julie Mueller and her colleagues at Wilfred Laurier University and the University of Western Ontario studied the implementation of assistive technology in a community literacy organization's writing program for adult learners. A group of fourteen participants were allowed to choose from among ten assistive software packages, including those that offered the ability to hear what is being typed and those that corrected errors (15). Despite periods of frustration that arose from learning the software, participants expressed satisfaction with the technologies they ultimately chose. The ability to "individualize" the assistive technology was the key here (19-20). Another interesting exploration of the use of technology in literacy work was conducted by Timothy Houge and Constance Geier. Although their study used adolescent subjects, the implications are clear for all sorts of adult literacy programs. Tutors at a university-based program were accessed through videoconferencing (156). Students were spread out over ten cities, and the results showed significant gains in reading ability as a result of this distance learning technology (161). Gloria Jacobs attempts to address "IM-spelling," a frequently expressed complaint of those who teach or tutor students in writing. She found that those programs that encourage participants to use Instant Messaging technology as one of several media for writing actually facilitate the acquisition of writing and reading skills in other domains (207). The key factor here is that literacy tutors create a writing community for participants. Indeed, as Bronwyn Williams suggests, the technologies we prefer are closely related to our identities. These technologies need to be incorporated into a larger repertoire of literacy practices (686).

One of the emergent themes in adult literacy research is the recognition that literacy is more than simply learning to read and write. There is a burgeoning body of research that explores specific literacies. Whitney Zahnd, Steven Scaife, and Mark Francis suggest that literacy of any sort must involve the ability to interpret and use texts. Thus they studied "health literacy" and general reading ability in urban and rural adults. Their rural participants showed poorer skills in reading and understanding quantitative information and in understanding documentation. They suggest literacy programs to address these skills as poor health literacy is associated with poor overall health (555). Jean

Hess and Julia Whelan studied one such program, albeit in an urban setting. Students at Harvard Medical School partnered with participants in a community literacy program for adults studying for the GED. The medical students provided instruction in accessing and interpreting health information while the adult literacy students provided feedback on the medical students' clarity and use of "plain English." The outcomes of the program were encouraging in that adult learners gained valuable information and a sense of how to use it and the medical students reported an increased rhetorical awareness and a better idea of how to present complex medical information (223).

Health education, however, is not the only type of specific form of literacy that has received scholarly attention. Sue Folinsbee explores literacy development in the workplace. A longtime practitioner in designing courses for corporations, nonprofit organizations, and other organizations, she writes about the ethical dilemmas faced when such programs are defined solely by management (36). She advocates giving a voice to employees, the actual clients of such programs, not only in designing a course that meets a specific workplace need but also in defining what literacy itself means in that workplace (38). In another setting, Jason Piccone found that intake literacy testing tends to underestimate the literacy skills of prison inmates and that assessments should be performed only when inmates arrive at more "permanent" placements to ensure the development of literacy programs that actually meet the needs of inmates (246).

Again, this is nothing more than a brief summary of the research published recently concerning a variety of issues in adult literacy or on literacy practices that impact adult acquisition of literacy skills. Certainly, there is other significant research in traditional programs as well as those that seek to promote literacy for specific purposes. Additionally, issues of bilingual literacy will continue to demand our attention as well as the attention of those that speak to the impact of cultural, social, and technological factors on literacy acquisition. Designing programs that meet the needs of adult learners depends on such explorations.

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