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**Caribbean Learners in an Adult Literacy Programme:
Concepts of Literacy, Motives and Expectations of the Programme**

by

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Abstract

Adult literacy programmes traditionally define literacy in fundamental, functional or cultural terms and prepare learners to conform to society. Community-based programmes see literacy as emancipatory, adopt a critical stance towards society and ideally use a learner-centred approach. This study sought to inform one community-based programme on more effective learner-centredness. Fourteen Caribbean immigrants participating in the programme were interviewed to investigate their concepts of literacy, motives for enrolling in, and expectations of, the programme. Results indicate that learners had limited concepts of the word "literacy," and had joined the programme because of difficulties in accessing Canadian public education. Most had completed primary school in the Caribbean and were accustomed to teacher-directed education. The study recommends that the programme increase learner-participation in decision-making and adopt a holistic approach to learning using focus groups. Also advocated is critical assessment of issues affecting learners such as language, migration and access to school.

Résumé

Les programmes d'alphabétisation pour les adultes définissent traditionnellement l'aptitude à lire et à écrire en des termes fondamentaux, fonctionnels et culturels. Ils préparent les apprenants à se conformer aux normes de la société. Les programmes communautaires présentent l'alphabétisation comme un agent d'émancipation, joue un rôle critique en questionnant les normes sociales et adoptent idéalement une approche centrée sur l'apprenant. Cette étude vise à informer les intervenants d'un programme communautaire au sujet de l'adoption d'approches plus efficaces et davantage centrées sur les apprenants. Quatorze immigrants des Caraïbes participant à ce programme ont été interviewés afin d'explorer leurs conceptions de l'alphabétisation, leurs motivations à participer au programme ainsi que leurs attentes relativement à ce même programme. Les résultats tendent à démontrer que les participants avaient une compréhension limitée du terme «alphabétisation» et qu'ils en étaient venus à prendre part au programme en raison des difficultés qu'ils éprouvaient à accéder au système public d'éducation canadien. La plupart avaient complété leurs études primaires dans les Caraïbes et étaient habitués à une approche centrée sur l'enseignant. Il est donc recommandé que la participation des apprenants dans le processus de prise de décision soit accrue et qu'une approche plus holistique de l'apprentissage – incluant le recours à des groupes cibles – soit adoptée dans le cadre de ce programme. On suggère également une évaluation minutieuse des enjeux relatifs à la langue, à l'immigration ainsi qu'à l'accès à l'éducation.

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CARIBBEAN LEARNERS IN AN ADULT LITERACY PROGRAMME: CONCEPTS OF LITERACY, MOTIVES AND EXPECTATIONS OF THE PROGRAMME

Chapter I

Introduction

Most adult literacy programmes in Canada follow a traditional model of education, wherein standards and objectives are set by administrators, implemented by practitioners and imposed on learners. Despite efforts of educators and volunteers in these programmes, adult illiteracy rates in Canada remain high. According to the 1981 Federal Census, 20% of the Canadian adult population were functionally illiterate (Statistics Canada, 1984). Just over a decade later, the first international adult literacy survey (Statistics Canada, 1995) estimated that 22% of Canadians were operating at the lowest level of functional literacy. Attempts to reduce adult illiteracy rates are hampered by low enrolment rates (8% of those identified as functionally illiterate), high dropout rates (70%) and low learner achievement levels in adult literacy programmes (Beder, 1991; Perin & Greenberg, 1993; Quigley, 1992).

In contrast to traditional programmes, community-based literacy programmes, because of their participatory approach, claim to attract and retain a large percentage of those adults who avoid traditional programmes. However, community-based literacy programmes have not proven that they are able to successfully address the illiteracy problem. In fact, many of them find it difficult to translate their philosophies into practice that leads to measurable achievement (Beder, 1996). The Home Extended Literacy Programme (HELP), run by the Jamaica Association of Montreal, is an example of many

community-based adult literacy programmes that have expressed dissatisfaction with their current levels of success (Dayle, 1999). Now in its second year of operation, HELP was established to meet the literacy upgrading needs of Caribbean immigrants in the Montreal area through a volunteer instructor programme. Although it is difficult to estimate the size of its target population, HELP attracts a full enrolment of learners (approximately 45) for each 3-month session. The estimated 40% attrition rate from the programme is not considered outside the norm. However, the slow progress of learners has become a source of concern to instructors and programme administrators. After five completed sessions, over a period of fifteen months, HELP has successfully graduated only nine learners. A bottleneck is created as new learners enrol each session, because the current learners have not progressed sufficiently to be either promoted within the programme or to graduate.

The problem of low learner progress rates in adult literacy education programmes is widespread and the subject of much research (Diekhoff, 1988). One potential explanation receiving attention in the literature is that learners' views of literacy and their expectations of the literacy programme are not taken into account by the programme planners (Malicky & Norman, 1995). Issues which have emerged during the past year at the Jamaica Association of Montreal point to the need for learner-related information that will help the co-ordinator and the instructors to plan and deliver effective instruction. Among the specific concerns identified by the staff and administrators of this particular programme are difficulties in the following areas: (a) planning learner-centred curricula, (b) coping with learners at various levels of competency within each class, (c) measuring the progress of learners, and (d) determining when learners are ready for promotion, or for graduation.

In accordance with the principles of adult community-based education, one of the goals of the HELP programme is to be learner-centred. However, there has been no

systematic investigation of the needs and interests of the learners enrolled. Have the current learners joined the literacy programme (a) to gain command of day-to-day print-related tasks, such as understanding their telephone bill, (b) to learn academic reading and writing skills, such as essay composition, (c) to develop abilities that will help them to meet the intellectual demands of their jobs or (d) to share in socially stimulating activities? The first three of these options contain elements that are typically conceived of as literacy, however the fourth option, social stimulation, is not a customary focus for a literacy programme. The fact that some instructors believe that many of the learners are primarily interested in socialising raises questions about the extent to which the programme can accommodate the learners' interests. To what extent can a programme adopt a learner-centred approach and at the same time focus on literacy?

There is no universally accepted definition of the word literacy. Adult literacy learners, volunteer instructors and programme administrators do not always ascribe the same meaning to the word (Quigley, 1997). Furthermore, even if the instructors and the learners agree on a definition of literacy, the learners' motives for enrolling in the programme are not necessarily literacy-related. Their present learning needs and interests are influenced by their personal experiences and their background knowledge. The social, cultural, historical and educational background of the adult literacy learners has a profound influence on their concepts of literacy and literacy programmes.

One of the strengths of community-based literacy programmes is that the social, cultural and historical context of learners' lives are usually taken into account (Gaber-Katz & Watson, 1991). However, in order to effect learning, it is important that community-based programmes also examine the educational background of their learners. Learners' prior schooling is thought by adult literacy researchers to be one of the most critical factors

in determining learners' attitudes towards literacy programmes (Courtney, LaDeane, & Babchuk, 1994). In order to implement a learner-centred, community-based adult literacy programme it is important to take into account the learners' individual schooling experiences as well as to find out about their present needs and goals.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to assist in providing the basis on which the Home Extended Literacy Programme (HELP) may be more learner-centred by investigating the concepts, motives and expectations of the adult literacy learners in programme. Guided by the literature, the study seeks to examine the relationship among learners' concepts, motives and expectations and their prior schooling. The questions guiding the study are:

1. How do the learners conceptualise "literacy"?
2. What are the learners' motives for enrolling in the literacy programme?
3. What are the learners' expectations of the programme?
4. What influence does prior schooling have in shaping the learners' motives, expectations and conceptualisations of literacy?

Definition of Key Terms

Terms which appear in the title of this thesis, and which are central to the ideas being discussed are defined as follows:

1. Caribbean – In this thesis, the word Caribbean is used loosely to refer to the countries of the English-speaking Caribbean. The following former British colonies located in the Caribbean sea are specifically referred to in this study: Barbados, Grenada, Jamaica, St. Kitts & Nevis, St. Lucia, St. Vincent, Trinidad & Tobago.

2. **Learner** – The active term "learner" is used in place of the word "student," because it depicts a person who is capable of constructing and engaging in a process of learning and not one who is merely a submissive receptacle for knowledge.
3. **Literacy** – A number of alternate definitions for the word literacy will be discussed in this study. However, wherever no specific definition is cited, the word should be taken to mean "the ability to read and write."
4. **Concept** – A concept is a general notion or idea. A person's concept of literacy is therefore his or her general notion of what literacy is. It is not restricted to a formal definition of the word, but includes any ideas about what the word pertains to.
5. **Motives** – Motives are factors or circumstances that induce people to act in a particular way. The learners' motives for enrolling in the literacy programme are the reasons why they enrolled, and are less specific than their goals in enrolling.
6. **Expectations** – The learners' expectations of the programme include both their assumptions and their suggestions about what the literacy programme should be like.

Organisation of the Thesis

Chapter II contains the background and theoretical framework for this study. It covers different perspectives on literacy, examines the findings from previous studies related to the research questions in this study, and describes the educational system in the Caribbean. The chapter closes with a statement of the research questions and corresponding hypotheses. Chapter III explains the details of the methodology used in the study. Chapter IV contains the combined results and discussion, and Chapter V concludes the study with the recommendations for the programme.

Chapter II

Theoretical Framework

Defining Literacy

The most basic meaning of the word literacy is "the ability to read and write" (Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English, 1995). However, the existence of diverging views surrounding the definitions and purposes of literacy is well noted in the literature. During the latter half of the 20th century, UNESCO, one of the world's largest governing bodies on education, has overseen a series of changes in the definition of literacy. We may gain an appreciation for the variety of meanings ascribed to the word literacy by following this trail of definitions.

Fundamental Literacy

In 1946, UNESCO adopted a concept of fundamental adult education, which included the following core skills: thinking, speaking, listening, calculating, reading and writing (UNESCO, 1949). Adult literacy was seen as an extension of schooling and the major tools of literacy were the materials and techniques that were used in primary school education. There was essentially no difference between primary education for children and fundamental education intended for adults. Although such a narrow definition of adult literacy is rarely used today it forms the basis for much of the current discourse on literacy. For most practical purposes, fundamental literacy has been replaced by the concept of functional literacy.

Functional Literacy

Functional literacy reached international attention through Gray's (1956) survey of reading and writing, in which he considered a person to be functionally literate when "he

[sic] has acquired the knowledge and skills in reading and writing which enable him [sic] to engage in all those activities in which literacy is normally assumed in his [sic] culture or group" (Gray, 1956, p. 24). Gray's definition noted the relative nature of literacy and the need to relate literacy training to the context in which individuals live. Later publications by UNESCO preserved some elements of Gray's definition, but instead of leaving the purpose of literacy open to interpretation by the "culture or group" they stressed economic development.

Literacy programmes should preferably be linked with economic priorities...[They] must impart not only reading and writing, but also professional and technical knowledge thereby leading to further participation of adults in economic life. (UNESCO, 1966 p. 97).

According to Levine, UNESCO had essentially made the term functional literacy synonymous with "literacy for work" (Levine, 1982, p. 254). Other writers define functional literacy in slightly broader terms such as "an individual's ability in relation to the reading and writing tasks imposed by, or existing in, the environment in which that individual resides and seeks to function" (Valentine, 1986, p. 109). However, most definitions of functional literacy are regarded as limited and limiting by some experts, particularly because they are usually determined according to "tasks imposed by" society. Functional literacy prepares people to conform, to fit-in, to function in their social environments (Levine, 1982; Malicky, 1991).

Emancipatory Literacy

A third perspective of literacy is one that challenges the status quo. Emancipatory literacy is seen as one of the mechanisms through which adults come to understand their world and, through the process of becoming literate, become empowered to act rather than

being acted upon. While most other approaches to literacy concentrate on individual gain, emancipatory literacy focuses on social transformation in the elimination of dominant class hegemony and oppression (Beder, 1991). Freire (1972, p. 79), one of the most prolific advocates of emancipatory literacy, described it as "a humanist and liberating praxis [through which people] subjected to domination must fight for their emancipation." The revolutionary aims of emancipatory literacy lessen its appeal to mainstream organisations such as those under the control of the federal government. However, Hamadache & Martin (1986), writing for UNESCO, emphasised the political, human and cultural aspects in their definition of literacy:

[N]ot just the process of learning the skills of reading, writing, and arithmetic...literacy creates the conditions for the acquisition of a critical consciousness of the contradictions of society in which man [sic] lives and of its aims; it also stimulates initiative and his [sic] participation in the creation of projects capable of acting upon the world, of transforming it (Hamadache & Martin, 1986, p. 128-129).

Although in theory UNESCO's definition of literacy has become progressively more liberal, in practice their adult literacy programmes continue to follow a conservative approach to literacy education (Malicky & Norman, 1995). The radical philosophies of emancipatory literacy are recognised, endorsed, pursued or sanctioned by independently run community-based programmes.

Cultural Literacy

Another perspective of literacy, which is in sharp contrast to emancipatory literacy, is the conservative approach of cultural literacy. E.D. Hirsch (1987, p. xvii), who coined the term cultural literacy, defines literacy as a set of "shared symbols and the shared

information that the symbols represent." To be literate entails the mastery of material which is embodied in the shared meanings of society. He argues that every human society requires a shared cultural literacy, and in his book, "Cultural literacy: what every American needs to know" (Hirsch, 1987), he proposes an American cultural literacy that includes such things as standard English, a commonly held interpretation of history and the basic principles of science. Hirsch's critics have attacked him for what they call "thinly masked cultural elitism" (Quigley, 1997, p. 118) and "eurocentrism" (Mitchell & Weiler, 1991).

The idea that there can be a shared national (or international) culture is controversial because it requires selecting from among many valid existing cultures. What Hirsch and his colleagues (whose council he sought when compiling the list of items found in the book) regard as things "every American needs to know" are limited to entities with which they themselves are familiar, and which are upheld within their own circles as being worthwhile items of knowledge. The American culture that Hirsch defines is essentially the culture of White middle class Americans. Though he admits that his list is neither comprehensive nor exhaustive, the very attempt to define and delimit American culture is seen as antagonistic to the ideals of multiculturalism. Though Hirsch's book is popular among many Americans it is not embraced as a universally acceptable concept of literacy.

Dynamic Nature of Literacy

One thing is clear from the preceding discussion: there is no consensus as to what constitutes literacy. The term continues to have a range of divergent meanings in the professional literature. However, while specialists and bureaucrats contest definitions of literacy that emphasise different types and purposes of reading and writing, contemporary use of the word suggests that it is now popularly taken to mean basic knowledge. Current utilisation of the word literacy, in expressions such as "computer literacy,"

"communication literacy" and "media literacy," challenge the earlier confinement of literacy to reading and writing. One author compares the concept of literacy to the dynamic states of substances like jelly and sand, being "without intrinsic shape, defined and redefined by the vessels that hold them" (Venezky, Wagner, & Ciliberti, 1990).

Theories on the Causes, Effects and Solutions to Illiteracy

Just as there are many definitions of literacy, so are there many schools of thought on the causes and effects of illiteracy, and ways to reduce it. This section briefly describes five theories on the causes, effects and solutions to illiteracy. Each theory has its own definition of what constitutes literacy and each conceives of literacy as serving different purposes.

Internal Attribution Theory and Individual Deficiency

The first theory on the cause of illiteracy is internal attribution theory. It is a deficit model, which places the blame for illiteracy within the illiterate person. According to this theory, illiteracy is the result of individual deficiencies, such as learning disabilities or behavioural problems, which lead to low intellectual achievement and poor social performance. Proponents of this theory may pinpoint the source of the individual deficiencies in human genetics, birth defects, or some early developmental delinquency. However, the tenet of the theory is that all things are attributable to the individual.

Attribution theorists are likely to define literacy in functional terms and to stress the importance of a person's ability to operate according to the norms of society. Ignorance and poor mental ability are considered to be non-functional behaviours. In analysing the consequences of illiteracy, the focus sometimes shifts from the individual to the community, so that illiterate persons are held responsible for many of society's ills. Illiteracy is thought to result in inclinations towards deviant behaviour and criminal

conduct (McGovern, 1980). Illiterate persons are a burden to society; they make almost no valuable contributions, yet they consume scarce resources through their reliance on social welfare. To be illiterate is to be worthless; to become functionally literate is to become a worthwhile member of society.

Some writers refer metaphorically to this theory as the medical model. Pupils who display symptoms of learning or behavioural deficiencies are subjected to diagnostic screening tests whereupon they are prescribed special education (see Shakespeare, 1998). There is little hope for persons suffering from the disease of illiteracy, unless their underlying deficiencies are somehow cured by exceptional education systems (Ilsley & Stahl, 1994). Many mass national and international campaigns against illiteracy utilise this view to appeal for volunteer instructors. The idea that many individuals among us are suffering from this terrible but curable illness encourages those who can read to join in the fight against the illiteracy epidemic. There is little doubt that many factors other than individual deficiency contribute to illiteracy (Quigley, 1997). However, the medical model and the idea of blaming the victim are common strategies used to situate illiteracy.

External Attribution Theory and Environmental Deficiency

The second theory which explains the cause of illiteracy is external attribution theory. It is also a deficit model, however, the deficiency or defect is thought to be external to the individual. Deficiencies in the home environment or the school environment are the usual culprits – poverty, unstable home life, parents who cannot read, and absence of reading material in the home – or lack of teaching resources, inferior teachers and ineffective teaching methods in the schools (Quigley, 1997). Many children grow up in homes where there are no books, magazines or other reading material, and never see their parents (or anyone at home) reading or writing, either for academic purposes or leisure.

Furthermore, notwithstanding the expectation that the school, and not the home, is ultimately responsible for preparing children academically, many schools are unable to counteract the ill effects of a deficient home environment, because there are also deficiencies within the school environment which exacerbate rather than ameliorate learning problems for some students.

The effects of illiteracy caused by environmental deficiencies are underachievers whose problems lie in a lack of stimulation and not a lack of inherent potential. Environments that lack adequate intellectual stimulation, are also commonly thought to be devoid of social and emotional stimulation (Bloom, Davis, & Hess, 1965). In addition to being academic non-performers, children who feel unloved and uncared for, grow up to resent the institutions that mistreat them (Quigley, 1992). Motivational theorists claim that persons raised in socially and emotionally poor environments end up being inimical to education and learning (Boshier, 1973). Thus the illiteracy that results from environmental deficiency is a self-perpetuating cycle; children of illiterate parents eventually become parents of illiterate children.

In order to protect a new generation from illiteracy, one recommendation is for greater co-operation between the home and the school. Parent-teacher associations, family literacy programmes and counselling interventions rank highly on the list of proposed solutions to environmental deficiency. For those who fall through the cracks, there are adult literacy programmes, which offer remedial help and individualised attention designed to combat the effects of having grown up in less than ideal situations. Such programmes often use diaries and journals as instructional tools where learners reflect on their lives and in so doing discover ways to overcome the negative forces that have shaped their

accomplishments. Environmental deficiency theory posits that the way to help learners is to start working from the outside in.

Reading: Skills or Process?

A third theory of the cause of illiteracy has been termed the "great debate" (Chall, 1996). This debate is not about whether the cause of illiteracy is within or without the illiterate person. The dispute is between two dissimilar views of reading: skills versus process. Process-oriented educators believe that reading is a holistic "process of meaning making, ... a psycho-linguistic guessing game... [in which] readers use the least amount of available text information necessary in relation to existing conceptual schemata to get meaning" (Goodman, 1986, p. 25). The skills view defines reading as a set of skills – letter recognition, letter sound association, word attack – through which people recognise and sound out words. In addition to the debate between the skills and the process views, there is also a debate between proponents of skills methods about which skills to teach and the order in which they should be taught.

Educators who are intent on the distinction between various views of reading are inclined to define literacy as the ability to read. Reading ability is then used as an indication of global academic ability and as a predictor of ability to function in society. The causal link between reading ability and productivity has been so emphasised, that people have blamed low U.S. national productivity on the method used in schools to teach reading (Flesch, 1955). In debating the merits of one skill-based method over another, Flesch claims that knowing the rules of phonics enables a person to read any word he encounters, whereas the word recognition method requires that an individual learn all the words that he is likely to encounter before he can read them. Flesch boasts that he can read

Czech, although he does not understand it, because he know the rules of pronunciation (Flesch, 1955). However, some educators believe that what Flesch is doing is not reading.

Constructivist educators, who support a process view of reading, would argue that unless comprehension occurs, then what is taking place should not be called reading (Booth, 1998; Hayes, 1991). Furthermore, they would argue that even if a reader cannot identify all the words in a passage, she is still reading as long as she is able to understand and make sense of the passage. Readers rely on pragmatic, semantic and syntactic knowledge in addition to grapho-phonemic (phonics) skills when interpreting textual information. Reading is the use of these various types of knowledge, to differing extents, to make sense of text. Instructional methods that are promoted by these educators recognise that readers' knowledge about language, knowledge of the content of the reading material and specific knowledge about the written word all aid in the process of decoding text. There is also a high level of integration between reading, writing, listening and speaking which many process-oriented educators utilise in the teaching of reading.

In the language experience approach, for instance, learners create their own texts based on personal oral accounts of actual experiences. They also engage in written conversations with peers and instructors, writing for real rather than imagined purposes, transcribing text from voice and reading aloud from their own text. All these activities involve transferring between different modes of communication, as well as building on learners' personal experiences. Instructors then guide learners through an editing process that teaches skills and rules regarding the use of language, but only as they relate to the learner's immediate needs. In contrast to being taught the rules of phonics or word recognition in a predetermined, hierarchical fashion, the language experience approach teaches skills only when they become relevant and necessary (Edelsky, 1991). The main

criticism of the language experience approach is that it depends on instructors becoming aware of learners' weak areas in order to determine the appropriate time to address a particular need. Many learner misconceptions that go unnoticed may remain uncorrected.

Clearly, there are merits to be found in each of the various views of reading and reading instruction. Almost all methods have produced students who excel as readers (see McKenna, Robinson, & Miller, 1990). However, no method is guaranteed to be one hundred percent successful. Not surprisingly, when faced with a choice, many educators tend to favour the method by which they remember having learned to read. A more effective strategy may be to select an appropriate method based on the learner's particular background.

Ethnocentrism and Cultural Conflict

The fourth hypothesis for the high incidence of illiteracy is based on ethno-cultural differences. The performance of Black students, including African-Americans, African-Canadians and Caribbeans in North American schools has long been a subject of research. "There is no disagreement over the fact that Black students [in the United States] generally do less well than White students and that Blacks tend to terminate their schooling earlier" (Ogbu, 1978, p. 43). However, there are a number of disparate reasons posited to explain the performance gap.

Ogbu (1978) has organised some of the explanations found in the literature under five headings: (a) heredity, (b) cultural deprivation, (c) institutional deficiency, (d) culture conflict, and (e) educational equality. These five explanations correspond roughly to the theories under scrutiny in this study. Thus far we have looked at three theories: individual deficiency theory, environmental deficiency theory and skills versus process theory which are parallel to what Ogbu calls respectively: heredity theory, cultural deprivation theory

and institutional deficiency theory. While Ogbu has raised these theories as explanations for the low relative performance of Blacks, we have used them to account for the existence of illiteracy in the general population. However, in both cases the issue is : what are the causes of illiteracy and poor academic achievement?

The heredity theory claims that Blacks have inferior genetic endowments that prevent them from achieving intellectually. Ogbu discounts the heredity theory on grounds that the researchers (Jensen, 1969) use defective research methods (comparison within either the Black or White population is a comparison of biological organisms, but comparison between Black and White populations in the United States is a comparison of sociologically defined groups), and that the conclusions are based on the interpretive fallacy that statistical significance necessarily supports the researcher's hypothesis. The cultural deprivation theory claims that Black parents fail to transmit a learning culture to their children. Ogbu's locates a major flaw in the cultural deprivation theory in that there is a built-in bias that tells the researcher what to look for and that many positive attributes of "culturally deprived" children are ignored during data collection. Furthermore, counter-evidence such as so-called culturally deprived students who do well, and culturally-privileged students who fail in school is not researched.

Supporters of the institutional deficiency theory use two separate arguments: that schools do not teach the right skills and that the methods used in schools favour middle class non-minority students. Both are inadequate according to Ogbu, the first because it does not explain why Blacks do less well, since institutional deficiency should affect all children and the second, because it fails to examine why the schools use methods that favour middle class non-minority students.

The conclusion that Ogbu reaches after inspecting each of the theories, is that the poor performance of Black students in American schools is really a result of differential treatment of Blacks and Whites in American society, whereby society assigns Blacks and Whites different roles in adult life, and prepares them for these roles by offering differing levels of education and skills.

Discrimination based on race, though not always institutionalised, often results from prejudicial stereotyping. People judge persons outside of their own cultural or ethnic grouping based on preconceived ideas that apply to the other person's entire culture or group. Teachers have been found to base their expectations of learners on such stereotypes (Coelho, 1998). In many cases this means that teachers predetermine their students' futures by providing them with instructional support and encouragement that prepares them for roles that are within the teachers' expectations. For instance, parents of Afro-Caribbean immigrant students in Canada complain that teachers were differentially preparing their children for physical rather than intellectual pursuits (Palmer, 1990). They cited examples where students were placed in classes for low achievers and where their teachers discouraged them from pursuing academics, even though they displayed both the interest and the capacity for academia. Teacher behaviour influenced the achievements of those Black children in preparing them only for working class jobs or athletic careers. Notably, prejudicial behaviour towards students is not limited to Blacks. An Asian student, also schooled in Canada, recalls that her elementary school teacher denied her full participation in artistic or creative class activities such as finger painting, because the teacher automatically assumed that being Asian, her natural aptitude would be towards mathematics and science rather than arts (Sleeter & Grant, 1999).

Ogbu, and others who support his views regarding the cause of the performance gap between Blacks and Whites, see the solution to the existing situation in an examination of the nature of American caste society. Acknowledging that "schools are organised to promote failure among Blacks and success among Whites" (Ogbu, 1978, p. 65), is only the first step, the next step is to explain why schools are organised that way. The next theory on the causes and effects of illiteracy takes this crucial step.

Oppression and Conspiracy Theory

The fifth theory of the cause of illiteracy is an extension of the fourth. According to this theory, illiteracy is intentionally allowed to exist in order to retain dominant class hegemony. One difference between this theory and the previous one is that the dominant class is not only defined according to race, but according to gender, social class and culture as well. Persons who are not representative of the typical dominant social group are considered minorities, not necessarily in numbers but in status – e.g. women, persons of colour, non-Christians, gays and disabled persons. Discrimination against minority groups is a means of protecting the present social order by withholding power from non-dominant groups. Because participation in the civic decision-making process usually requires that persons are literate, one way of withholding power is to suppress access to literacy.

According to the oppression theory, even the notion of functional literacy is a strategy used by the authorities to keep persons in positions of perpetual subordination. Education which prepares learners to conform to the rules and dictates of society is oppressive. Societies that invest in what Freire refers to as the "banking concept" of education are reproved for subjecting learners to instruction that prepares them to follow rules without questioning (Freire, 1972). True literacy is not merely the ability to read and write, nor is it limited to being able to function in society, the acquisition of true literacy is

a liberating experience that invites people to challenge the rules and to resist oppression. Emancipatory literacy involves being able to "read the world" as well as the word in order to break free from the oppression of poverty and subordination (Freire & Macedo, 1987).

Freire, one of the pioneers and most outspoken advocates of emancipatory literacy, was imprisoned and exiled for bringing literacy to peasants in his home country of Brazil. Years after his exile, during a tour of North America where he was presenting at conferences and workshops, a female colleague pointed out that peasantry was still prevalent in Brazil, and asked Freire why he did not fight for causes that (she thought) would have had greater liberating impact on the lives of peasants. According to her, developing an effective public welfare system would have been more effective at reducing poverty than merely teaching people to read. Freire shook his head at the fact that his mission was so misunderstood and asked rhetorically, "Do you think that I went to prison for teaching people to sound out words?" (D. Dillon, personal communication, May 1999).

His reply states emphatically what emancipatory literacy is not. It is not about teaching people to read by sounding out words. In fact, emancipatory literacy is not about teaching people to read. Although reading and writing may be necessary prerequisites for access to power, they are not sufficient to grant power. Access to welfare funds may artificially alleviate poverty, but it leads to dependency on external support systems rather than promoting self sufficiency.

Emancipatory literacy programmes, also known as critical literacy programmes involve people learning to look critically upon their historical existence and thereby coming to a "conscientisation" (Freire, 1972) of their situation as having being historically constructed. The purpose of critical reflection is to define and describe situational problems in terms that will enable people to create a different history for the future members of their

group. The thinking behind the emancipatory literacy theory is that illiteracy and functional literacy are tools of oppression and that true literacy involves understanding the circumstances by which one is oppressed and thereby taking steps to alter those circumstances (Freire & Macedo, 1987). Instead of seeking donations as a solution to poverty, emancipatory literacy involves transforming the conditions that bring about poverty in the first place.

Traditional and Current Models of Adult Literacy Education

Traditional Models and Human Capital Theory

Each of the first three models of adult literacy education – internal attribution, external attribution and skills versus process – have dominated North America at some time during the 20th century. These are the traditional models of adult literacy education. Many proponents of these models highlight the fact that society bears the burden of illiteracy. Human capital theorists remind us that some of the consequences of illiteracy are low productivity, higher crime rates and people who don't pay their share of taxes (Stechert, 1985). At the societal or macro level, the "banking metaphor" (Ilsley & Stahl, 1994), which hinges on the issue of human capital investment, imparts the image that citizens need to invest in the poverty-stricken lives of illiterates or else the nation will go poor. Many researchers have argued that illiteracy does not cause crime or poverty, but that all three – illiteracy, crime and poverty – are results of social mechanisms that foster inequity (e.g., Quigley, 1997). Nevertheless, the correlation between illiteracy and other social ills is used in media messages to encourage mass participation in literacy campaigns. The message conveyed is that illiteracy can be eradicated through the efforts of ordinary citizens, and that it is their business to do so because the effects of illiteracy are not merely individual but societal concerns (Kozol, 1985).

Effects of Traditional Adult Literacy Education

One of the assumptions of traditional campaigns against illiteracy in North America is that teaching an adult to read requires only care and persistence. Approximately 75% of programmes use volunteers (Development Associates, 1992) and 45% of federally funded programmes in the US do not have a single staff person certified in adult education or a single full time instructor or administrator (U.S. Congress: Office of Technology Assessment, 1993). However, they have failed to live up to their promise of reducing levels of illiteracy (Cook, 1977; Diekhoff, 1988).

Federally funded adult literacy programmes have managed to attract only 8% of adults whose reading level is below functional (Pugsley, 1990). Eighteen percent of those who enrol drop out before twelve hours of instruction (Development Associates, 1993) and those learners who persist improve their reading by an average of only 1.5 grade levels over 3 years (Diekhoff, 1988). More alarming is the finding that most of those who graduate from literacy programmes return to the same low-paying jobs afterwards (Malicky & Norman, 1995).

On the global front, UNESCO claimed in 1964 that it could eliminate illiteracy world-wide, through its functional programmes, but by 1976 faced with obvious disappointment stated that "literacy programmes can only be fully functional...if they accord to social, cultural and political change, as well as economic growth" (UNESCO, 1976, p. 160). The lesson learned from the non-performance of adult literacy programmes is that the traditional models espoused are inadequate. The increasing interest in community-based and emancipatory models of adult literacy education is a current reaction to illiteracy. What is the philosophy that distinguishes community-based education from traditional education?

Current Models of Adult Literacy Education: Community-Based Programmes and Popular Education

The ethno-cultural and oppression theories define illiteracy as being socially constructed. Typically, literacy programmes that adopt this stance are community-based programmes also referred to as participatory or critical literacy programmes and the educational model that these programmes follow is called popular education or critical pedagogy. Gaber-Katz and Watson (1991) have identified three principles that underlie community-based literacy programmes: learner-centredness, critical literacy, and community building. Learner-centred programmes foster equality among learners, volunteers and staff, and ensure that learners' interests and needs guide the curriculum. Critical literacy emphasises the social, economic and political empowerment of literacy learners, rather than just their academic achievement. Community-building focuses on the empowerment of the group as a collective and on working with other neighbourhood services within the community. So the essence of community-based programmes is that their goal is to bring about social change that results in the empowerment of the members of the community and of the community as a whole.

Community-based programmes often follow what is called a "popular" (Beder, 1996) or "participatory" (Gaber-Katz & Watson, 1991) education model. The way that Beder (1996) describes the components of popular education echoes the principles of community-based programmes outlined above:

Popular education has three essential and integrated components that separate it from other adult education methodologies: praxis, a collective and participatory orientation, and action....Praxis is the interaction between theory and practice, in which theory informs practice and practice informs theory....Collective and

participatory orientation [means that] groups rather than individuals are the object of education, ... although individuals may benefit, programme outcomes are measured by group achievements. ... [In popular education] the kind of action taken ... must further humanist goals such as social justice, social equality, and the elimination of social oppression. (Beder, 1996, p.75 –76)

Gaber-Katz's (1991) community-based philosophy and Beder's (1996) popular education express the aims of the literacy programme that is the subject of this study. Learner-centredness and community-building speak to the same ideals as collective and participatory orientation. Similarly, critical literacy is akin to praxis and action. These goals call for a thorough knowledge of learners' views and needs, their beliefs about literacy and their attitudes toward literacy programmes.

Community-based popular education in the HELP programme. A major focus of this thesis is to investigate issues with the objective of making the HELP programme more learner-centred in keeping with the aims of community-based popular education. One of the problems experienced in the programme is insufficient knowledge about the learners, their views about literacy and their expectations of the programme. In the next section, we will examine findings from other studies that have sought to understand learners' views. We know that learners' views are strongly influenced by their prior schooling and their individual backgrounds. However, none of the previous studies has focused on a population of learners within the same social, demographic, educational, and cultural background of the learners in the HELP programme. The findings from these studies thus have limited predictive power for the present study.

Adult Literacy Learners' Concepts of Literacy and of Themselves

Very little is known about learners' concepts of literacy, but the few studies which deal with this topic have found that learners' ideas of literacy are mostly fundamental in nature (Malicky & Norman, 1995). For many learners, literacy is synonymous with reading, and good readers are those who know more words or can spell well (Fingeret & Drennon, 1997). These ideas are thought to be residual of the views of reading held in schools where many of these adults were labelled as "slow readers." Having never conquered the task of reading, they continue to think of themselves in these terms throughout their adult lives. The perception of themselves as poor readers does not necessarily transfer to other areas of their lives (a surprising number of adult non-readers are successful entrepreneurs, for example). However, adult literacy professionals tend to believe that their students have low global self-esteem and not just low perception of themselves as readers (Quigley, 1997).

Learners see their instructors as key to their learning and are loyal and appreciative of them. They rarely criticise either the materials or methods employed and seem to develop relationships with their instructors that border on dependency (Davis & O'Brien, 1985; Malicky & Norman, 1995, 1996). Although they see reading as difficult they rely on their teachers to make it manageable for them. Instructors try to counteract what they perceive to be low self-esteem by rewarding learners for even the most minimal efforts rather than evaluating them based on their real achievement. Some learners recognise their instructors behaviour toward them as patronising and condescending and state that they do not like being treated like children (Fingeret & Drennon, 1997). On the other hand, there are those who seem to appreciate the praise they receive.

Ironically, it may be the actions and attitudes of the instructors that cultivate the learners' habit of dependency. Outside of the literacy programme, Fingeret (1983), who spent twelve months with low literate adults in their communities, found that in sharp contrast to the media image of adults as deficient and dependent, they are active members of "social networks" – informal co-operatives among adult peers characterised by interdependence and a range of skills. Low-literate adults make valuable contributions to their networks in many areas other than reading and writing and are at times looked up to as leaders or role models. The initiative of co-operation seems promising for participatory literacy programmes, which are built on the premise that by actively engaging learners in programme planning, they will be stimulated to invent solutions to their own problems. However, as long as instructors treat learners in patronising ways, they will tend towards the cycle of dependency that community-based literacy programmes claim to be trying to break.

Quigley (1997) makes the assertion that when adult literacy learners are asked to describe an illiterate adult, they never mention low self-image in their responses. Instead, he says they speak of schools that ignored them, families that moved too much, and health problems that interfered with their attendance. They lay the blame for their low literacy outside themselves – school, family circumstances, unfortunate luck – rather than on themselves. Similar views were especially common when researchers interviewed low-literate adults who choose not to participate in literacy programmes (Beder, 1991; Quigley, 1997). These adults, referred to in the literature as "resisters," hold particularly strong views against schooling and educational institutions. Their dissatisfaction with the failure of schools (not of themselves) causes them to avoid participating in any institutions that they believe will be like school. Many of these adults were members of minority ethnic

groups who felt that they had been misunderstood and discriminated against in school. According to Quigley (1992), none of the learners displayed resistance to learning or knowledge, but they rejected the mainstream orientation of the schools and institutions that they had attended. By utilising an external attribution theory to explain their problems with school and education, they actively resist being cast as deficient individuals. Rather than feeling victimised, some resisters feel empowered by their decision to reject the mainstreaming of educational institutions.

Some low-literate adults confess that if they had paid more attention, or exerted greater effort they would have achieved more in school (Fingeret & Drennon, 1997). These adults accept the blame for their failure rather than placing the school at fault. However, many students who drop out of school are actually pushed out by forces beyond their control such as a hostile environment that only caters to the needs of an elite class (Beekman, 1987). There is some degree of discord surrounding the role of schools and the role of learners in the pursuit of education. Conflict between the goals of educators and the personal motives of learners may be making it more difficult to address the problem of illiteracy.

Adult Literacy Learners' Motives for Enrolling in Literacy Programmes

The general adult motivational literature suggests that adults are motivated to participate in learning for a variety of reasons. In his work on adult motivation for learning, Houle (1961) developed a typology of three types of adult learners. The first, the goal-oriented, are those who use education as a means of accomplishing fairly clear-cut objectives. The second, the activity-oriented, are those who take part because they find in the circumstances of learning a meaning which has no necessary connection, and often no connection at all, with the content or the announced purposes of the activity. The third, the

learning-oriented, seek knowledge for its own sake. Houle's study sparked a series of other studies which sought to confirm or expand his typology, and the results of these studies confirm that adult learners are subject to a variety of higher order needs including the desire for professional or social advancement. However, adult literacy learners were excluded from many of these studies and were thought to differ from other adults in terms of their motives for participating in literacy programmes. Motivational theorists claimed that adults who are in need of literacy education are "deficiency-oriented," "deterministic" and driven by "neurotic" lower order needs (Boshier, 1971; Miller, 1967).

Recent research from within the adult literacy field challenges earlier notions and asserts that adult literacy learners are motivated to learn for the same reasons as other adults. For instance, Boshier (1976) found that adults in a college continuing education programme were motivated by (a) escape, (b) professional advancement, (c) social welfare, (d) external expectations (e) cognitive interest. A later version of the test administered to a sample that was contained adult literacy learners yielded similar results (Boshier, 1991). In addition, a study which comprised entirely of 157 adult literacy learners yielded responses that factored into four dimensions of motivation, namely (a) escape, (b) personal growth, (c) professional development and (d) external expectations (Bova, 1985). In a more comprehensive study involving 323 adult literacy learners, Beder (1990) found that their motivations to enrol in literacy programmes include the desire for: (a) self-improvement, (b) to respond to family responsibilities, (c) seeking diversion / escape, (d) literacy development, (e) community / church involvement, (f) job advancement, (g) launching, (h) economic need, (i) educational advancement, and j) at the urging of others. Beder and others have found that a relationship exists between motivation and certain socio-

demographic variables such as age, gender, race, culture and class. These are discussed in the following sections.

Age-Related Motives

Of the total non-literate adult population, young people under 30-years-old are more likely to participate than older adults (Beder, 1991). Bova (1985) demonstrated how the levels of influence of some motivational factors vary over the adult life cycle. For instance, the desire to secure professional advancement increases from young adulthood to middle adulthood and is most important during the years between ages 33 and 50. After the culmination of middle adulthood professional advancement exerts almost no influence on the potential Adult Basic Education learner population. Other trends identified by Bova indicate that at around the time of the "age fifty transition" (Levinson, as cited in Bova, 1985) the desire for personal growth levels off and the need to escape from routine becomes strongest (Bova, 1985).

In reporting findings from her extensive field study, Fingeret (1983) explains that it is not so much the reasons for participating in literacy programmes that change, but that the context within which literacy operates in one's life is linked to the adult life cycle. During the 20s adults are focused on work, family and community. During the 30s, they are trying to be better role models, during their forties and fifties they are motivated to realise old dreams and during the 60s there is an intrinsic reward from simply continuing to learn.

Gender-related Motives

More women than men attend adult literacy programmes, though men and women are almost equally represented among adult nonreaders (Beder, 1991). One of six subgroups of learners discovered by Beder, was labelled "mainstream women." Members of this group were typically housewives with children; very few were employed outside the

home and many reported having left school because of marriage or pregnancy. Their motivational profile indicates a lower motivation for literacy development than any other group of literacy learners within the sample, and they scored above the sample average on cognitive ability and achievement. This profile seems to describe women interviewed by Horsman (1990) where the main reason for enrolling in programmes was to escape the boredom of staying home. This "escape" factor has surfaced in many studies (Beder, 1990; Boshier, 1971; Bova, 1985) and is always far more prevalent among women than men. Horsman (1990), whose work centres on feminist issues, portrays the domestic abuse that many of these women live with and the fact that their enrolment in literacy programmes is not stimulated by academic, but by social needs.

The need to be a member of a social community of people influences the goals that women set for themselves when they join literacy programmes. Although many women displayed educational goals as well, the type of learning that they valued most related to interpersonal, social and psychosocial goals. Men on the other hand valued knowledge about "how things work" (Ziegahn, 1992), had more job-related goals (Hill, 1987; Malicky & Norman, 1995) and viewed learning in terms of "smartness" (Malicky & Norman, 1995). However, analysis of trends in enrolment statistics reveal that in more recent years women have been increasingly motivated by job-related reasons (Hill, as cited in Beder, 1991). The available data paints a relatively clear picture of how reasons for participation can be classified by age and gender, but there are many other factors which play a role as well. "[E]ven in [women], differences of race, culture and class may contribute to differences in...goals" (Cuban & Hayes, 1996, p. 10).

Race- Class- and Culture-Related Motives

Because in the North American context, race, culture and class are intertwined it is difficult to isolate the effects of these variables on motivation. In any case, studies have shown that when culture, language and social class are held constant, race does not distinguish between participants and non-participants (Wikelund, Reder, & Hart-Landsberg, 1992). In a study of adult literacy programme participants, conducted in the province of Alberta, more Asians than Canadian-born participants had educational goals. Another finding in the same study was that Canadian women are more likely to have social reasons for participating than are Asian women. Further, and due to the fact that most of the Asian participants were immigrants who had recently completed a course in English as a Second Language, more Asians cited specific language-related goals such as learning to spell, or to communicate better (Malicky & Norman, 1995).

There is an interaction between language and culture in their effect on adults' priorities related to literacy and learning (Ziegahn, 1992). In a study conducted in Ohio, there were no differences between the views of Native and non-native Americans about literacy and learning. Ziegahn (1992) speculated that this was because both groups spoke English as their mother tongue and had had similar experiences in school. The effect of language and schooling on adults' literacy needs and on their views about literacy and learning needs further investigation. Early schooling is widely thought to have a profound impact on any learning endeavours that adults may undertake in their lifetime. People's expectations of learning situations are shaped during their initial encounters with school during childhood.

Adult Literacy Learners' Expectations of Literacy Programmes

Expectations Based on Prior School

Most adult literacy learners seem to base their expectations of the literacy programme on their experiences in school. Some feel that the literacy programme is their second chance; they are motivated to try harder and expect that they will achieve more. One learner describing her first day attending classes in a literacy programme said "I was just so set on school that day, I just wanted to rush through the books, cause I knew I could do it" (Courtney et al., 1994, p. 180). The experience of being back in school was important to her and she was determined to make the best of it. Other learners expect that the programme will be different from school, and any similarities the programme may have with school are regarded negatively. "I can't say that any one thing intimidated me, it was just the classroom, the class atmosphere, big huge chalkboard and people were up writing on it" (Courtney et al., 1994, p. 178).

Initial Expectations and Changing Expectations

Most learners who join literacy programmes are prepared for major changes in their lives. Some expect drastic differences in the teachers' attitude towards them, including more individual attention. Others are more prepared to change their own behaviour and attitudes (Fingeret & Drennon, 1997). Whatever their outlook, at the onset of their participation, most learners have great expectations of the outcomes of their participation in literacy programmes. The decision to participate is "more than an instrumental activity whereby skills are acquired, it is a symbolic activity" of learners' decisions to make changes in their lives (Beder, 1990, p. 79).

As their time in the programme progresses, many learners adjust their expectations. Primarily, the amount of time they had originally planned to spend in the programme soon

seems unrealistically short as they realise that the progress towards their goals is not as fast as they had thought it would be. Their expectations with respect to their interactions with teachers also changes, as they realise that they must put in more work than they had anticipated (Malicky & Norman, 1996). The limited concepts of reading held by some literacy learners changes as well, as they learn that proficient reading is not only about knowing how to pronounce or to spell all the words they may encounter. For many learners, the reality of attending a literacy programme amounts to disillusionment which leads many to discontinue or become irregular in attendance.

Success is Related to Expectations

In a study of the concept of success in adult literacy programmes, Chamley and Jones (1979) interviewed 35 adults who had been participating in literacy programmes. They identified the following categories of success that learners felt they had achieved: (a) affective personal achievement, (b) affective social achievement, (c) socio-economic achievement, (d) cognitive achievement, (e) enactive achievement. Other studies of the benefits of participation in literacy programmes suggest that the concept of outcomes is subjective (Valentine & Darkenwald, 1986). Outcomes, or the learners' perceptions of positive changes in themselves or their lives as a result of participation in the programme, are related to their original intentions for joining the programme and do not necessarily result from what was directly taught in the programme (Beder, 1990). Evidently some learners join the programme seeking affective and social benefits. In order for programme planners to design curricula that will provide learners with the success they seek it is necessary to know why they have joined the programme in the first place.

Their initial motives for participating, their goals for themselves and their expectations of the learning situation are intertwined and are influenced by their earlier experiences in school or other learning situations.

The School Experience of Caribbean Immigrant Adult Literacy Learners
Educational System in the Caribbean

The educational system in the former British colonies in the Caribbean is based on that in Britain. It is a multilevel system with access to each successive level restricted to students with high academic performance. The system varies slightly from one country to the next, but the structure is essentially the same. Some children start pre-primary or basic school at age three, but nearly all students begin primary school (called junior school in some countries) at age five. The primary grades 1 through 5 correspond to Canadian elementary grades 1 through 5. In the majority of Caribbean countries primary schooling is practically universal, with most children attending public primary schools and a relative few attending private primary schools. Notably, those attending the latter schools are from better off families and the quality of education offered is superior to that in the public schools.

At the secondary level, enrolment rates are far lower because of the limited availability of places. The screening procedure for secondary school has traditionally been the Common Entrance Examination, from which a relatively small percentage (25 – 40%) has been selected to attend the best quality secondary schools, traditionally called high schools (Planning Institute of Jamaica, 1996). In the traditional high schools, form 1 to form 5 correspond to Canadian high school grades 7 through grade 11 (both notations are used interchangeably throughout this thesis).

Students who do not pass the Common Entrance Examination are confined to lesser quality secondary schools which receive the least public funding. These schools, which we will call "Senior" schools according to how they are called in St. Vincent, are also known as "All Age" or "New Secondary" schools in Jamaica and "Junior Secondary" schools in Trinidad. Senior schools typically offer a technical or vocational curriculum in contrast to the academic curriculum offered by traditional high schools, and last only three years (senior 1 to senior 3) compared to traditional high schools which last five years (form 1 to form 5). At the end of senior school, students sit an examination called the School Leaving Examination, based on which a very small number may qualify for a place in a high school, but for the majority this culminates their formal education.

In the traditional high schools, at the end of form 5 students sit the Caribbean Examinations Council O-level Examinations. Moderate subject passes in O-level exams satisfy most entry level job requirements, and excellent results may qualify students for entry to a university or college. None of the participants in this study have gone beyond the Caribbean Examinations Council O-level Examination in their academic pursuits, so we will end our description of the education system at this point.

Factors Affecting the Caribbean Public Education System

In order to fully understand how the educational system in the Caribbean functions, it is necessary to appreciate certain social, cultural and economic aspects of the people. The system operates on the principle of the survival of the fittest, so only learners with superior academic performance are granted full access to education through the primary and secondary levels. A number of factors introduce bias and inequity into the system, based on which learners from the lower socio-economic classes are more likely to be denied access to high quality education.

Language issues: Caribbean English versus standard English. In general, persons in the Caribbean speak Caribbean English, although standard British English is the official language. The degree of dissimilarity between Caribbean English and standard British English increases along a continuum and persons whose speech is furthest from standard English are typically those from poorer backgrounds. In addition, Caribbean English is not standardised and is considered inappropriate in many institutions, e.g., schools, churches, and the media (Jean-Baptiste, 1996).

Caribbean English is a creole – a mixed language resulting from close and prolonged contact between a dominant and a subject group speaking dissimilar languages (Funk and Wagnalls Standard College Dictionary, 1976). Creole languages are similar to pidgin languages, but linguists differentiate between them on the basis that a pidgin is a secondary language used mainly between members of two distinct groups but not exclusively within either group, whereas a creole language becomes the only language of the subject group. In the case of Caribbean English, the dominant group from which the language was formed consisted of speakers of British English, and the subject group consisted of speakers of West African languages such as Twi and Fante (McCrum, Cran, & MacNeil, 1986). The resulting creole, Caribbean English, is now the only language spoken by the majority of the population in most Caribbean countries.

Although Caribbean English is the prevalent language, many people regard it with disdain, and speakers of Caribbean English have been taught that they are speaking bad or broken English (1999). This view of Caribbean English characterises it as a dialect rather than a creole, the essential difference being that a dialect is not a hybrid language, but an imperfect rendition of a standard language. Whether Caribbean English is regarded as a creole or a dialect, linguists who have examined the speech patterns inherent in the

language maintain that it is governed by regulated syntactic and semantic rules that render it capable of being standardised, written and taught as a language (McCrum et al., 1986). Notwithstanding, it continues to exist only as an oral language, stigmatised and regarded as inferior, even by persons for whom it is the sole means of communication.

When children enter the formal school system they are expected to use standard English. However, many children are not familiar with standard English because it is not spoken in their homes. Because the extent to which children can speak standard English usually correlates with their socio-economic status, this creates a language handicap for children of the poor. The characteristics of the education system are such that this language handicap is not overcome, but indeed is intensified by other inadequacies of the system.

Home-related factors. We have already discussed the effect of the home environment on children learning to read, and we concluded that children whose parents are not able to read usually begin school at a considerable disadvantage. This is true of many children from poor families in the Caribbean, thus, in addition to being introduced to instruction in a new language many are being exposed to the written word for the first time (Bryan & Mitchell, 1999).

Earlier in this chapter we also mentioned that adults who cannot read are sometimes apathetic or even inimical to education (Boshier, 1971; Miller, 1967). This would suggest that they may not be keen on sending their children to school. However, the available data provides some counter-evidence to this proposition. In Jamaica, for example, where the adult functional literacy rate is 75% – other sources say 65% (Henry, 1998) – the current enrolment rate of primary-school-aged children is over 90% (Statistical Institute of Jamaica, 1994). This, in spite of the fact that enrolment of school-aged children is not

enforced. Thus, although parents who cannot read may not be able to help their children academically, they seem to be doing what they can by sending their children to school.

However as we saw earlier the school on its own may not be able to provide adequate or appropriate instruction for children. The low functional literacy rates compared to the traditionally high primary school enrolment rates suggest that there is little correlation between school attendance and actual literacy achievement.

School-related factors. Further inequity is introduced into the public school system in the Caribbean through the lack of funding and resources for some schools. Most schools are overcrowded and poorly equipped, and particularly in rural areas, there is scarcity of even the most basic equipment such as books, desks and chairs (James-Reid & Mitchell, 1996). "Teaching aids are virtually non-existent in most public schools" because "the bulk of the recurrent budget is allocated for wages and salaries" (Swaroop, 1996, p. 12). However, in spite of the high overall allocation to teachers' salaries, most teachers are grossly underpaid making the profession unattractive to adequately trained individuals. Many teaching positions in public schools are therefore filled by persons with little or no specialised training, a number of them having insufficient content knowledge of the subjects they teach (James-Reid & Mitchell, 1996).

In general, except for a few primary schools and some of the traditional high schools, public education in the Caribbean is qualitatively lacking. In Jamaica, for example, although enrolment rates at primary level are practically universal, about "half of students finishing sixth grade have test results indicating functional illiteracy" (Swaroop, 1996, p. 12).

Summary of Educational Background of Caribbean Immigrants

In essence, the education system in the Caribbean does not benefit all children equally for a number of reasons. The first reason is that there are insufficient places at the secondary level resulting in a highly selective screening procedure for public secondary schools. A second reason for inequity in the education system is that the home language, especially of poor children, is different from the language that they are expected to use at school. The third cause for inequity in the public education system is through the allocation of resources (a) to traditional high schools instead of to technical and vocational secondary schools and (b) to urban schools instead of to rural schools. Overall, the system tends to favour children from wealthier urban backgrounds, whose home language gives them a head-start and whose parents are able to afford to pay for their education. For the vast majority of students, therefore, their experience in school is characterised by obstacles to the learning process, such as ill-equipped classrooms, high pupil: teacher ratios, and teachers who often lack the skills to motivate students to learn.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

Research Question #1

In light of the many meanings ascribed to literacy, the first objective of this study is to determine what the word literacy means to the learners in the HELP programme. Thus the first research question is, *How do learners conceptualise literacy?* There is scant research that provides answers to this question for any group of adult literacy learners, let alone for Caribbean-immigrant learners in Montreal. However, what literature there is suggests that adult literacy learners define literacy in fundamental terms (Davis & O'Brien, 1985; Malicky & Norman, 1989, 1995). That is to say, their definitions of literacy refer basically to reading and writing skills. Functional definitions of literacy are rare among

literacy learners. Even more rare, in fact non-existent in the studies I have reviewed, are adult learners who refer to empowering or liberating aspects of literacy. My hypothesis is, therefore, that the learners in this programme will define literacy fundamentally, as the ability to read and write. This is expected to be especially true of those learners with low reading ability or low levels of literacy according to how the term literacy is being used in this thesis. Those learners whose reading level is above functional may include reference to functional aspects in their definitions as well. However, emancipatory concepts of literacy are not expected to arise among the learners' definitions.

Research Question #2

The second research question in this study is *What are learners' motives for enrolling in the literacy programme?* If it is assumed that learners enrol in the programme to obtain or improve their level of literacy, then their motives for enrolling in the literacy programme ought also to provide some indication of their concepts of literacy. However, learners' motives for enrolling may not be directly related to literacy. For instance, a learner may define literacy as the ability to read and write, and then state that her motive for enrolling in the programme is to meet new people.

The available literature on learners' motives for participating in literacy programmes makes it clear that reasons for participating vary widely (Beder & Valentine, 1989; Bova, 1985; Hayes & Valentine, 1989). However, there is some predictive power in certain socio-demographic variables, such as age, gender, socio-economic status, employment status, marital status, family life, ethno-cultural and language background (Beder & Valentine, 1989; Bova, 1985). Given the wide range of variables and the fact that the effect of each variable has not been well-researched, it is more difficult to hypothesise the direction of learners' motives. It is expected that learners with low levels of literacy will

have been motivated to join the programme out of a desire to learn to read and write. Those who are more literate will be motivated by desire for social stimulation. As regards gender and age, in keeping with the findings from other studies we may expect that older women will cite social motives for enrolling such as meeting people or making new friends.

The fact that the participants in this study are immigrants in a large metropolitan city, from relatively much smaller communities, may also have an effect on their motives for enrolling. They may feel pressured by the demands of functioning in a society where the communication culture forces them to rely on print media to a large extent. Encounters with street signs, newspapers, application forms, flyers and bus schedules are far more commonplace in Montreal than they are in the Caribbean countries that these learners come from. For this reason, functional literacy is likely to be a priority for these learners.

Language differences and dialect differences ought to play a role as well. In Canada, they are expected to be able to communicate in either French or standard English, and in Montreal in particular, signs are more commonly in French than in English. In order to be fully functional, the ultimate goal is to be able to communicate using the French language. However, in order to do this it is necessary to first master standard English. Thus, for some learners the motive will be to learn to communicate in standard English, while others who already have a higher level of proficiency in standard English will wish to learn French.

Research Question #3

The third research question in this study asks *What are learners' expectations of the literacy programme?* Of the three questions, this one most directly addresses the issue of taking learners' viewpoints into account in literacy programmes. Although the two previous questions seek to find out what learners' concepts and motives are, the most likely

application of the responses will be that programme planners will attempt to infer from this what type of programme the learners will prefer. The third research question however, asks learners directly what they would like the programme to be. As stated before, their expectations include both their assumptions about what the programme ought to be, and their hopes about what it could be. Furthermore, they will be asked to mention aspects of the programme that they consider to be its strengths and weaknesses.

Hypothetically, learners are expected to commend their instructors as the real strengths of the programme as this has been the trend in other programmes that have conducted learner evaluations (Fingeret & Drennon, 1997; Malicky & Norman, 1995). The weaknesses that learners are likely to cite relate to time on task and the amount of attention they get from their instructors. Learners, especially those in computer literacy classes, have complained about the limitations on class time, and the inadequacy of instructors. Few learners have mentioned content or teaching methods when asked to suggest areas where the programme should make changes. Learners are also expected to relate their expectations of the programme to their earlier experiences in school.

Research Question #4

The final research question encompasses the three previous questions. *What influence does prior schooling have on learners' concepts of literacy, their motives for enrolling, and their expectations of the programme?* This question asks what it is about their prior schooling that makes these learners view literacy and literacy programmes in the way that they do.

Many research studies which deal with adult literacy mention the importance of learners' prior schooling (Courtney et al., 1994; Malicky & Norman, 1994). The reasons for taking learners' prior schooling into account are many. One common belief is that adults

who enrol in adult literacy programmes are those who had negative experiences in school. The difficulties that learners had, especially when learning to read make them resent school and education. Based on this premise, adult literacy programme planners are advised not to model their programmes after traditional schools, so as not to reactivate learners' negative memories of schooldays of failure (Courtney et al., 1994).

We can reasonably expect that many of the immigrant learners in the HELP programme, are among those who were denied access to education due to the selective procedures built into the education system in the Caribbean. Among these learners there is likely to be a range of abilities, from those whose performance earned them a place in high school, to those who were victims of poor quality education at the primary level. The learning needs of the participants in this study may therefore range from basic literacy education to the continuation of education cut short at the secondary level. We should not rule out the possibility that there may be some learners who are not victims of the education system, but whose goals or needs relate to personal learning difficulties.

Summary of Research Questions and Hypotheses

In summary, we expect that those learners whose prior schooling was characterised by failure will have limited concepts of their own ability as readers and may perhaps also have limited concepts of themselves as learners in general. Learners with more positive school experiences ought to have more confidence in themselves as readers and as learners in general. Those with less schooling will define literacy fundamentally, and those with more schooling will define it functionally. Those learners who had negative school experiences would not hope for a literacy programme that reminds them of school. However, if they accept that their failure in school was due to some fault of their own, which they have now modified, such as poor attitude to schoolwork, they may wish for a

programme that gives them a second chance to achieve success in a school system. In general, our expectations are that learners will differ in their concepts of literacy, their motives for enrolling and their expectations of the literacy programme according to the amount of schooling they had and their consequent levels of literacy.

Chapter III

Method

Design

A qualitative case study approach was used to gather and analyse data in this study (Maxwell, 1996). An interpretive case study was appropriate because one purpose of the study was to develop conceptual categories of learners in the HELP programme (Merriam, 1991). The design is that of a single case with multiple embedded units (Yin, 1984). The single case is the HELP programme, and the learners are the embedded units of analysis. This design provided the opportunity for interpretation both at the level of the individual learner and at the programme level.

The impetus for this study lay in the difficulties being experienced by a particular literacy programme – the Home Extended Literacy Programme – in making the programme learner-centred. Curriculum planning was being hampered by the lack of sufficient accurate information about the learners' educational backgrounds and their literacy needs. This study is a needs assessment from the point of view of the learners themselves. To the extent that it seeks to bring these learners' views to the fore, and to generate potential solutions to the specific problem in context, it should be seen as an applied study (Patton, 1990).

Site

Jamaica Association of Montreal

The Jamaica Association of Montreal is a community-based organisation, which serves members of the Caribbean community in Montreal through social, economic, educational and cultural programmes. The Association has been serving the community for

over eighteen years through various activities and outreach projects. The Home Extended Literacy Programme (HELP) is one such project.

Brief History of HELP

The idea for HELP was conceived by the Association to address what they felt was a need for literacy training among Caribbean immigrants in Montreal. A proposal for funding was submitted to the federal government in 1996, and the recommendation was made that a study be conducted to ascertain the extent to which such a programme was indeed necessary. A survey was commissioned by the Association and conducted in a Montreal neighbourhood that is heavily populated by Caribbean immigrants; the surveyors concluded, that "the need exists" (Harriott, 1997). The application for government funds was subsequently approved, and HELP began operation as a certified centre of popular education in January 1998. A plan was drawn up by the co-ordinator of the programme which specifies the content of the programme's instruction. During the initial semester of HELP's operations, individualised instruction was delivered in one-on-one tutorials, however learner enrolment soon became too large to allow the continuation of this format. Instruction is now delivered in classes which contain between five and fifteen learners.

The Courses Offered by the HELP Programme

The courses offered are: English, mathematics, computer literacy, and life skills. (French language classes are also held at the Association as part of a separate programme. However some of the participants in this study also attend those classes). Within each course, there are classes which correspond to different levels of proficiency. Classes are mainly teacher-directed and each class is taught by one instructor.

English. English course comprises of three levels. The contents of English Level I are letter recognition, phonics and word recognition. The contents of English Level II are

fundamentals of grammar, reading strategies and reading comprehension. The contents of English Level III are writing skills.

Mathematics. Mathematics is comprised of four levels. The contents of Mathematics Level I are basic number ideas, addition, subtraction and multiplication. The contents of Mathematics Level II are division and introduction to fractions. The contents of Mathematics Level III are fractions, decimals, ratios, proportions and percentages. The contents of Mathematics Level IV are geometry, measurement and signed numbers.

Computer literacy. Computer literacy is comprised of three levels. The contents of Computer Literacy Level I are introduction to the parts of the computer and basic computer use. The contents of Computer Literacy Level II are keyboarding (using a typing tutor), word processing and spreadsheets. The contents of Computer Literacy Level III are the Internet and the world wide web.

Life skills. Life skills is comprised of modules, all of which are essentially at the same level. The life skills course adheres to the content provided by the Plato Pathways software programme. Plato is an educational software programme designed in the United States to be used by adolescents and adults who have not completed high school (TRO Learning Inc., 1992). The programme includes components in English, mathematics and life skills. However, only the life skills component is formally used within the HELP programme. The modules in Plato life skills programme are: understanding the self, choice and decision-making, problem solving, active listening, assertive communications, job skills inventory process, resume writing, job search techniques, time management, conflict resolution and money management.

Operations of the HELP Programme

HELP is a semester-based programme, with courses offered in fall, winter, spring and summer sessions. At the start of each session there is a designated registration period, which lasts approximately three weeks. However, persons are usually allowed to register throughout the year on an ongoing basis. All registrations are administered by the programme co-ordinator or programme secretary. At registration, applicants are required to select the courses of their choice and to have their personal data recorded on file. In the absence of formal literacy tests, learners are given a brief reading comprehension exercise and basic arithmetic computations, which are used as approximate indicators of their level of English and mathematics proficiency.

Once learners have been assigned to classes they are introduced to their instructors. According to the stipulations of the programme co-ordinator, it is at this stage that the business of planning learner-centred curricula should begin. The instructor ought to hold consultations with each learner in order to determine their personal goals within the programme, and then prepare a mutually agreed plan of action which will lead towards the achievement of those goals. In practice, this procedure does not generally result in a clear set of learning objectives to be pursued within the programme. This problem is one of the primary reasons for this study.

All classes within the HELP programme are three hours long, and are held in the evenings and on weekends. Classes take place at the Association in four provisional classrooms and one computer lab, which is equipped with five personal computers. Instructors are volunteers mostly from within the Caribbean community in Montreal. At the time of this study, five of the eight instructors were of Caribbean origin. The

programme is open to all members of the public and is offered free of cost to learners. The majority of learners enrolled in the programme are persons of Caribbean origin.

Participants

Participants for the study were 14 adult learners who were regularly attending the HELP programme during spring 1999. Of a total 45 learners enrolled, 30 were regular, (attending at least 67% of classes during the previous eight weeks), 8 were irregular (attending less than 67% of classes) and 7 had dropped out (absent for over eight weeks without notification) (C. Dayle, personal communication, June 1999). In recruiting participants for this study, there were attempts to contact some learners who were irregular or had dropped out, but these proved unsuccessful.

Participant selection for this study was based on three factors: a criterion-based sampling approach, recommendation by the co-ordinator, and voluntary participation of the learner. The criterion for selection was based on "maximum variety" (Locke, Spirduso, & Silverman, 1993) and was established to optimise the likelihood of variation in participants' age, gender, country of origin and literacy level. Recommendations by the programme co-ordinator helped in selecting participants whom she thought would make interesting cases for analysis. For instance, one learner was recommended because she was thought to be unlike most others in the programme in that she had graduated from high school and was a fully competent reader. Voluntary participation was obtained through informed consent forms which were circulated to instructors and read aloud in class (see Appendix B).

Instructors were initially being sought for participation in the study as well, in order to compare their views to those of the learners. Five instructors were accordingly interviewed, however because of a change in the aims of the study their interviews were

not analysed. Of sixteen learner-participants who were interviewed, two were dropped from the final sample. One had been enrolled only in French classes, not considered literacy in the strict sense, and the other was a Canadian-born man whose learning problems were related to a mental condition. The views and needs of these two people were considered to be outside the scope of this study.

Procedure

Data Collection and Transformation

Open-ended interviews. Data was primarily collected through open-ended interviews, which were conducted during June 1999. Each participant in the study attended one such interview. Interviews were chosen as the primary means of data collection because they are particularly well-suited for studying people's understanding and elaborating their own perspective on their lived world (Kvale, 1996). The open-ended interview, in contrast to structured ones, allow the researcher "to find out what is in and on someone else's mind...not to put things in (for example, the interviewer's preconceived categories for organising the world) but to access the perspective of the person being interviewed" (Patton, 1990, p. 278).

One of my goals during the interviews was for things to proceed as much like a normal conversation as possible (Merriam, 1991), but in order to keep focused on the research issues, an "interview guide" was developed beforehand (Kvale, 1996). Neither the exact sequence of items, nor the actual wording was determined in advance; the guide served as a basic checklist during the interview to ensure that all relevant topics were covered (Patton, 1990). Interview protocols used in other studies that investigated learners' concepts of literacy (Davis & O'Brien, 1985; Malicky & Norman, 1995) were consulted for

clues as to what questions elicited the most valid responses. A copy of the interview guide can be found in Appendix C.

Silverman (1997) makes the point that social distance, i.e. differences in age, gender, and culture for instance, between interviewer and interviewee may make it difficult to establish the rapport that ensures good participant response. During the interviews, I created a relaxed atmosphere by speaking Caribbean English as would normally be spoken in informal social settings. I was also familiar to most of the participants, as I had previously been a volunteer instructor in the programme, and at the time of the interviews was employed as a consultant to the HELP programme. In addition, being interviewed by someone who is also from the Caribbean, and therefore close to some the issues that concern them, helped to set the tone for an understanding dialogue. Each interview lasted approximately one hour.

Transcription. Transcription of the audiotaped interviews was completed between July and August 1999 by myself and a research assistant who is familiar with Caribbean English. We met at regular intervals to discuss and compare our rendering of certain words to avoid misrepresentation or inconsistencies in spelling. This was crucial to the analysis stage as the same word with different spelling could make automated text searches impossible. There is no formally accepted written form for Caribbean English, however many words are similar to their standard English counterpart, with differences in pronunciation. In most cases, we tried to represent the participants' speech in a way that preserved their accent and language as much as possible, however for certain common words like *the* and *and*, which were pronounced in Caribbean English style, we opted to use the standard English spelling. This was done in order to create a balance between preserving the participants' own voice, and at the same time making it possible for readers

who are not familiar with Caribbean English to understand the text. Apart from this, the grammar and vocabulary remain unedited, so excerpts which appear in the Results and Discussion are verbatim. The original unedited transcripts as well as the audiotapes have been retained and may be used for verification purposes or for further analysis (see Denzin & Lincoln, 1998).

Document analysis. As a supplement to the interviews, data were also gathered from documents. The mining of data from documents in case study research is chiefly used to corroborate and augment evidence from other sources (Yin, 1984). Certain facts obtained from the participants during interviews were triangulated by inspecting registration forms, class attendance lists and instructional plans. Documents within the public domain, including newspapers and the world wide web, were consulted for information on the education systems both in the Caribbean and in Canada.

Data Analysis

Stage I: Coding content categories. Formal analysis of the interview transcripts was done in three stages, and was aided by the QSR NUD*IST software package (Qualitative Solutions and Research Pty, 1997). In preparation for analysis all transcripts were formatted and entered into the NUD*IST programme. The first stage of analysis involved coding the transcripts for content categories. Content categories are labels which identify the topic or subject of conversation, and coding refers to the process of applying these labels to sections of the transcript. During this stage, coding was first done on paper and then the codes were entered into the NUD*IST system. Coding was mainly inductive, but some of the codes were derived from the topics covered in the interview guide.

Stage II: Coding patterns. After all the transcripts had been coded for content area categories, the second stage comprised of searching for patterns and coding the

corresponding sections in each participant's interview. This began with patterns that would confirm or refute the hypotheses for each of the research questions (Boyatzis, 1998). NUD*IST allowed me to view or to print the sections of each interview that shared the same code. This made it possible to compare what different participants were saying about the same topic. Similarities across interviews were recorded as patterns. In order to accomplish this, I printed the coded reports and searched for patterns offline, then I returned to the NUD*IST programme and entered the pattern codes as labels. This process was iterative, as simple patterns were reanalysed to discover more complex underlying patterns. This required sophisticated manipulation of the data, which I handled using matrices and tables in NUD*IST. Each pattern identified was a potential theme to be addressed in the Results and Discussion.

Stage III: Confirming patterns as themes. During the third stage of analysis I studied the patterns in order to verify whether they would be used as themes (Boyatzis, 1998). Again NUD*IST made it possible to print detailed reports which could be studied offline. However, after verifying the themes offline, I decided to forego the process of re-entering the thematic codes into the NUD*IST database because of the dynamic nature of the themes. The themes were in a constant state of flux; new themes emerged, existing themes were split or merged, and some themes were omitted. As each theme emerged I reread the relevant sections of the transcripts to test the hypotheses. With time, I found that one of the best tests for the validity of a theme was to try to explain or describe it so that someone else would understand (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Writing draft versions of the Results and Discussion became a very important phase of the analysis. Often, what initially seemed to be a clear theme was eventually discarded

because it was difficult to justify in discussion (Ely et al., 1991). Each theme had to be backed by strong supporting evidence and not just a multitude of weak evidence. Even if a theme pertained to only one participant's interview, it was sometimes justifiable based on its natural logic. Various ways of classifying and organising the discussion were explored, and the one that seemed to offer the best fit to the data was selected (Patton, 1990).

Establishing Validity Through Member-Checking

When a draft of the Results and Discussion was complete, some of the participants were contacted for verification. This process, known as "member checking," helped to establish validity for the study and reduce the influence of researcher bias in the interpretation of the participants' views (Merriam, 1991). One-year after the initial interviews, three participants were consulted for this purpose. All three agreed to cooperate and met with me personally to review the results. The procedure for member checking involved first giving the participant the transcript of his or her own interview to read in order to reacquaint them with the details of the conversation. The participants varied in the extent to which they studied the transcripts: one spent over an hour reading and analysing each statement, whereas the other two merely skimmed or scanned the pages, stopping only to read sections that caught their attention. This was not related to any inability to read and comprehend the text, because discussion with all three ensured that they had read the interview in sufficient detail to give feedback on their reactions to it. They were then asked if there was anything in the transcript that they wanted to change, delete or clarify and they were asked about particular sections that had been difficult to interpret.

Having familiarised themselves with the transcripts, they were shown a document which contained a collation of the sections in the Results and Discussion chapter which

pertained to them. Again, I ensured that they understood what was contained in these excerpts by discussing the contents with them. Their feedback based on this encounter with my interpretation of their lives was overwhelmingly positive; no changes were recommended that altered my interpretations in any significant way. In fact, when one of the participants had read the account of his own life he remarked "I like this guy!"

Chapter IV

Results and Discussion

Introduction

The participants in this study were grouped according to the amount of prior school experience they had and their consequent level of reading. The first group consists of early school leavers, four learners who left school before completing primary school. All members of the early school leavers' group are operating at the lowest level of literacy and are thus enrolled in English Level I. The second group, the late school leavers, consists of ten learners who left school during the secondary cycle – eight of them left school between grade 7 and grade 10, and two of them completed and graduated from high school. The reading levels of the late school leavers vary, but all are considered to be functional. Although there was no formal test of the reading levels of the participants in this study, their reading ability was judged based on their performance in class. Not all of the late school leavers were enrolled in English, but consultation with the instructors of their other courses confirmed that they are all capable of independent reading comprehension, albeit at varying levels of competency.

In presenting the results, I will first discuss the groups independently, starting with the early school leavers. I will briefly introduce the individual participants by highlighting the events and circumstances of their lives (both in and out of school) that led to their participation in the literacy programme. Then I will discuss the results of each research question according to the themes that emerged during analysis. Although the groups are dealt with independently, comparisons and contrasts between them will be made throughout the discussion.

The Early School Leavers

The four participants who have been classified as early school leavers are: Byron, Cathy, Peter and Vanessa. Vanessa has been placed in this group although she never went to school. The others left school before completing primary school. All four of the learners in this group are currently enrolled in English Level I and are incapable of independent reading.

Byron

Byron is a 44-year old Jamaican male. He has forgotten most of the details of his school days. As far as he can remember, school was hard because his parents did not have enough money to buy him the things that schoolchildren were required to have. He went to school barefooted and wore the same khaki shirt for many days because he did not have a change of uniforms. His attendance at school was interrupted at around the age of thirteen (he isn't quite sure), because of a dog bite that had turned into a bad sore. It took a very long time to heal – perhaps more than a year – and during that time Byron stayed out of school. By the time his leg was better, it was decided that he was too old to rejoin classes.

Byron says that in class he couldn't really learn anything because he got many "licks" [hits] in his head, so his "brain cannot manifest as how it should." He remembers getting licks from his uncle and his friends, and explains that when flinging stones to pick mangoes sometimes the stone would come down and "lick me inna me head."

He learned a number of skills through apprenticeship, while he was in Jamaica: woodwork, masonry, and painting, but he says his main job is baking. He is currently employed as a janitor because he cannot get the opportunity to work in any of these skilled areas without being able to read. Byron cannot read, but he does not seem to be seriously bothered by this. He says he joined the literacy programme because there are "good people

to move amongst." He wants to improve his social skills, i.e. how to "address [him]self to people." He believes that it is important to be well-mannered and respectful especially to "older heads," and he expects to improve in this area through his participation in the programme. He wants the programme to "get more people," and although he believes that more can be done, he is thankful for it.

The distinction Byron makes between literacy and illiteracy is unclear. First he said that literacy was "people them that don't know nothing at all... [who] don't know how to talk to people, don't hear what people said an [who] cannot learn nothing and whatsoever." Then, when asked what "illiteracy" was he said, "illiteracy is the people them that know something, but they act stupid like."

Cathy

Cathy is 26 years old and currently works as a domestic. She is from the island of St. Vincent. She went as far as grade 4 without having learned to read, and then she was told that she was too old to remain in school. She never took the Common Entrance Exam and never went beyond primary school. After she left school, Cathy was being tutored at home along with some other students, but she says this did not help much because the teacher was more interested in "having relationship with the girls."

She has been in Canada for five years and hopes to go back home to her seven-year old son one day soon. Cathy's mother, who is taking care of her son, reports that he is doing very well in school and can write his own name and read his schoolbooks on his own. Cathy is very proud of him and partially attributes his success to a certain teacher, who also taught her and was her favourite when she was in school.

She is very eager to learn to read herself, and does not know why it is so difficult for her. She joined the literacy programme because she feels she "really needs [her]

reading." Although she is interested in computers and mathematics as well, she says that "reading is the most thing I really come her for." She's not very familiar with the word literacy but she thinks it has to do with education. However, she admits that she does not like the sound of the word because it "sound like you retarded....I don't think they should call it that word." Chief among the changes she would like to see within the literacy programme is more teachers. She feels that those, like herself, who cannot read need more attention than they are getting from being in a class where others are ahead of them. Lack of adequate attention is not something new to her, as she blames some of the teachers for her slow progress during school. When describing her school days, Cathy said, "the teachers them not into those who cannot catch on fast...them only into them who have it, and who parents have money."

Peter

Peter is a 20-year old Grenadian. He says he was "a good boy" who "didn't used to give trouble in school." His favourite teacher was the principal "because he like sports and I like sports, so the relationship grow from there." There were a lot of teachers whom Peter did not like because they were bossy and mean to children. Peter used to like mathematics, but "when you reach to the difficult stages and...ain't got nobody to help," the only option is to "drop it." He didn't like English because it required "too much writing." When Peter was sixteen, he had to leave school because he had surpassed the admissible age for being in that school.

Early in 1999, Peter came to Canada. He likes it here, but admits that sometimes he gets into a mood where he doesn't want to talk to anybody at all. Sometimes he doesn't want to eat and his stepmother bugs him a lot about it. Since he has been in Canada his stepmother has been trying to help him with his reading, and when she heard about the

literacy programme she encouraged him to enrol. He joined the programme because he feels that he "needs some help to read better and write better." When asked what the word literacy means Peter says: "like you getting problem with you reading or writing or stuff like that, I would say this is...literacy."

He is doing English, mathematics and life skills in the literacy programme, and he would like to do "more reading and more writing" in the English class. Peter thinks that one of the best things about the programme is that "the teachers try to make you understand what is going on before they move along with other stuff." This he says is especially true of the mathematics teacher.

Peter will be starting classes in an adult education centre in a few months. When asked what he wants to be, he replies "I'd really like to be a construction worker."

Vanessa

Vanessa is from St. Lucia. She is 22 years old. Vanessa never went to school because her aunt with whom she lived didn't have enough money to send her to school. She started working to help support the home when she was about 12 years old.

Shortly after arriving in Toronto, Canada two years ago, Vanessa enrolled in an adult learning centre to take reading lessons. She was given a private instructor and things were going well, but then she had to stop classes when she moved to Montreal. She likes Montreal, and has become an active member of the religious community here. A former member of the Evangel Pentecostal Church, Vanessa recently converted to Judaism. It is through her involvement in the church that she heard about this literacy programme.

Vanessa is not sure what the word literacy means, but says it probably refers to when "you don't know how to do something." She joined the programme "to learn how to read better," and to be able "to get around." When Vanessa joined the programme in April

1998 instruction was offered through one-on-one tutoring. The tutor that she had been matched with encouraged her to join a class within the programme, when the programme adopted the group mode of instruction, but agreed to continue meeting with her privately outside of the programme. Joining the class was a big transition for her, because she didn't know what the other learners would be like. She's comfortable in the class now, but still feels that she benefits more from the private meetings with her tutor. Vanessa also does Mathematics Level I, but it is too advanced and she would like someone to "start from scratch" with her.

Her reading has improved since she joined the programme and she plans to continue coming until she can read "really good." She presently works in elderly care, but her ambition is to become a missionary.

Discussion of Early School Leavers

Concepts of Literacy

Literacy as knowledge. As stated before, the early school leavers in this study were all non-readers or low level readers. Previous studies which have examined learners' concepts of literacy did not differentiate between learners based on levels of literacy. However, their samples contained mainly non-readers or low level readers (Davis & O'Brien, 1985; Malicky & Norman, 1995; Ziegahn, 1992). Given the findings from those studies, these learners' definitions of literacy were expected to be mostly fundamental, that is, related to reading and writing. However, only one of the 'early school leavers' mentioned either reading or writing in his initial definition of literacy. Instead, their definitions reflected a more global notion of literacy as general knowledge. Phrases such as "I think is about the education" or "people them that don't know nothing at all," do not refer specifically to reading, writing or other specialised skills. The meaning of the word

literacy refers vaguely to education, or knowing, but not necessarily within a particular field.

Vanessa's use of the word "something" in the following quote implies that literacy may refer to any skill or practice.

Interviewer: What does the word literacy mean to you?

Vanessa: I don't know.

Interviewer: Have you ever heard the word before?

Vanessa: Yeah, I do. Like maybe you don't know how to do something.

What does the word "something" stand for? Is Vanessa defining the word literacy according to how it is used in expressions such as "media literacy," "social literacy" and "computer literacy"? In these expressions literacy means knowledge, and without the qualifying term before it, it may potentially refer to anything. However, we cannot be sure that Vanessa is using the word in this sense and she does not say anything else during the interview that supports this view. It is quite possible that the lack of specificity in her definition simply means that she is not sure what the word literacy means.

Literacy or illiteracy: what is the difference? One factor which supports the conjecture that the early school leavers are not sure what literacy means is that they confound the distinction between literacy and illiteracy. They either don't perceive that *literacy* and *illiteracy* are different words, or they confuse the meanings of the two. When asked whether she considers herself literate or illiterate, Vanessa says, "I don't know. What's the difference?" Also, in the excerpt quoted in the previous paragraph where she said that literacy means "like, maybe you don't know how to do something," she essentially defined illiteracy rather than literacy. Correspondingly, Peter, who also confuses the meanings of the two terms, answers affirmatively when asked "Are you literate?" and then

goes on to explain "because I cannot read as I want to and cannot write as I want to, I would say I *literate* in that way."

Why do these learners confuse literacy with illiteracy? Is it possible that the words sound the same to them? The fact that they cannot read well, means that their grapho-phonemic awareness is not well developed. Hence, they might not easily perceive the difference in the sounds of the two words. However, even when they are aware of both words they still do not treat them as opposites. Byron spoke of both literacy and illiteracy, and went to great lengths to try to explain the difference between the two. Literacy, he said was "people them that don't know nothing at all... [who] don't know how to talk to people, don't hear what people said an [who] cannot learn nothing." On the other hand, "illiteracy is the people them that know something, but they act stupid like." He evidently acknowledges that literacy and illiteracy are different terms. However, he does not regard them as being opposite in meaning. The distinction he made between literacy and illiteracy was unclear, and so I asked him to clarify his definitions by repeating them.

Interviewer: OK. Tell me again – so, *illiteracy*, is what?

Byron: Like when you dark. When you don't know how to talk to people, you don't know how to approach people, you don't know how to, how to make friend and ignorant.

Interviewer: That is – ?

Byron: *Literacy*.

Interviewer: OK. And what is illiteracy?

Byron: *Illiteracy* is when you can't read and write, and – you cannot read and write, and you just feel to yourself that you know, and you don't know nothing.

It seems that Byron may actually have difficulty perceiving the different sounds of the words literacy and illiteracy, because his definitions are not always congruent with what is asked. However, questioning him further about the distinction between literacy and illiteracy seemed to be creating more confusion rather than clarifying the issue, since he did not appear to be giving consistent definitions. Nevertheless, one thing which is consistent about his definitions is that both literacy and illiteracy always include reference to something negative.

Stigma of (il)literacy. The stigma of illiteracy is strongly alluded to in the views of the early school leavers. However, because of the confusion between literacy and illiteracy, both terms carry this stigma. For instance, in both definitions provided by Byron, literacy as "people them that don't know nothing at all," and illiteracy as "people them that know something, but they act stupid" there is something negative. He does not regard either literacy or illiteracy as a desirable state to be in. Byron is not the only learner who responds to the stigma of illiteracy. After asking "What's the difference?" Vanessa was told that literacy usually refers to "having necessary skills" and illiteracy to "not having the necessary skills." She subsequently worked her way around labelling herself as illiterate, by explaining

Well, because I know how to read a little, you know. I know how. Because since I started last April, you know I had the tutor and...I really learn pretty fast....Maybe if my mom did send me to school...but I didn't get the chance [Vanessa].

She does not feel that she deserves to be called illiterate because she "learns pretty fast" and therefore would have been able to read had she been given the opportunity to do so. It is because of the stigma and the fact that illiteracy is associated with a lack of

intelligence, and not just a lack of reading skills, that she hesitates to refer to herself in that way. This type of reaction is typical of early school leavers according to (ref.).

Another participant who reacts negatively to the stigma is Cathy. When she was asked whether or not she considers herself literate she responded by saying that she did not like the use of the word literacy, because of all its negative associations. In the following excerpt, although she confuses the words literacy and illiteracy, the point she is making about the stigma is clear.

I don't think so, 'cause is like, literacy,...to me it sound like, sound like you retarded, you cannot do nothing for yourself and stuff like that. I don't think they should call it that kind of word. To me, it sound like that. You retarded, you cannot pick up a piece of paper and write something on it, you cannot do nothing whatsoever for yourself. So, just the – just the way them say it – just the way them pronounce it. When you really think about it and listen, it sound like that.

Cathy does not like the fact that the word illiteracy conjures up images of a person who is helpless, and who cannot do anything for themselves. She feels that an image of an illiterate person that extends beyond mere reading and writing is unwarranted. Later in the interview Cathy says "I know I have the skills to do other things but is just the reading keeping me back." She has no reservations about admitting that she cannot read, and she does so many times throughout the interview. However, for her, the term illiteracy with the burden of its stigma is simply too much to bear.

Community voice, community silence. It is no surprise that these learners are aware of the stigma of illiteracy. The stigma is very much a part of the way illiteracy is regarded within society. Zieghan (1992) uses the phrase "community voice, community silence" to summarise the way people speak about illiteracy. Community silence is echoed

in the way people avoid speaking about illiteracy, especially in the presence of persons with low reading ability. This is done so as not to embarrass people with reading difficulties. However, community silence has the effect of making it hard for people with reading difficulties to discuss their problems or to seek assistance.

The media is usually the community voice which urges people through campaign advertisements to join literacy programmes. Cathy acknowledges the role played by the media's literacy campaign in alerting her to the fact that many others – "not [she] alone" – were unable to read. Usually, apart from the media ads, only a close friend or confidant can break the community silence. Cathy says that as far as she knows, many of her friends don't know that she cannot read. The only person with whom she has discussed her reading problems is her fiancé. It is he who told her about the literacy programme and encouraged her to enrol. Similarly, Peter's stepmother, and Vanessa's Sunday school teacher knew of their reading problems and advised them to enrol.

Reading and writing for functional purposes. In the midst of the confusion between literacy and illiteracy, and the stigma associated with both, it was difficult to find out what importance learners attach to the concept of literacy. The fact that the word is loaded with negative connotations, and that the meaning is vague meant that asking them "What are the advantages of being literate?" could lead to indefinite answers. I therefore adopted an operational definition of literacy as "the ability to read and write," and asked them what they thought were the advantages and importance of being able to read and write. To this, the early school leavers responded that reading and writing were important for accomplishing tasks such as reading their own letters, reading street signs, completing forms, and writing letters to friends. For these learners, the primary importance of reading and writing is the attainment of what we have earlier referred to as functional literacy.

It is instructive to note that the term literacy was not itself associated with either reading, writing, or with completing functional tasks. However, reading and writing themselves are associated with being able to complete functional tasks. The reason for this could be related to the fact that these learners are not familiar with the term literacy and are not accustomed to using it in their own speech. Thus what has been referred to in this thesis as fundamental literacy as well as what has been referred to as functional literacy are linked in the learners' minds to each other, though not to the word literacy.

While it was not possible for the early school leavers to provide a precise definition of literacy, it is clear that some of the concepts of literacy are important to them. Reading and writing are important for accomplishing functional tasks and seem to be the main reason why they have enrolled in the programme.

Motives for Enrolling

To learn how to read better. With the exception of Byron, whose reason for enrolling in the literacy programme was that "there are good people to move amongst," the early school leavers joined the literacy programme for the primary goal of learning how to read. When asked why they had joined the literacy programme Vanessa and Peter replied respectively "To learn how to read better," and "because I need some help to read better and to write better." The use of the word *better* in both of their responses shows that unlike the participants in some other studies (see Malicky, Katz, Norton, & Norman, 1997), these learners do not feel that they are unable to read at all. They would probably describe themselves as low level readers rather than as non-readers. However, they are primarily interested in improving their reading level so that they may be able to accomplish those tasks for which they say reading is important. The following excerpt from Cathy's interview demonstrates that her foremost interest is learning to read.

[T]he most thing I want to do here is more my reading, because I really need my reading. And I doing maths, but I really have to [do] the reading, because it's – I need that! That's the most thing I really coming here for. [Cathy]

Vanessa also says that she really wants to learn to read. "Well, I need to know how to read, like really good. And how to spell and write, and do everything like really good so I know – I gotta be good!"

Three of the four early school leavers have motives for enrolling in the programme that are clear and uncomplicated – they want to learn to read. The fourth early school leaver, Byron, has a different goal in mind.

Good people to move amongst. Byron did not join the programme to learn how to read. He says that he joined because "there are good people to move amongst" and that his "number one" goal is to learn how to talk to people. He also says that one change he would like to see in the programme is that more students and more teachers join the programme.

Interviewer: Why did you join this programme?

Byron: Because I like it.

Interviewer: What you like about it?

Byron: There is things that I don't know, and there is sense, and there is good people to move amongst, to get to talk to and whatsoever.

In appraising the strengths and weaknesses of the programme Byron says that the "only thing [he] would change, [is to] try to get more people to come here." It may seem that Byron is primarily interested in socialising. However, if we view Byron's statements in light of Fingeret's (1983) research, we might say that he is really trying to establish social networks. One of the most significant findings reported in Fingeret's dissertation is that adult non-readers are not the isolated, dependent individuals that the media portrays them

to be. The social networks within which adult non-readers operate are characterised by interdependence through the exchange of goods, services and information. In exchange for help with reading and writing tasks, non-readers provide services such as auto-mechanics and other trade skills. It is likely that Byron thinks of the literacy programme as a social network of interdependent agents rather than as a place where he will learn to become an independent reader. Group collaboration and co-operation rather than individual autonomy are among the aims of community-based education programmes, so Byron's interest in moving amongst good people may be more compatible with community-based education than the goal of learning how to read.

Later in the interview Byron mentions that he wants to learn how to drive and hints at the fact that he would like someone in the programme to help him with the logistics of getting his driver's license. He says, "I want to go in for a book, to study to get my learners, so maybe you have little idea, or maybe somebody have little idea how to go in to get it." This is one example of the type of information that Byron expects to obtain from the social network within the literacy programme. In terms of his side of the bargain, he does not go as far as to make any specific offers, but his experience as a painter, a mason, a carpenter and a baker may be useful.

In summary, the early school leavers do not know how to define literacy, but they think reading and writing are important for functional tasks. Within this small sample, most of the learners are interested in improving their reading. The exception is Byron, who has joined the programme with the hope of meeting people with whom he can establish interdependent social relationships. Although socialising is not in itself a valid aim of literacy programmes, the mutual benefits derived from social networks is among the aims of community-based education.

Expectations of the Literacy Programme

Individualised attention. How do the learners believe that the programme should address their motives? Most of the expectations that these learners have of the programme relate to the way in which they are being taught to read. Overcrowded classes with learners at various levels are among their chief concerns. Cathy feels that she would benefit more from individual attention. "Well, I just need someone to more – to help me. Like more help me in my reading. I really need someone to more concentrate on me, and helping me in my reading." Similarly, Vanessa asks for individual help with mathematics. "[I wish] somebody would start from scratch with me, because I really want to do the math but its...not my level now, it's too [difficult]."

Both Cathy and Vanessa are asking for individual help because they feel that they are not able to keep up with the pace of the rest of the group. They both have experience with one-on-one learning within this programme because when they first joined they were each matched with one tutor. Cathy's tutor has since left the programme, but Vanessa continues to meet with her tutor outside of the programme. She says they do a lot together including spelling, writing and going to movies and that her tutor is "just what [she] was looking for."

Community-based education tends to stress group rather than individual orientation, and that was one of the reasons that the programme shifted to a group instruction mode. However, apart from the fact that they cannot keep pace with the group, these learners admit that they were reluctant to join the group because they did not want others to know that they could not read. Cathy points to the fact that because the programme is in the community where she lives, she knew she would meet people whom she knew, including some from her own country. This worked against the programme, but

she decided to join anyway. Now she says that she feels comfortable and is not embarrassed at all, especially since there are others who cannot read. However, she still feels that individualised attention is better for her and for others like her who are slow readers. Vanessa has also gotten over her initial fear of the group, but she too feels that she gains much more from her one-on-one meetings with her tutor. However, there are not enough teachers to go around.

A possible compromise is smaller classes where all the learners are at the same level. "I would feel much better if who cannot read stay together, and who could read go in a different class, so we [who cannot read] could catch on and then after we could join them" [Cathy]. This time around, Cathy is not asking for one instructor to be devoted to her only, but that she be placed in a class with other learners at the same level as herself.

Other suggestions. Peter also suggests changes to the programme that would improve the rate at which they are learning to read. He says that even though he doesn't like writing "a little bit more writing could do...[because] that's the way it helps." Even Byron, who is not overly concerned with learning to read suggests that some changes be made so that he could see how well he is progressing. Vanessa doesn't have any specific suggestions for the means or methods for teaching her, but she makes it clear what end she has in mind. "I need to know how to read, like really good, and how to spell and write and do everything like really good, so I know – I gotta be good!"

Influence of Prior Schooling

Teachers not really interested. The fourth research question asks what influence does prior schooling have on the learners' concepts of literacy, motives and expectations of the literacy programme. For the early school leavers, the most obvious effect of prior schooling is that it did not result in their learning to read. For Vanessa, who did not attend

school at all, there can be no effect of school on her views, so she is not discussed in this section. The other participants were asked to say what they liked or disliked about school, and the three early school leavers made a series of negative statements about it. Cathy and Peter mention the fact that some teachers were not really interested in whether the students learned or not. Byron and Cathy mentioned that school was hard because they were poor. A lack of attention and care, especially for slow learners is one of the most common contributors to illiteracy found in the literature (Fingeret, 1997). As discussed in the theoretical framework, the environmental view places the blame for illiteracy outside of the learner. Thus, teachers who did not care and parents who could not help are possible reasons for these participants' lack of reading ability.

The effect that this seems to have had on these learners' views is that they have come to value teachers very highly and they believe that without close attention from a teacher, they will not learn. The expectation of individual attention or small groups is related to the fact that they have had poor results before as learners in large classes, led by teachers who did not care.

"Brain cannot manifest as how it should." Although none of them have been diagnosed with a learning disability, both Byron and Cathy believe that they suffer from learning problems. Byron states as though it is a confirmed fact that his "brain cannot manifest as how it should." Cathy says she wonders why she has difficulties learning to read and says that is possible that her brain may not be working right. She says that one of the instructors in the programme promised to help her to get in contact with a person in Montreal, who administers diagnostic tests. However, at the time of the interviews no steps had been taken towards having this test done.

It would be wrong to conclude that the only source of Byron's reading problems is that his "brain cannot manifest as how it should." Though he may only have stopped going to school at the age of thirteen, his attendance at school was always irregular. The missed days of school and the conditions under which he attended school are almost guaranteed to produce negative effects in academic performance. However, Byron does not make this connection during the interview. Although he speaks about going to school barefooted and about not having books, he ultimately blames his poor performance in school on the notion that his "brain cannot manifest as how it should" because he was "always getting licks up and down." Placing the blame within himself rather than on external factors, Byron concludes that he cannot learn to read. It is difficult to say for sure, but Byron's lack of interest in learning to read could be caused by the fact that he does not think that he can learn. Having accepted what he apparently believes is irreversible and untreatable, he has resigned himself to a life without reading and instead seeks solutions to his needs through social interaction, or as he puts it "moving amongst people."

Cathy has not made the same self-indicting conclusions that Byron has made and so she still has hope in two things: finding out whether or not she really has a learning problem and trying to learn to read in spite of what problems she may have. She feels that whatever problems she may have were compounded by teachers who did not take the time it required to help her to learn. "The teachers only into them what pick up very fast." It is this belief in the benefits of having a good teacher who can pay close attention to their learners that led Cathy to suggest that the programme acquire more instructors and "put those who cannot read together."

Summary of Early School Leavers

In summary, the most striking finding is that the early school leavers confuse the terms literacy and illiteracy. They are not familiar with these terms and do not seem to use them in their own speech. When asked what the word literacy means they are likely to ascribe global meanings, such as "knowing how to do something." They associate reading and writing with functional tasks such as filling in forms, reading letters, writing letters and deciphering street signs. However, though they join the programme primarily to learn to read, they do not typically refer to this as literacy. One of the early school leavers is more interested in relying on the strength of a social network rather than in gaining the skills necessary for autonomous self-reliance. He therefore suggests that increasing both learner and instructor enrolment is one way of strengthening the programme. Those learners who are focused on improving their reading would prefer to see more instructors but less learners.

The early school leavers blame themselves as well as their teachers for their poor academic performance. Of the three who attended school, one learner blames the teachers, one learner blames himself, and one learner blames both herself and her teachers. Where they place the blame is crucial in determining their motives for enrolling in the programme and their expectations of the programme. Byron's belief that his own brain is deficient has led him toward a goal of social interdependence rather than one of learning to read. Cathy is interested in confirming whether or not she is defective and she is trying hard to learn to read in the meantime. Peter, who thinks that the teachers are entirely at fault says that it is up to the instructors in the programme to break things down and to take the time.

The Late School Leavers

We now turn our attention to the late school leavers all of whom went beyond primary school. Some of them attended a high school and some attended a senior school, according to whether or not they had passed the Common Entrance Examination. All are capable of independent reading. Again, the participants will be introduced individually before we attempt to distil and discuss their answers to the research questions.

Beverly

Beverly is from St. Vincent. She is 23-years old. She grew up with her aunt because her mother had migrated to Canada when she was young. She found school to be fun and was active in games and sports. She liked her teachers, although there was one teacher who used to beat the students for not knowing their times tables. She feels that "too much pressure on the brain" and constant persuasion from her aunt to "go read a book" caused her to resent schoolwork. She admits that she preferred watching television to doing her homework.

Beverly did not pass the Common Entrance Examination so she went to senior school instead of a high school. She took the School Leaving Examination in senior 3 but again she did not pass. In order to attend a high school someone would have to pay for her to attend a private school, but her aunt had four children of her own and could not afford the fees. After leaving the public school system, Beverly enrolled in a programme in child care and development. This programme was especially difficult for her because she had not gone to secondary school. She completed most of the programme requirements, but did not get a certificate because she failed the final exams.

In 1998, Beverly migrated to Canada to be with her mother. She enrolled in the literacy programme in April 1999 "to get more education that [she] missed out." Beverly

says she doesn't know what the word literacy means, but she is interested in reading more and improving her spelling. She finds the programme helpful, but thinks it could be more effective if everyone was given a test to determine exactly where they left school. She would also like to have rules which stipulate that "when its break its break and when its working time its working time" because she finds the behaviour of other learners (walking in and out of class) distracting.

Beverly is hoping to get into school here in Canada soon. When asked what she wants to be she says, "I have this dream, ...like I go back to St. Vincent, and mothers who cannot take care of their children, I would ...build like a foster home...and make sure they get enough education that they could go out and live."

Kerry

Kerry is 18 years old. She is from St. Vincent. She grew up with her grandmother, because her mother was in Tortola. Kerry earned a place in a secondary school through the Common Entrance Examination. She liked school sometimes, "but sometime it sucks!" and when you go home parents force you to do things you don't want to do like "pick up you book." She didn't like spelling because "if I don't get all right I can't go out for games. She was involved in sports and liked "to play netball, or sometimes ...to play soccer with the boys." She says herself that she didn't learn in school because "I used to sometimes leave classroom ..and go with the girls them, like a gang, go some shop, sit down and drink something." When she was in form 3 her mother sent for her in Tortola "because my grandmother tell she I'm not behaving myself." She started going to a private school in Tortola but before she was to graduate she had to go back to St. Vincent "because of some immigration problem." Once back in St. Vincent she "never used to do nothing, ...just sometime read books in [her] spare time."

In June 1998 her mother sent her to Canada to live with her cousin who is a law student. Kerry's cousin was given instructions to watch her closely and so she is selective about the places that she permits Kerry to go to. For instance Kerry would like to join a netball club but she does not think that she would be allowed. Kerry mostly stays home and does occasional baby-sitting. When she is bored she sometimes reads books or magazines. She says that if she sees a word that she does not know she asks her cousin, who usually tells her to go and look it up in the dictionary. Kerry's definition of literacy suggests that she may be confusing the word with *litter*. She says that it is "like when you see something and you don't like it. Like if somebody dirty the ground and they just leave it there." Kerry says she joined the literacy programme because she wants to "ketch up back in her work."

One good thing about the programme is when "people come in and talk to you about independence and how to get your papers and stuff like that." She says that she is interested in learning mathematics so that she can manage her money well. She would also like it if they could add "some sports stuff" to the curriculum. Kerry wants to become a dancer.

Rita

Rita is 16 years old. She was born in Grenada but grew up in Trinidad with her grandmother. Rita's mother migrated to Canada when Rita was very young. She says she was an average student who worked very hard. She was an early reader, because before she went to school her father taught her and her siblings to read "a level over [their] age." In her mother's absence, Rita's favourite teacher used to accompany her to Girl Guides. Her least favourite teacher was an English teacher who used to beat the children if they couldn't spell. "She tell you stand up and spell a word, and if you get it wrong, she sending you

yourself to wet the belt and bring it back for her and she beating you with it." She describes herself as talkative though sometimes she likes to be by herself. Rita's favourite subject was mathematics, "because I don't need to read." Her least favourite was English, because "if you don't know the meaning of the word, you have to stop right there."

Two years ago, Rita came to Canada on holidays to visit her mother, and decided to stay. Since that time her family has been trying to get her immigration settled so that she can go to school here. In the meantime, she has joined the literacy programme "because I needed to keep up in my schoolwork...and here was the best place for me to come to get through." Since she joined the programme, she has completed the highest level of the mathematics curriculum being offered, and is now taking classes in English and French. She agrees that literacy is "one word with a lot o' meaning." To her it means learning, having respect and manners.

If she could change anything about the programme it would be to hold classes more days per week and to waive the fee for French. In addition Rita is asking for the programme to "teach [her] more algebra in maths." It was recently confirmed that she will be able to enrol in high school in September. Rita's ambition is to be a schoolteacher, "because I want to give children education that I have."

George

George is 18 years old. He is from Barbados. Growing up, he lived between his father's and his aunt's homes because his mother was in Canada. George had many friends at school and in his neighbourhood. However, he says some of them were not close friends but just acquaintances who flocked to him especially when he returned from holidays in Montreal. Unlike most other participants, George says he had no favourite subjects because

he wasn't particularly keen about schoolwork. However, he always got good grades in school even without studying hard

During the summer before his final year in secondary school, George came to Canada to visit his mother and he never went back. He had been preparing to sit the O-level examinations before he left Barbados, and now he is anxious about getting ahead in his education. However, he is still awaiting clearance from the immigration officials before he can go to school in Canada.

George says that when he thinks about literacy he thinks about reading, and about "doing English literature better." He enjoys reading and says he "just love[s] a good piece of writing." He writes poetry in his spare time and would like to have some of his poems published. He joined the literacy programme because "it's better than staying home wasting time." He also hopes that through his participation in the programme he may "learn something today for tomorrow." His views on the ideal relationship between teaching and learning are that learning occurs best when it is independent and self-initiated.

George would like to learn about film-making, as he is thinking of writing scripts or producing movies "that people will find really interesting."

Nancy

Nancy is 18 years old and from St. Vincent. When she was in school her favourite subjects were reading, spelling, social studies and history. Her teachers were very helpful except for one whose name she can't remember who was a "pervert." She also enjoyed sports and going camping. Nancy took the School Leaving Examination in senior 2, but did not pass. She was informed that she had missed the grade by seven marks and would have to pay to go to a high school. Her family had already planned on migrating and so her mother decided against paying the fees for high school.

During the four years since Nancy has been in Canada, she has mostly been staying at home, but will hopefully be starting school in September. She says "there wasn't really a reason" why she joined the literacy programme, but then adds that her "sister wanted her to get out of the house, and [she, too] wanted to get out of the house." When she first heard about the programme she expected a larger place with "a lot of students." She doesn't think that the programme gets enough publicity: "first of all, the sign supposed to be bigger," she suggests laughing. In general, however, Nancy likes the literacy programme. She especially admires the way the programme co-ordinator shows interest in the learners by always asking them how they're doing.

Nancy is taking mathematics, computer literacy and life skills, but, she would really like to be doing more subjects. To her, literacy means "to learn more, to have more education." She wants to do French, but has to wait until next semester because there aren't enough teachers in the programme. She's interested in history and biographies of famous people, and she believes it is important for people to learn more "about their countries, the people... [and] what they were doing back then." This is important for "Blacks especially," though from what she has heard, "in these countries [Canada], they hardly teach history." Nancy is looking forward to attending High school in September, although she thinks she may still come to the literacy programme to get help with mathematics. Her goal is to get her high school diploma, to go to college and then university and eventually to become a lawyer.

Valerie

Valerie is 26 years old and also from St. Vincent. She describes herself as a good student who used to study her books. Valerie says "schooldays was fun, as well as it have it ups and downs." One of the "downs" was when teachers showed no interest in whether or

not students learned. Another "down" occurred when she was in senior 2: Valerie had not earned a place in a secondary school and a girl, who was in senior 3, told Valerie's mother that Valerie was not studying. Her mother took this to mean that Valerie was not interested in school and decided that she would be better off leaving school and finding a job. Valerie says she would have liked to stay in school longer, because although she knew her mother could not afford to pay for her to go to secondary school, she was hoping that someone else could have sponsored her.

Valerie left school and went to work in a factory making "jerseys." She stayed in this job until she came to Canada in 1998. She now works as a domestic and "night housekeeper" but wants to work in child care, so she plans to enrol in a course in this area as soon as she has her immigration papers.

She joined the programme "because it better than going home wasting time." Valerie says literacy means "furthering [my] education about certain things that I don't know about, like computer." Valerie wishes that the learners would get along better with one another and that the teachers would be more serious. At present she is taking all the subjects being offered in the programme, and she thinks the programme would be more interesting to herself and others if more courses were added. One of the things she would like to learn about is Canadian history, because she is curious to know what people in Canada were doing "before it became so advanced."

Alicia

Alicia is 25 years old. She graduated from one of the top schools in St. Vincent at age 18. Her favourite subject was English and her favourite teacher was her English teacher. Her least favourite subject was mathematics, and she says she just "develop a attitude" towards it making it hard for her to learn. However, she can do most of the

arithmetic that she needs to do in everyday life. "Like the basic addition and subtraction and stuff like that, I'm OK." She also did agriculture in school, but she didn't like the teacher because she found she was "pushy" and "selfish." Alicia did not pass all her O-level exams, but she obtained her school leaving diploma and graduated.

After leaving school, Alicia went to work in a hairdressing salon until she came to Canada two years ago. During that time she had a son who is now living with her mother in St. Vincent. She now works as a babysitter, where she has to perform simple tasks on the computer, such as installing games for the children. She joined the computer literacy classes because she knows that to "to earn a job, you have to learn more about the computer." She likes computers and she wants to learn more about them, but the teacher is not explaining enough.

Alicia ultimately wants to open her own hairdressing salon, but she has to get her immigration settled before she can think about that.

Angela

Angela is 29 years old and from St. Vincent. She was one of the top students in her class, often finishing first or second. When she was 12 years old her family moved to Barbados where her parents got jobs working on sugar plantations. Her schoolwork suffered a setback at this time because she did not have the legal "papers" to go to school there. A year later, they returned to St. Vincent and she was able to go back to school. However, by the time Angela was fourteen, shortly before she was to take the School Leaving Examination, her mother took ill and she had to leave school to "help out." This time she never went back.

Angela says that she does not know what the word literacy means. Anyway, she doesn't have any problems with reading, but joined the literacy programme because her

cousin (Cathy) who told her about it had registered both their names. She thinks the programme is good but would prefer it if there were courses in trade, management and home economics. At present she is enrolled in English, mathematics and computer literacy. She says that she is not sufficiently challenged by Mathematics Level III, but it is the highest level currently being offered. She has always found schoolwork easy, and she feels that she catches on quickly when new concepts are introduced to the class.

Angela wants to open her own hairdressing salon, and although she doesn't have any formal training in that area she gets regular practice styling her cousins' and friends hair.

Carol

Carol is a Jamaican woman. She states that she is between 36 and 45 years old. She has been living in Montreal for ten years and only recently became a landed immigrant. Carol graduated from high school in Jamaica where she was very involved in athletics and other extra-curricular activities. She is an active member of the community-based organisation that runs the literacy programme and she joined the literacy programme so that she could "further her education." She's interested in learning things that she doesn't know, and in addition to French and computers, which she is now taking, would like to do classes in biology, Spanish, accounting and shorthand.

Carol thinks that the literacy programme is doing well because she sees many new learners coming every session. When asked to define literacy, Carol replies defiantly that "literacy is for people who cannot read and write." She is aware that this is one of the main goals of the programme, but she believes that the programme is also for others to come and "further their education." She would like to see even more teachers and learners join the programme because that "would keep it going on... or otherwise its dead."

Carol says she would like to operate a business of her own, but she has not yet decided what type of business it will be. She also says that she would like to be an actress.

Sharon

Sharon is 24 years old and from St. Vincent. She lived at home with her mother and her siblings, until she came to Canada. She used to get good grades in school, especially in mathematics, which was her favourite subject. She also liked English, Spanish and history although it was sometimes difficult when she had to read and "make her own sentences" in English literature. Her geography teacher was her favourite because he used to "take his time, little by little" when teaching. She did not really like the English teacher because she was pushy, but in general, Sharon liked most of her teachers.

When Sharon was in form 3 she had to drop out of school because she was pregnant. (Her daughter is now seven years old and lives in St. Vincent with Sharon's mother.) There was no school where she could return to complete her education after she had her baby, so she had no choice but to find work. She got her first job working as a clerk with the banana export board. She was not new to the board, because she had previously worked there during the summer and her grandmother was a manager with the board. Sharon eventually left the board and changed jobs twice before she decided to leave St. Vincent for Canada. She was hoping that she could go back to school and eventually get a "good job." She currently works as a domestic, but she says that this is "not what [she] really came here for." Ultimately, she would like to return home to St. Vincent to run her own business.

Discussion of Late School Leavers

Concepts of Literacy

Literacy? Education, right? Various concepts and many aspects of the nature of literacy are displayed by the late school leavers. Some of the late school leavers are like the early school leavers in their lack of familiarity with the word literacy. Three of them state matter-of-factly that they don't know what the word means, and others provide definitions that are punctuated with uncertainty. "Literacy? education, right?" is Nancy's reply, when asked what the word means to her. She goes on to say, in a slightly more confident tone, that "literacy means to learn more, to have more education – I think." A similar contemplation is expressed by Valerie, who asks herself "What it mean again?" before saying that it means to "further my education about certain things that I don't know about, like computer." Rita admits that it is one word with a lot of meaning, before saying that to her it means things "like learning, respect and manners." In addition to not being familiar with the word literacy, they do not realise that they are enrolled in a literacy programme, and they are not acquainted with the name of the programme, or the fact that it contains the word literacy.

For these learners, as for the early school leavers, literacy refers vaguely to education of some sort. Reading and writing are not specifically mentioned, although at least one learner mentions computers. However, our hypothesis – that advanced readers would define literacy in functional terms – is not supported by these findings, except that behind the participants' use of words like "education" and "learning" there is reference to the utility of education and learning. At face value, these words describe academic literacy rather than functional literacy, however these learners do provide a picture of the purposes of education and learning. Furthermore, they do not treat reading and writing as purely

academic subjects useful only in the classroom, but as skills to be applied in various areas of their lives.

Associating literacy with reading and writing. The participants in this study do not commonly associate the word literacy with reading and writing. The most common reaction to the word literacy is to relate it to education or learning. Nevertheless, at least two of the late school leavers' concepts of literacy spoke directly or indirectly of reading and writing. In the expressions of George and Carol there are some ideas that lie at the heart of current debates regarding the nature of literacy.

Literacy. When I think of literacy, I don't really know what the word means. But, when I think 'bout literacy, I think 'bout reading, and think 'bout – just reading. And, I think literacy is like when you read, and you study...and you just, like perform English literature better. That's all. That's when I think literacy, that's all I think about. Just reading. [George]

Although George begins by saying that he doesn't really know what the word literacy means, he goes on to define it according to what he thinks about when he hears the word – reading, just reading. In comparison, Carol's reply to the question of what literacy means to her is that "Literacy is for people who cannot read and write." Carol's statement was essentially a retort, indicating that literacy was not relevant to her because she is not someone who cannot read and write.

The following points about the nature of literacy are implied in George's and Carol's concepts of literacy. First, George says that he only thinks about reading, whereas Carol includes writing. Secondly, Carol thinks of literacy as being only for people who cannot read and write. Thirdly, George speaks of performing English literature better, which implies a relatively high level of reading competency. These issues provide fodder

for discussion, because they are also reflected in the way literacy is defined and measured in the professional literature.

Equating literacy with reading only. Although even the simplest definition of literacy refers to both reading and writing, surveys that comprise of skill tests in reading only, have been used as tests of literacy. As we saw earlier, some educators conceive of literacy as synonymous with being able to read. Equating literacy with reading is based on the idea that literacy refers to the most basic of abilities that render a person functional. The notion of being functionally literate involves being able to comply with rules dictated by society (by reading and obeying instructions) and not necessarily being able to express opinions or views (through writing).

When George defines literacy in this way he may not be consciously supporting this view as he is merely reflecting what he has learned from the many media messages that suggest that teaching someone to read makes them literate. However, by not including writing in his definition of literacy, George is actually contributing the perpetuation of the view. If the goal of literacy programmes is merely to enable people to read, and not to write, then there is very limited utility in being literate. Being literate in this way is not empowering and can actually lead to further subordination.

Stigmatising literacy as being only for people who cannot read and write. The second difference between George's and Carol's concepts of literacy – that literacy is for people who cannot read and write, as opposed to being for people who want to "perform English literature better" – touches on an important issue. Contemporary terms containing the word literacy, such as computer literacy and media literacy suggest that literacy is no longer only relevant to people who cannot read and write. In fact, some experts claim that all persons are illiterate to some extent (e.g. Levine, 1982). This view of literacy goes a

long way in reducing the stigma associated with the word illiteracy; many people are not ashamed to say that they are computer illiterate. In this case, Carol is perpetuating a concept of literacy that may be contrary to her own ideals. She is quick to point out that she can read and write, however she has enrolled in a literacy programme because she wants to "further [her] education and learn things that [she] does not know, like French and how to use the computer." If Carol were to think of the word literacy in broader terms, instead of restricting it to people who cannot read and write, then she would be more comfortable using the word to refer to her interest in learning things like French and computers.

Levels of literacy, or dichotomy. Can there be different levels of literacy, or must all persons be classified as being either literate or illiterate? Many researchers and statisticians treat literacy as a dichotomous variable, ignoring gradations in levels of reading and writing competency. Viewing persons as being either literate or illiterate however contributes to the stigmatisation of literacy by creating a gulf between persons of high and low reading and writing ability. Carol's response to the question of what the word literacy means to her, is an acknowledgement of that stigma. None of the other late school leavers presented evidence of the stigma being acknowledged in that way.

A number of the other late school leavers described themselves as being partially or "sometimes" literate, indicating that they view literacy as polychotomous rather than dichotomous. Statements by Nancy, Beverly and Valerie show this. Nancy said, "I am not literate to that extent, because I'm not at the level I want to be at." She had defined literacy in terms of levels, which gave her the opportunity to place herself along this continuum. Valerie also speaks of her own level of literacy as being "in between, not to that extent," and she explains that this is because she needs to pronounce better, subsuming other tasks

within the meaning of literacy. Beverly likewise says that she is literate "sometimes" because she needs to spell.

The idea that a person can be literate sometimes and not at other times can also be found in the literature on literacy (see Levine, 1982; Quigley, 1997). Depending on the context within which literacy is being considered or measured, the same person may or may not be found to be literate. These types of variabilities in the nature of literacy – as levels existing along a continuum and as varying according to context – are currently popular ways of conceiving of literacy. The effect of such concepts of literacy is to de-stigmatise the word and to include more people into the "magical circle of the literate" (Bhola, 1981).

One final note about the many skills, competencies and abilities that are subsumed under the title of literacy pertains to numeracy. Among the participants in this study, the only reference to mathematics as a component of literacy came from Beverly, who says that one of the reasons she thinks of herself as literate only sometimes is that "math gives [her] a tough time." In the educational literature, numeracy is now regarded as a distinct branch of literacy, and it is increasingly gaining attention in literacy programmes.

Literacy is important for lifelong learning, independence and respect. Despite the fact that there is no common understanding of literacy among the late school leavers, it is necessary to determine the importance that the learners place on the acquisition of skills and competencies that are most often referred to as literacy. They were given a working definition of literacy as "the ability to read and write" and then asked what they think are the advantages of being literate. When this question was asked of the early school leavers, they spoke of reading and writing as being important mainly for accomplishing functional tasks like reading their own letters and deciphering signs. By contrast, the late school

leavers see reading and writing as baseline skills which are required for growth in various areas of their lives. They claim that literacy is a prerequisite for lifelong learning, independence and respect.

Useful, not only for performing "tasks imposed by society" (Valentine, 1986), literacy enables people to pursue new knowledge throughout their lifetime. Nancy acknowledges the enduring value in literacy when she says "You know, you always get an opportunity to learn and do new stuff everyday because you never stop learning." Beverly also asserts that reading and writing are indispensable tools for adults to have, "because they carry them out through life." In some ways, literacy also has the capacity to make people independent. It enables you to "do what you want, when you want" and to handle your own affairs such as using the bank machine. When you can read and write for yourself "nobody can't [sic] fool you."

The late school leavers, all of whom can read on their own, see literacy as one of the requirements for a fulfilling and respectable life. Rita, who says that literacy means "learning, having respect and manners" adds that the main advantage of being literate is "having people respect you and you respecting them back." In these learners' opinion, a lot is dependent on being literate. People who are not able to read and write are denied opportunities for learning, independence and respect. Although the ability to read and write cannot by itself create opportunities, it puts people in a position to take advantage of opportunities that may arise.

The major difference between the early and the late school leavers is that because the late school leavers are more competent readers, they are capable of independent action, worthy of the respect and manners due to literate people, and adherents to the principles of lifelong learning. While the early school leavers have joined the literacy programme in

order to avail themselves of basic functional competence, the late school leavers are prepared to take on new and greater challenges. Neither the early nor late school leavers limit reading and writing to academia; both see the functional purposes of reading outside of the classroom. However, where the early school leavers speak mostly of tasks imposed by society, the late school leavers speak of competencies that go beyond those tasks.

Motives for Enrolling

Remedial instruction in reading and spelling. The late school leavers group comprises persons at varying levels of reading competency and hence with varying motives for enrolling in the programme. Some of them feel that they need remedial instruction in reading, while others are ready to put their reading to use in new areas. Beverly and Kerry are two learners whose motives for enrolling focus considerably on their need for remedial instruction. Both point out that although they can read, their spelling is not very good.

I'm not perfect, you know. You know, sometimes, you can read and write, but sometimes it have words that you don't know and you can't spell...I need to ketch up more on my reading. Yes I read, but I need to ketch up more on my reading and my writing. Like sometimes you have big books and like other hard stuff...sometimes I does want to [read it, but] certain word inside of it I don't know.

[Kerry]

Likewise, Beverly says that before she considers herself fully literate she would like help with spelling.

I need to read some more. I need to like spell. I have a problem with [spelling]. I could read off a whole page but don't ask me to spell the words. I could able to read

a page...but sometimes the words give me trouble....Like to break it down into syllables, I can't break it down into syllables. [Beverly]

Difficulty with spelling is not the only problem that Beverly and Kerry experience, and Beverly feels that the areas in which each person needs help are directly related to the grade level at which they left school. She says that the way the programme is run now, there are no "pretests and posttests" used to diagnose learners' needs and to track their progress. She thinks that some of her own learning needs are not being addressed because of this. She joined the programme "to get more education that I miss out, from like form one...to form five, see if I could scrape them up back now," and although it may be "baby stuff" she would like her instructor to start with lessons on verb tense and verb agreement. "Like start back with the simple words like *is*, *were*, when to use them, and stuff like that. I know them is baby stuff but..."

Both Beverly and Kerry are enrolled in English Level II, where the curriculum includes fundamentals of grammar, reading strategies and reading comprehension. They have similar needs and they fall somewhere in between the early school leavers and the other late school leavers in terms of reading competency and motives for enrolling in the programme. The two of them left school without having acquired the proficiency required to read with confidence, and so they need remedial instruction to fill what they see as gaps in their education. Even so, although they have similar reading and writing capabilities and similar reasons for enrolling in the programme, they do not have the same schooling background.

Beverly did not pass the Common Entrance Examination at the end of grade 5, and so instead of attending a high school she went to a senior school. Moreover, she did not pass the School Leaving Examination at the end of senior 3 and her term within the public

school system ended there because her family could not afford a private school. Kerry, on the other hand, passed the Common Entrance Examination and attended a high school where she got as far as form 3 before her mother took her out of school for disciplinary reasons. She then attended a private school in another Caribbean country for two years before leaving "because of some immigration problem."

Though Kerry had been granted the privilege of attending a high school and subsequently attending a private school, this did not result in her attaining a higher level of education than Beverly. Kerry's need of remedial instruction, by her own admission, is due to her lack of interest in schoolwork and not a lack of ability. Activities such as playing soccer with the boys and leaving school to go shopping with a "gang" of girls were more appealing to her than schoolwork. Here is an indication of the effect of factors other than access to education in determining learners' academic achievement. It is a wonderful thing to have access to education, but in order to benefit from such access, learners must be prepared to apply themselves to their work in order to achieve. While Beverly and Kerry have joined the programme for remedial instruction in reading, the other late school leavers have more advanced motives for enrolling in the programme.

Beyond reading.

Not more reading! I read. I think I could read sufficient on my own. But I like more English, more writing. I don't know why, I just love a piece of writing. I just like writing, like ...short stories, poems....I just love writing. I just think I love writing.

[George]

George does not dislike reading. However, when it comes to reading, he is more excited about reading to learn than about learning to read. This interest above and beyond

reading is typical of the late school leavers. They are ready to put their reading ability to use by learning about other things that appeal to their curiosity.

I just want to study like famous people, you know. Like what fascinated people with... like Martin Luther King, and Churchill, and Julius Caesar – people that cause a lot of attention, you know. I just want to study those people and see like why people like them so much, and what they say that click other people inside.

[George]

Nancy agrees that it is important to study history and to learn about people whose lives have influenced our own. "History. You need to learn more about the people from way back then, about Blacks especially. And you know...biography and history." In Valerie's opinion, the inclusion of other subjects is one way to increase the learners' participation in the programme, and she adds that it is important for reading material to be adult-centred and of interest to learners. "Get other subjects, or something like that....more advanced material, not kids things; more like adult reading or something....Like history book about Canada and what they did before it was so developed."

To learn things that I don't know. The desire to pursue knowledge and to be engaged in learning new things is something that researchers have found to be common among many adults (Houle, 1961; Ziegahn, 1992). There are various areas of study that these learners would like to pursue. The following excerpts indicate how wide ranging their interests are.

"I join this programme so I could further my education and learn things that I don't know, like French and to know how to use the computer." [Carol].

"Like a trade class, like to learn a trade...I would like to be like a carpenter, if I get the courage for that....Even home economics classes and stuff like that; like learn to cook,

learn to do different pastry, do different things like that, design stuff and classes like that" [Angela].

"Maybe science or biology or stuff like those, you know. Or even Spanish" [Carol].

"I just want to get like a general idea about making a movie...that's why I want to improve my English, so that like...I could write a lot of scripts, so like I could produce a movie. I could write it, I could produce it, and I could write the script also." [George].

"I would like to know more about the internet" [Alicia]

"And maybe I'll come to...learn some French." [Nancy]

These late school leavers have not enrolled in the programme for mere reading and writing. Some of the things that they want to learn can hardly be classified as literacy.

George who defined literacy as "reading, ...just reading" says that what he wants to do in the programme is "not more reading, [but] more writing....[and] to study famous people."

Being literate is only the first step towards being able to learn new things throughout life.

To be able to speak proper. Again, exactly what it means to be literate includes a variety of communication-related skills and differs from one person to the next. More than one learner stated that they did not consider themselves fully literate because of problems with pronunciation. Pronunciation is an important aspect of speech communication, and though these learners may be able to read and write, and even to understand spoken standard English, some of them still aspire towards being able to speak standard English. When asked what else she would like to be doing in the literacy programme, Sharon says, "like the way how to speak, you know I wish I could...do it." The only course that Sharon is taking in the HELP programme is computer literacy. She is unable to enrol in the English class because she has to work six days a week and sometimes at nights. Even so,

speech communication is not a focus of the English course at HELP. However, Sharon says that she would really like to change the way she speaks.

Like I wish I can come to do English still, because like for instance, sometimes if I'm speaking fast...sometime some of the English bad and some of them going different places. So, I wish I could have come to, you know, still ketch up on it.
[Sharon]

Another participant who also wants to be able to pronounce better is Valerie. "I still need a lot of practising, and to be able to pronounce word properly and so and so. You know, sometimes I don't pronounce the word the way that they supposed to pronounce...because other people correct me."

Angela believes that the reason for her poor pronunciation lies in the differences between standard English and Caribbean English. She says that, when compared to how people speak in Canada, pronunciation in her home-country St. Vincent is bad. "We pronounce them in a...bad way, you know. Here, it's more like proper." Because Angela has moved to different countries and has been exposed to different varieties of English her accent has undergone many changes.

When I was in Barbados for the year, it come like how I young, I pick up the accent very fast. So, I went back home now and I still have that accent in me. And then I went in the Grenadines to work...and then like I was working around most tourist, so it come like I still [have that accent too]...And come here again, listen the way how people speak. Well I'm not really speaking proper, proper English yet, because some words I still not [saying] proper, but... [Angela]

Apparently, Angela thinks that speaking "proper" English refers only to changes in accent and pronunciation. She does not take into consideration other differences between

her speech and that of other English speakers, such as grammar, vocabulary or sentence structure. Basically, these learners do not seem to know much about the differences between various dialects of English, and so their ideas about what it means to speak proper English may not be accurate.

The differences between Caribbean English and standard English are much more complex than mere pronunciation or accent. In fact, the variations within Caribbean English make it relatively easy to switch from Vincentian to Barbadian to Grenadian by altering little more than an accent, but the change from either of these to standard English involves far more. Caribbean English varies slightly from country to country and even across regions of the same country in the same way that standard English varies between countries such as Britain, the United States and Canada. One school of thought is therefore that Caribbean English is a separate language distinct from standard English, and that the varieties of Caribbean English are like the mutually intelligible dialects of standard English (McCrum et al., 1986). From this point of view, a Caribbean person learning how to speak standard English is not learning how to speak proper, but acquiring a new language, and persons who can speak both Caribbean and standard English are regarded as being bilingual. Adopting this point of view in the Caribbean would have the effect of raising the status of Caribbean English and instilling pride in its speakers.

One learner who seems to already take pride in the way he speaks is George. "I just like want to improve my English more. Well, not my English speaking, 'cause I don't want to change how I speak for nobody. I just want to change how I write, 'cause I like to write."

This is better than staying home. Other studies have discovered that some adults enrol in literacy programmes to escape from the boredom of staying home (Beder & Valentine, 1989; Bova, 1985). Most of those adults were married women who were going

through "mid life transformation" (Levinson, 1978 as cited in (Bova, 1985)). In this study, a number of learners also said that they joined the programme as an alternative to staying home, however, they were all young unmarried people. The difference between this group and those in the other studies lies in their reasons for being confined to home.

For two years, while her application for immigration and access to school has been in the pipeline, Nancy has been staying at home. She says "My sister wanted me to get out of the house, and I wanted to get out of the house, so I came to the programme." The situation is the same for many of these learners. Of the 14 participants in this study, only 2 of them were officially landed immigrants at the time the interviews were conducted. Although they also cite other reasons for enrolling in the programme, the most popular reason for was that it is better than staying home. George says, "Because I don't have my papers yet, and that's better than being home waiting until they come, to do something. So, I'd rather come. Like I can't wait, 'cause I'm very, very impatient."

The socio-political situation in which these learners find themselves is a crucial reason for their enrolment in the literacy programme. Some of them are still within the age range of high school students, or at least they were when they first came to Canada and applied for landed immigrant status. The fact that they cannot gain access to (either public or private) schooling points to the difficulties that are faced by migrants in being granted certain rights and privileges. This problem is not restricted to migrants in Canada, because both Angela and Kerry mention that they were denied access to school when they moved to other countries in the Caribbean. The intricacies of the system and the exact cause of the delay in their being granted the desired status as immigrants in Canada was not investigated in this study. There was some speculation that it may have been related to their educational attainment (which would have been a deadlock situation because of the

contingence on their being schooled in order to be granted access to school). However, within six months of the interviews, three of the participants, including one of the early school leavers who was a low level reader, had received notification that they would be able to attend school in the upcoming fall session.

Many of these learners migrated to Canada with the precise objective of taking advantage of better opportunities for education and employment than are available in the Caribbean (see Palmer, 1990). Sharon, who had to leave high school because of pregnancy, testifies that there was no school in St. Vincent where she could return as an adult to complete her education. She thought that coming to Canada would present her with a solution. Similarly, before Valerie left her home country, she had the impression that once she arrived in Canada she would be able to finish high school and go on to do a course in child care. Now, six of the participants in this study, including both Sharon and Valerie who came to Canada in search of better opportunities, are employed as domestic maids. "This is not really what [they] came here for," and they are disappointed about not being able to attend school. However, at least they have the literacy programme, which is better than staying home.

Expectations of the Literacy Programme

More like school. The views expressed by the late school leavers about how they would like the literacy programme to be, reflect an orientation towards school. One of the hypotheses in this study was that learners who had negative experiences in school would not want the literacy programme to remind them of school. These learners clearly do not have memories of school that they do not want to reactivate; they are not the "resisters" that Quigley (1992) describes, who hate schools and institutions. Most of the late school leavers have pleasant memories of their schooldays. Although Kerry complains that

"sometime [school] sucks!" she also describes it as "fun" and says of the literacy programme that "I enjoy my classes...I love my teacher." Even Beverly, who doesn't like to be "pressured" into doing schoolwork, wants more discipline in the classroom.

When asked what changes they would like to see in the literacy programme, the late school leavers say they would like more subjects, more teachers and more days of classes. They ask for textbooks to accompany the courses, for the teachers to dictate notes and for "pre-tests" and "exams" to track their progress. They even request stricter discipline and for the instructors to be "more serious."

Most of the things that these learners expect from the programme are things that are associated with the rigid, didactic structure of traditional teacher-centred academic institutions. Are they saying that they prefer this to a flexible, learner-centred environment? My conjecture is that do not really have a preference for structured learning situations, but that it is the only type of learning environment that they have been exposed to. They view traditional schools as a benchmark standard against which to judge all other learning environments. Courtney et al (1994) found in their investigation of the learners in an adult literacy programme that they assessed the programme on the basis of whether or not it was like school. Exposing learners to alternative educational models, when they are not made aware of the reasons for the differences, leaves them to draw their own conclusions. If they do not realise that the changes are intentional and designed to work in their favour, they may not view these changes positively. Furthermore, they do not make the necessary adjustments in their own learning to match the programme's new approach.

Teachers should explain things.

Interviewer: What are the characteristics of a good teacher?

Beverly: He could put things in your way, know how you are thinking. He don't have to be a psychologist, he could assume. Like if he teaching English he could break things down into your way, that he think - that he know - you will understand.

A number of participants in this study mention that they think good teachers are those who "break things down" and "explain it so everybody gets to understand." They also say that teachers are more effective when they care whether the students are learning or not. Most of the late school leavers (and the early school leavers too) made comments which indicate that they place a large portion of the responsibility for their own learning on their teachers. Researchers agree that adult literacy learners depend on their instructors too much (see Davis & O'Brien, 1985; Malicky & Norman, 1995). As pointed out earlier, this dependency is fostered by the instructors themselves, through their patronising behaviour towards learners – a practice that is a result of their belief that their learners are "little lost lambs who need to be shown the way home" (Quigley, 1997).

Over-reliance on teachers is common among learners at all levels. Again, this is partially because learners are not aware of the new demands that will be placed on them as they are promoted from one level to the next. For instance, problems often occur when learners must make the necessary adjustments in shifting from high school to university, and likewise from undergraduate to graduate studies. In community-based adult literacy programmes, learners need to be oriented to the differences between adult and childhood education as well as between traditional and learner-centred education.

Beverly acknowledges the shortcomings of the traditional teacher-learner relationship when she admits that it is not always possible for teachers to know whether learners understand.

[A good teacher should] always ask questions, make sure that everybody understand. But they can't [even] make sure that everybody understand... 'cause you could say you understand and when you walk from here... you forget it. [Beverly]

When she made this statement, Beverly was asked what are the requirements for being a good student, and she specified that one should "listen and understand and pay attention." She neglected to mention what a student should do if they did not understand or if, as she had intimated, they forgot what they had learned. Her suggestions fall short of demanding active participation from the learner, though she admits that there are limitations on the extent to which the teacher may ensure that effective learning is taking place.

Self-directed learning: "I think it's up to me...". George responds to the question of how he thinks the programme can help him by saying that it is really up to him. His statement reveals that he believes in active learner participation. His answer is the contraposition to the over-reliance on instructors that other learners exhibit.

I don't think no programme can help me learn those things. I think it's up to me to go and learn those things, you know. How? In a library. There's libraries that I can go by and pick up a book just like that, easy like that and study. [George]

This statement is exceptional, and it sets George apart from all of the other late school leavers in terms of his approach to learning. He is an advocate of self-directed learning, which is not only a goal of community-based adult education, but indeed of education at many levels and in various spheres. Many educators and researchers try to foster this independent approach to learning through inquiry-based, holistic and learner-centred approaches. George is on target in making this remark; his views represent what

we may consider to be the ideal learning attitude. However, the following quote reminds us of the difficulty in conforming to the ideals that he espouses.

People could go and pick up books and read, but people just choose not to. Tell the truth, I would rather go out to a party...than to go to the library. That's the truth.

...After the party, I might have a good time but that might blow over, you know.

But, if I go and I pick up a book that going be still in my head until whenever, until my days up. [George]

Influence of Prior Schooling

Three subgroups of late school leavers. The late school leavers can be subdivided into three groups that have common aspects. The first subgroup contains Beverly and Kerry – the two late school leavers who require remedial reading instruction. The second group consists of George, Nancy and Valerie who have similar interests in learning about biography, history and social studies. The third group consists of Alicia, Angela, Carol and Sharon, who all claim to have been among the top students in their class when they were in school and who state that they want to operate their own business. On close examination of the similarities within and differences among these three groups, some interesting parallels emerge about the prior school experiences of the learners within each subgroup.

Subgroup I: Remedial readers dislike English. In the first subgroup, Beverly and Kerry both share a dislike for English, and both complain that they resent the pressure to do schoolwork that they received at home. These similarities do not seem coincidental; no other learner in the late school leavers group shares these characteristics. Evidently, Beverly and Kerry's dislike for English during their earlier school experiences is related to the fact that they both need remedial instruction in reading now that they are part of the literacy programme.

It is possible that they dislike the subject because they encountered difficulties with it, or on the converse, they may have experienced difficulties because they disliked it. The direction of this relationship cannot be verified from the present data but the correlation is telling. In order to improve their reading and writing skills, Beverly and Kerry may need to develop a love for English. The whole language approach to instruction stresses the importance of imparting to learners the practicality and simple pleasures that may be derived from leisurely engaging in reading and writing activities. We saw where George has developed a fondness for expressing himself through writing poetry and short stories. Beverly and Kerry may benefit from exposure to similar literate activities.

Subgroup II: Proficient readers like history, social studies and literature. The similarities within the second subgroup are equally striking. George, Nancy and Valerie, regard themselves as average learners who worked consistently and liked school. None of them completed secondary school for different reasons, and all three state that they regret having left before completing. Another similarity among them is that they liked and were good at English, as well as reading subjects like social studies, history and literature. They express interest in these areas as possible subjects to be explored within the literacy programme and this is very much a continuation of their earlier interest in these subjects.

Subgroup III: High achievers want to be businesswomen. The circumstances of their prior educational and personal lives are very different, but all four women in the third subgroup report that they were top students in their schools. Angela says "I was really good in school, because it come like it so easy for me to catch on to things...when we get test, I came first several times, the [worst] I used to come is fourth." She experienced setbacks in her education when her family moved from St. Vincent to Barbados and eventually dropped out of school because her mother was ill. Alicia, one of two participants in this

study who graduated from high school, says casually "Yeah, I graduate and everything." The other high school graduate, Carol, says proudly "I did all my subjects well...I was second in my class." Finally, Sharon, who attended "the top school in [her] country" dropped out in form 3 because she was pregnant. She says "I was very intelligent like in maths...in my primary school I was a top student there...I was the only person that pass [Common Entrance Examination]."

These learners all say that they would like to have a career operating their own business. No other learners in the study cited this as a career goal. Excellent performance in school appears to have had a positive effect on their belief in their own ability to reach the summit in their chosen careers.

An exception: Mathematical interest. One learner, Rita, has not been included in either of the three sub groups just described. Rita is similar to the learners in subgroup II in terms of her proficiency as a reader, however she does not share their interest in history, social studies and literature. Rita's main interest is in algebra, which in addition to being unrelated to reading, is an academic pursuit which she did not relate to any practical or functional aspects of literacy. Rita is unique because of her mathematical inclination, which like the members of subgroup II is an extension of her preference in school.

Summary of Late School Leavers

On the whole, the late school leavers do not define literacy any more precisely than the early school leavers do; some of them also speak very generally about literacy being related to education. However, their ideas regarding the importance of literacy are more advanced than those of the early school leavers. More than just the accomplishment of functional tasks, they see reading and writing as important prerequisites for lifelong learning and for independent participation in life's activities. Again, the word literacy does

not make most of them think about reading and writing, or about functional literacy tasks as was predicted. Furthermore, they do not seem to have a personal or expanded view of what the word literacy means. However, when asked about the importance of reading and writing, their responses testify that they do not view them as merely academic skills, but as important tools for life. They are aware of a utility for reading and writing that goes beyond the classroom, and of the application of these skills to the pursuit of knowledge.

The late school leavers have joined the literacy programme until they are able to enrol in a public school in Canada. Their learning needs are way beyond fundamental or functional literacy, and many of them are proficient readers who enjoy participating in literate activities such as reading history, learning languages and writing poetry. They are also interested in computers, the internet and various other subject areas like trade and management.

The home environment in which they grew up and the education system in the Caribbean have had a profound effect on their academic achievement. Six of the learners grew up with persons other than their natural birth parents and four of them had their schooling interrupted because their families moved. Pregnancy or health problems contributed to discontinuing school in at least three of the cases. Ten of the learners sat the Common Entrance Examination and five of them passed earning them a place in a high school. Of these five, only two went on to achieve a high school diploma – the others left school for reasons various reasons none of which was related to academic performance. It is apparent that unfavourable circumstances have played a greater role than academic ability in preventing these learners from achieving more in school.

Chapter V

Conclusions and Recommendations

This study sought to investigate learners' concepts of literacy, their motives for enrolling in a literacy programme and their expectations of the literacy programme. The theoretical aim was to add to the scant existing body of literature on adult literacy learners, and to provide information specifically related to the concerns of Caribbean-immigrant learners in Canada, a growing sector of the population, which is underrepresented in research. A practical aim of the study was to advise the administrators of the Home Extended Literacy Programme how to best address the literacy-related needs of the learners currently enrolled in the programme.

The primary hypothesis was that the learners would differ in their concepts of literacy, motives for enrolling in the programme and expectations of the programme, based on the number of years and quality of prior schooling that they had. The 14 participants in the study were separated into two groups: The first group consisted of learners who did not complete primary school and had limited reading ability. The second group consisted of learners who had upwards of eight years of schooling and were at varying levels of reading competency. Results indicate that the hypotheses were supported, insofar as the early school leavers and the late school leavers differ markedly in their concepts of literacy, motives for enrolling and their expectations of the programme.

Summary of Findings

Findings Relating to the Early School Leavers

The early school leavers had limited concepts of the word literacy, which included confounding it with illiteracy and stigmatising it. Their motives for enrolling in the

programme related mainly to learning to read and their expectations were that the programme would provide individualised instruction focused on teaching them to read. These views were found to be related to their prior schooling, in that it is because of their insubstantial amount of schooling that they were unable to read well and also consequently had limited lexical knowledge of the word literacy. That they attached a stigma to literacy was thought to be an outcome of their only coming into contact with the word in a negative sense within their communities. Their motives for enrolling in the programme were influenced by both the quantity and quality of prior schooling that they had: because of their limited quantity of schooling they were low level readers and based on their qualitative judgement of their teachers and of themselves as learners they were motivated either to become independent readers or to depend on social contact with others. The early school leavers' expectations of the literacy programme indicated that most of them were intent on accomplishing their motive of learning to read.

Findings Relating to the Late School Leavers

The concepts of literacy displayed by the late school leavers were more highly evolved than those of the early school leavers. Although their definitions of the word literacy differed from the early school leavers only slightly, their overall ideas regarding literacy were more advanced. They spoke of the prolonged advantages of being able to read and write as creating the opportunity to pursue learning throughout life. The reasons the late school leavers had enrolled in the literacy programme varied from remedial instruction in reading, to learning how to speak proper English, to finding out more about history and learning about the Internet. Many of the late school leavers also stated that they had joined the programme in order to escape from the boredom of staying home while they awaited approval of their status as immigrants to Canada. The expectations that the late school

leavers had of the literacy programme amounted to an orientation towards the type of teaching and learning relationship that exists in traditional schools. This was thought to be related to the fact that the learners had had little exposure to alternate models of education and had not been initiated into the culture of learner-centred and learner-directed education. Their prior education in the Caribbean was characterised by stops and starts in school, due to family migration and problems with access to education. This prevented them from completing school even though many of them had been performing satisfactorily and in some cases performing exceptionally well. The goals and dreams that the late school leavers have for themselves, both within and without the literacy programme, were discovered to be related to their prior schooling as well. Those who had been doing extremely well in school, now had high career aspirations; those who had enjoyed reading subjects, were motivated to pursue interests in history, social studies and literature; and those who had done only moderately well in school, opted for instruction that would bring them up to the level of their counterparts.

There was considerable variability in the views of the late school leavers which can be partially explained by the fact that this group consisted of learners who had achieved variously within the school system. Some of the late school leavers were high school graduates, whereas others never made it to high school because they had failed the Common Entrance Examination at the end of primary school. However, as was expected, passing or failing the Common Entrance Examination, was not found to be a useful distinction between learners in all cases. This was especially visible in the comparison between Beverly and Kerry, two learners who currently read at approximately the same level although one had failed the Common Entrance Examination and subsequently failed

the School Leaving Examination, while the other had passed the Common Entrance and gone to a traditional high school.

Recommendations for the HELP Programme

The following recommendations are based on the themes that emerged during analysis, and pertain to the learners' responses to each of the four research questions.

Goal-Setting in a Learner-Centred Community-Based Programme

Learners are often not prepared to state their goals as they do not have explicit goals in mind. In general these learners' motives for enrolling in the programme are more "activity-oriented" than "goal-oriented" (see Houle, 1961). They are also not accustomed to being asked to assist in planning their own courses, and they have a preference for a teacher-directed rather than a learner-centred instructional model. A series of orientation sessions should be conducted to acquaint learners with the principles of community-based education and the active role that they must play in the process. Alternatively, the process of developing and articulating goals should be covered in a course devoted to goal setting. This course should be taken by all the learners who enrol in the programme, regardless of their subject choices or level of proficiency.

Each learner should set goals that are commensurate with the programme's aim of building and empowering the community, and at the same time relevant to his or her personal needs. Learners should not be expected to achieve a normalised standard, based on which they will be promoted or graduated. Instead, upon reaching their individual goals, each learner should be given a certificate of achievement which symbolises that that goal has been met. Goal-setting should be an ongoing process, so that learners are constantly pursuing new goals within the programme.

Discussing Literacy with the Learners

For the most part, the learners do not have a clear idea of the meaning of the word literacy. Although they have enrolled in a literacy programme, and though the name of the programme contains the word literacy, they attach no particular importance to this. Further, despite a limited concept of the word literacy, they associate it with a stigma and display negative views of the word. One way to address the various meanings and connotations of the word literacy is to have the learners discuss it openly in class. This will increase their awareness of the many meanings ascribed to literacy and allow them to develop their own views of literacy. Understanding that literacy has many meanings, and that each meaning of literacy implies different learning goals is the first step towards defining their own literacy needs. As far as possible, each learner's personal definition of literacy should be represented in a collective definition of literacy that defines the goals of the programme.

Moving Beyond Functional Literacy for the Early School Leavers

The next recommendation for the programme is related to the learners' motives for enrolling in the programme. The main motive of the early school leavers is to improve their reading skills so that they may be able to accomplish everyday functional tasks on their own. While functional literacy is a prerequisite for many other potential goals related to literacy, these learners should be encouraged to look beyond the immediate goal of functional literacy. The materials and topics that are covered in class should stimulate an interest in reading and writing for pursuing knowledge and leisure as well as for critical awareness of the world in which they live.

Critical Literacy for the Late School Leavers

The late school leavers are interested in remedial reading, history, social studies, computers, and management classes, but they also clearly have needs that are associated

with the lack of access to a school or place of learning where they can pursue these interests. In keeping with the principles of community-based literacy programmes – learner-centredness, critical literacy, and community building – the programme should address these needs by dealing specifically with issues that are of interest to the learners and by critically examining ways in which they may organise to pursue their interests. The programme should capitalise on the learners' interests and use them to promote active learning and problem solving that will lead them to create the conditions through which they may aspire to achieve their own objectives, under the present conditions.

Active Learner Participation in Decision-making

The HELP programme should provide a forum where learners make decisions that affect the programme. Issues such as what subjects should be taught and how standards within the programme should be maintained are the business of learners in a learner-centred community-based programme. The participants in this study have their own ideas about how to make the programme more structured, although they expect that the structure should be defined by the administrators or instructors. Giving them the responsibility for putting their ideas into practice will help them to develop the competency to manage their affairs more effectively. Instructors and programme administrators should participate in the decision-making process on equal footing with learners, rather than as directors.

Focus Groups Instead of Classes

One way of enacting critical literacy is to establish focus groups wherein learners with similar interests can get together to engage in collective praxis that will lead them to define their situation in problematic terms and to devise means through which they may solve their problems themselves. Among the goals of the focus groups, is not only to learn the content or skills that they desire but to develop metacognitive strategies, and to acquire

competencies that will enable them to approach future learning projects using the tools that are available to them.

Useful activities that focus groups can do include identifying and discussing the obstacles they currently face, going to a public library to research and collect information, going on field trips to places of interest, visiting other community or public service organisations, and inviting guests to speak about topics that the group is researching. They can then brainstorm for ways to solve their problems, write letters to individuals or groups whose work is relevant to their own needs, practise their advocacy skills by making presentations to the class and engaging in debates, promote their projects through personal or public means and plan their strategies for achieving their goals using all the known resources available to them. Their action plans may include recruiting experts to help them to achieve their goals, raising funds to start a new project, publishing the work of the group in a community publication, or reaching out to other members of the community by organising and promoting workshops.

Each learner in the programme should be involved in as many focus groups as possible, though not necessarily at the same time. The outcome or product of each focus group should be something that can be shared with the entire programme and which will meet a particular need or solve a particular problem experienced by participants in the programme. The following list contains some ideas for focus groups that may benefit these learners.

Focus Group I – Literacy and literature. The first focus group of learners is those who have an interest in English language arts. This group will include the remedial readers who do not like reading, as well as advanced readers who enjoy literature and writing poetry and short stories. The aim of the group is to develop learners' confidence in their

ability as readers and writers, and to foster a fondness for print literacy. A useful motto for this group is that "reading to learn is the best way to learn to read." Self expression and communication are important objectives of this group, and the link between reading, writing, listening and speaking should be used to develop creative written expression. Learners who enjoy literature and poetry can share their creativity with others through peer-tutoring and in so doing improve their own skills at the same time.

Focus Group II – Social skills and life skills. The second focus group consists of learners who want to establish social networks and deal with social issues. The life skills course should be expanded and made relevant to the interests and needs of the learners, instead of the present arrangement, in which life skills lessons are limited to the modules offered by the Plato package. This will enable learners to develop skills and competencies necessary for dealing with social issues that affect them, such as relating to the other participants in the programme and dealing with the stigma associated with illiteracy. This group should also be responsible for monitoring learner behaviour within the programme and for ensuring co-operation and the successful functioning of other groups within the programme. They will benefit from lessons in social relations and group dynamics and will be able to practice what they learn within the programme.

Focus Group III – History and social studies. The third focus group is for those learners whose are interested in history and social studies. The nature of the questions that the learners had about Canadian and Caribbean history is related to cultural literacy. In this group, discussion will centre on current and historic world events, issues of national and personal interest and biographies of important or famous people. Group members should spend time in the public library and on field trips researching and preparing presentations to be made to the entire programme.

Focus Group IV – Job training – trade skills and management skills. The fourth focus group is for learners who want to take trade or management classes. Some of the learners stated that they wanted to operate their own hairdressing salons, while others were less specific about the nature of the business they were interested in. This group can be regarded as a job-skills or employment training group. However, because this would require specialised human and material resources, it may not be practical for the literacy programme to undertake the task of training learners. The main purpose of this group is to explore the options available to them. Where, when and at what cost can they begin to learn the skills they need to pursue their chosen careers?

Focus Group V – Second language learning. The fifth focus group is for language learners. There are two types of language-related interests that the participants in this study make reference to: The first is a desire to learn languages foreign to them such as Spanish and French, and the second is a desire to learn standard English as a second language. Treating standard English as a second language is done in support of the view that Caribbean English is a distinct language. A useful starting point for the learners in this group may be to discuss the definitions of languages and dialects, and the consequent advantages and disadvantages of defining Caribbean English as a language on equal footing with standard English, Spanish and French. Subgroups within this group will each focus on learning one language at a time.

Focus Group VI – Learning about computers and the Internet. The sixth focus group is for learners who want to know more about computers and the Internet. This group already exists as the computer literacy class. However, it needs to be expanded to accommodate more learners, to cover a wider scope of the use of computers, and to offer instant rather than delayed gratification. All learners currently start at a basic level and

work their way incrementally towards advanced topics in computer literacy. This involves perfecting skills in mundane tasks such as typing before they are allowed to begin word-processing or surfing the internet. This does not depict the way that adults typically use computers and learners do not begin to see the purpose of what they are learning until near the end of the course. Computer literacy classes should prepare learners to use the computer in ways that will benefit them: communicating via email, and using the internet for research purposes. Persons in this group can also put their skills to use by doing computer-related tasks for other groups.

Focus Group VII – Human rights and responsibilities. The seventh focus group is for learners who need to learn more about their legal and civic rights and responsibilities. As immigrants to Canada, and as members of the Caribbean community, one major purpose of this group is to explore the Canadian laws and regulations that affect them. An important issue currently affecting most of them is that of acquiring status as a landed immigrant and consequently gaining access to school. They should also investigate their rights as workers, especially since many of them are employed in a domestic capacity and are not part of a labour union or advocacy group. An outcome of participation in this group should be that learners know the answers to questions such as why immigration applications are delayed or denied, persons to whom applicants can appeal, and ways in which the application process may be accelerated.

Holistic Approach To Learning

Overall, an important motif of these recommendations to the programme is for a more holistic approach to learning. Each focus group will learn cross-curricular competencies that can be applied in various areas of their lives. Language arts, technology,

history and numeracy should be covered in all focus groups through relevant and authentic lessons.

Making an Impact Beyond the Literacy Programme

The learners are affected by factors outside of the literacy programme, and any action taken within the programme is in reaction to those factors. Their early home environment, the education system in the Caribbean and their migration to Canada affect their learning progress in various ways. One expectation of community-based programmes, and in particular critical literacy programmes is that outcomes should benefit the entire community. Participants in the Home Extended Literacy Programme should endeavour to get involved in politics at the community level.

Limitations of the Study

One major limitation of this study is that data collection and the bulk of data analysis was carried out by only one researcher. Checks on the validity and reliability of the analysis were provided by the members of the supervisory committee, however these checks were random and were based on my interpretations. Another weakness of the study is its combined use of research methodologies that may appear to be in conflict. For example, although the approach was supposed to be inductive, hypotheses were included in keeping with the requirements of the department in which this thesis was written. This could have prematurely narrowed the qualitative research orientation, but a review of the findings in relation to the hypotheses shows that the latter were sufficiently broad in scope to have not interfered with the inductive analysis.

The study was intended to be applicable to one particular literacy programme; the use of qualitative research methods and in-depth analysis of a small sample attest to this. No guarantee can therefore be made as to the generalisability of the study's findings.

However, as other qualitative researchers point out (see Malicky, 1997), it is important for readers to be able to judge whether the findings of the study are relevant to other contexts.

The study sought to overcome this by providing "thick" descriptive information.

Epilogue

Changes in the Education System in the Caribbean

Important changes are now taking place in the educational environment of Caribbean learners. In both Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago, the dreaded day of the "eleven-plus exam", the Common Entrance Examination, is being replaced by a more systematic evaluation of primary school students beginning at grade three (Day, 1998; Joseph, 1998). In addition, greater equity is being promoted at the secondary level by upgrading Senior and New Secondary schools to status equivalent to the traditional high schools. The new system must also be designed to ensure that all primary school leavers can achieve at least a basic level of literacy by providing greater support for slow students. While the new system is still being tested, the government in both countries have promised significant increases in the education and literacy levels of school leavers in upcoming years. The impact of improved education in the Caribbean may surface in a changing profile of Caribbean immigrants to Canada.

One Year Later: Progress Report on Participants in the Study

An entire year has elapsed since the initial interviews were conducted and we can expect that many things have changed in the lives of the learners. The programme coordinator provided an update on the progress of the 14 learners who participated in this study. Three of the learners were also contacted personally for verification.

The progress report answers the following questions. How many of the learners are still enrolled in the programme? What have they achieved within the programme during the past year? What other milestones have they achieved and where are they heading?

The Early School Leavers***Byron - (age 45 – Jamaica)***

- No longer attends English classes, apparently because of a lack of interest.
- Occasionally attends math class.
- Still working as a janitor.
- No significant academic improvement.

Cathy - (age 27 – St. Vincent)

- Still in English Level I and attending classes regularly.
- Her progress is slow but noticeable.

Peter - (age 21 – Grenada)

- Immigration application has been approved and he now attends a special adult education centre.

Vanessa (age 23 – St. Lucia)

- Promoted to English Level II.
- Attending math and computer classes as well.
- Major academic improvement noted.

The Late School Leavers***Beverly - (age 27 – St. Vincent)***

- Still in English Level II.
- Also attending math and computer classes.
- Experiencing family-related problems which slows her academic progress.

Kerry - (age 19 – St. Vincent)

- To be promoted to English Level III next session.

- Has settled down and is showing major improvement.

Rita - (age 17 – Trinidad)

- Immigration application approved and now attending "welcome class" in a French school. (The purpose of welcome classes is to orient new immigrant students to school in Canada. The class has students at various ages and grade levels and who speak different languages. In Quebec, welcome classes are conducted in French.)
- Rita is the only girl, and the only student from the Caribbean, in her welcome class of 19 students.
- She finds school hard because the language of instruction is French.

George (age 19 – Barbados)

- No longer enrolled in English because it is not advanced enough for him.
- Attending French classes regularly.
- Plans to return to Barbados if his immigration is not approved in time for school in September.

Nancy - (age 19 – St. Vincent)

- Immigration application approved and now attending a public high school in Montreal.
- Recently visited the programme co-ordinator to discuss difficulty she is having with French being the language of instruction for all subjects at school. (She was given references for public adult education centres in Montreal where she may be eligible to attend in English.)

Valerie - (age 27 – St. Vincent)

- No longer attending English class because it is not advanced enough.
- Enrolled in math and French classes.
- Was absent from the programme for an extended period apparently due to a combination of illness and being away in Toronto.

Alicia (age 26 – St. Vincent.)

- No longer enrolled in the programme.
- Planning to return to St. Vincent.

Angela - (age 30 – St. Vincent)

- No longer enrolled in the programme.
- Got married in November 1999.
- Visits the programme occasionally on a social basis.

Carol - (age 45 – Jamaica)

- Successfully completed the computer literacy curriculum.
- Now enrolled in French classes only and attending regularly.
- Was absent for an extended period, apparently related to domestic problems.

Sharon (age 25 – St. Vincent)

- Completed the computer literacy curriculum
- Now enrolled in French classes only.

Summary

Three participants – one early school leaver, and two late school leavers – are now enrolled in the public education system since their applications for immigration have been approved. Two participants both of whom are late school leavers, have discontinued the programme. Some of the nine learners who are still enrolled in the programme have made

significant progress: Vanessa, has been promoted to English Level II, Kerry is slated for promotion to English Level III and both Carol and Sharon have completed the computer literacy curriculum. However, the need for a greater challenge in the English course has left George and Valerie to pursue other interests such French and mathematics. At least two learners are about to give up waiting for their immigration to be approved and are planning to return to the Caribbean.

Burning Questions and Implications for Research

A number of questions about the future of these learners remain to be answered. What will happen to those who are now struggling with the French language in the public school system? How much longer will others have to wait before they are given permission to attend school? What options are available for those who plan to return to the Caribbean? Finally, what will be the fate of many others who, like these learners, will come to Canada hoping to increase their chances of gaining education and employment opportunities?

This study has only scratched the surface in examining the learning needs of Caribbean-immigrants in Canada. As a follow-up to this study, investigation should continue in the following areas: (a) ongoing evaluation of the Home Extended Literacy Programme, (b) assessment of the available learning opportunities for Caribbean immigrants in Canada, (c) effect of different languages of instruction (e.g. standard English, Caribbean English and French) on Caribbean English speakers.

This study has noted a few significant advances that have been taking place in the field of adult literacy. The trend is toward research that examines literacy from the point of view of the learners. Further research is needed that identifies and analyses the self-perceived needs of adult literacy learners and that provides guidelines for implementing learner-centredness in community-based organisations.

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APPENDIX A

Certificate Of Ethical Approval

APPENDIX B

Request For Participation & Consent Form

Stacey P. Knight
3602 Durocher Street, Apt #9, Montreal, Quebec, H2X 2E8.
(514) 842-8141

Interview Schedule

Interview times are hourly, between 5pm and 9pm.

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
	June 1	June 2	June 3	June 4
June 7	June 8	June 9	June 10	June 11
June 14	June 15	June 16	June 17	June 18

1. Please indicate the time and date when it is most convenient for you to attend an interview.
2. Please indicate an alternate time and date, in case your first option is not available.

Every effort will be made to accommodate you; if you cannot attend any of the times or dates above, please use the space below to let me know when you would like to be interviewed. You may also use the space to write down any other questions you have about the study.

I have read and understand all of the above and I agree to participate in the study. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw from the study at any time.

Name : _____

Signature: _____

Phone #: _____

Date: _____

APPENDIX C

Interview Forms

Interview form for Learners

Name:

Date:

Gender:

Date learner joined HELP:

Age Range:

- 16 – 25
- 26 – 35
- 36 – 45
- 46 – 55
- 56 – 65

Subjects taken:

Country of Birth:

No. of years in Canada:

Occupation:

Educational Background and Attitude to School

1. Where did you go to school?
2. What is the last level of education that you attended?
3. [If answer to Question 2 is less than high school diploma] Why did you leave school?
4. What do you remember most about school?
5. How would you say you were as a student?
6. Did you have a favourite *teacher* in school? Who was your favourite teacher? Why?
7. Was there any teacher that you didn't like? Who was that? Why?
8. What was your favourite *subject*? Why?
9. Was there any subject that you didn't like? What was it? Why?

Personal Goals

10. Why did you join this program?
11. Are you satisfied with your job? What kind of job would you like to have?

12. Do you think that what you learn in this program will help you to achieve those goals? How?

Defintion of Literacy and Perception of Literacy needs

13. What does the word 'literacy' mean to you?

14. This program is called the Home Extended Literacy Program. What do you think the word literacy mean to the administrators and tutors in the program?

15. Do you consider yourself literate?

16. [If the learner considers themself literate, substitute 'learning' for 'literacy'.] Do you have any specific literacy needs right now? What are they?

Literacy Acquisition

17. What would you say is the reason that you did not learn to [Answer to Question 16] when you were in school before?

18. Do you think the instructors in this program can help you to become literate / to learn [Answer to Question 16]? What do you think they need to do to help you?

19. What do you think you have to do to become literate / to learn [Answer to Question 16]?

Expectations of the Literacy Program

20. Try to think back to when you first thought about joining this program. What did you expect the program to be like?

21. So far, is the program meeting your expectations?

22. What do you think are some of the strengths of what you are doing in this program?

23. What else would you like to do that you are not doing now in your classes?

24. This program offers classes in English, Math, Life Skills & Computer Literacy. What other subjects or areas would you like added to the program?

25. If you could change anything about this program what would you change?

Interview form for Instructors

Name:

Date:

Gender:

Date instructor joined HELP:

Age Range

- 16 – 25
- 26 – 35
- 36 – 45
- 46 – 55
- 56 – 65

Subject(s) taught:

Country of Birth:

No. of years in Canada:

Occupation:

Educational Background & Relevant Training/ Experience

1. What is the highest level of education that you have achieved?
2. Did you have any training in adult literacy education before you joined this program?
3. What other kind of training or experience have you had that has helped you perform your role as an instructor in this program?

Definition of Literacy

4. What does the term 'literacy' mean to you?
5. What is the purpose of literacy?
6. What is the main advantage of being literate?
7. What do you think *is* the purpose of this literacy program?

Perception of Learners' needs

8. What do you see as the literacy needs of the learners in this program?
9. How do you determine what the learners' literacy needs are?

10. What do you think the learners want to get out of this program?

11. What kind of literacy skills do the learners need?

Literacy Acquisition

12. What do you think are some of the reasons that learners in this program did not become literate earlier on their life?

13. What role do tutors play in helping learners become literate? What can / should someone do to help others become literate?

14. What is the learners' role in becoming literate? What do they need to do to make themselves literate?

Expectations of the Literacy Program

15. Why did you join this program?

16. Try to think back to when you first thought about tutoring in this program. What did you expect the program to be like?

17. So far, is the program meeting your expectations?

18. What do you think *should be* the purpose of this program?

19. Is there anything you would like to be able to change about your classes?

20. Is there anything you would like to be able to change about the program in general?

21. This program offers classes in English, Math, Life Skills & Computer Literacy. What other subjects or areas would you like added to the program?

22. If you were in charge of this program, how would it be different than what it is now?

23. How would you rank these five purposes of literacy?

Vocational – to get jobs for financial independence

Liberal – to gain cultural knowledge about oneself and environment.

Humanist – to feel good about oneself; to have achieved something

Emancipatory – to be able to impact upon the world; to transform one's world.

Personal – to contribute to one's personal development and recreation.