WHAT WORKS IN YOUTH LITERACY AND WHY?
A LITERATURE REVIEW AND DISCUSSION

By John D. Malcolmson
Research support provided by:
Janet Isserlis, James Powrie and Heide Spruck Wrigley

Prepared for:
Human Resources and Development Canada
National Literacy Secretariat
and
Youth Initiatives Directory

October 2001

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I. INTRODUCTION

Literacy programs have been a prominent fixture on the Canadian educational landscape for a number of decades. Through this period, programming has developed in various contexts to meet needs associated with a growing range of target populations. Considerable field-level experience has been accumulated from this process and research has emerged to look at conditions and approaches pointing to positive results. During this time, literacy programs have themselves undergone a process of differentiation. Originally oriented to the remedial educational needs of adults and older workers facing redundancy and the challenge of adapting to changing social needs and employment demands, the literacy field subsequently evolved to include the needs and circumstances faced by younger citizens—adolescents and young adults—whose negative experiences with the regular school system have left them facing literacy obstacles and challenges in later life.

At the root of this expanded focus is a growing perception of *cost*: The cost to society of providing for a class of undereducated young people who face a lifetime of disproportionate reliance on social safety nets, health care systems and in more extreme cases correctional institutions. The cost to the economy of a sizeable block of its younger citizens lacking the requisite skills to find meaningful and productive employment, not to mention the ability to adapt in the face of changing labour market requirements. And finally if not most importantly, the enormous individual cost faced by young people themselves caught in the flux of society undergoing ongoing structural and cultural changes and buffeted by a lack of basic reading, writing and other skills.

The purpose of this literature review centres on two interrelated objectives:

- First, to organize and analyze research information in the area of youth literacy, focusing on what is known about youth literacy and about “out of school youth” facing risk.
- Second, to highlight “promising practice” in the field of youth literacy programming that has been documented and to identify through a review of program experience and research literature “what works” and, more importantly, why.

To these ends, the discussion to follow offers a review of available research literature as well as program-based experience with promising practices.

II. ANALYZING YOUTH LITERACY

Adolescent youth literacy or literacy for “youth-at-risk” is a specialized area of interest that has not yet received a large amount of focused research attention. To date youth literacy has been analyzed largely along a series of tangents: social and demographic, economic, interview-attitudinal and to some degree educational. At no point has the field been subject to a detailed research effort aimed at demonstrating scientifically which particular programs or methods carry which levels of efficacy, or the reasons why some programs succeed while others fail.

Part of the reason for this is fact that the overall education needs of youth and adolescents are broadly seen to fall within the purview and mandate of public school systems. Yet it is these institutions that have failed to meet the needs of out-of-school adolescents. This very failure on the one hand helps feed the pool of “youth-at-risk” carrying serious literacy deficits while, on the other, it works to maintain a low level of visibility for the problem. The result is that less effort is devoted to developing awareness of what the literacy needs of “youth-at-risk” are and how they might best be addressed at the program level. Indeed, a recent Ontario-based report looking at conditions that promote “family wellness” concludes that the needs of adolescents are largely invisible across the entire social policy spectrum in this country. “There is a lack of focus on youth in the current child welfare system: few programming options, few policies directed at youth protection, care options limited for older teens, and system abandonment of youth at age 18.”[1]

The problem of establishing profile and visibility for youth literacy is mirrored in the ongoing ambiguity that surrounds the problem of school dropouts. While debates continue as to whether dropouts are really leaving school, as opposed to taking temporary breaks, relocating to other school districts or decamping the public system in favour of private school alternatives, what is clear is that a substantial number of adolescent learners are not having their needs met within the structures of the regular school system and face an uncertain future by choosing to exit this system.[2]

There is currently an extensive research literature dealing with literacy and literacy programming in general. At the same time, there is a developed body of research dealing both with “youth-at-risk” and with conditions required to redress the risk factors faced by youth. It is at the intersection of these largely separate fields of research that this literature survey can be situated as it is through an examination of reciprocal points of contact that we can gain insights capable of orienting our examination of “what works” in this field. To initiate this task, it is appropriate to examine what “literacy” as a term means and how practitioners, academics and other interested parties have used it.

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[1] Child Welfare League of Canada, Promoting Family Wellness and Preventing Child Maltreatment: Fundamental for Thinking and Action, Chapter 2 “Programming for Distressed and Disadvantaged Adolescents. (Funded by Social Development Partnerships, Human Resources Development Canada in partnership with the Provincial and Territorial Child Welfare Directors, 2000).

[2] “In an era when the prosperity of our society and the well-being of individuals will increasingly depend on having a highly-educated population, approximately one out of every three young people in Ontario drops out of high school before having completed Grade 12. And yet the dropout rate is only the most visible manifestation, the symptom, of broader issues that require attention. In a society as education-conscious as ours, one full third of the client is sampling a product as vital as education and walking away from it in dissatisfaction, the right strategic question isn't ‘What's wrong with the clients—how can we get them to stay?’, but ‘What's wrong with the product - how can it be improved?’" George Radwanski. “Ontario Study of the Relevance of Education and the Issue of Dropouts”. Toronto: Ontario Ministry of Education, 1987. Similarly, “When over a third of students leave school before finishing grade 12, it makes little sense to establish a two-tiered educational system with separate programs for students who are at risk for dropping out and those who are not. A wiser approach is to improve the educational system so that it better meets the needs of all children.” Loraine Thompson, ed., *Stay in School: A Community Resource Handbook,* (SSTA Research Centre Report, 1991).

A. Defining Literacy

Current research has come to reject the notion that literacy and illiteracy form a simple dichotomy.[3] It also typically underscores limitations associated with viewing literacy strictly in terms of reading/writing proficiency.[4] From this comes a widely shared recognition that confronting literacy in its full complexity must address a range of additional issues and needs. Such awareness is evident in the *International Adult Literacy Survey* (IALS) project, a seven-country initiative conducted in 1994 whose goal was to create comparable literacy profiles across national, linguistic and cultural boundaries. The IALS definition sees literacy as an “ability to understand and employ printed information in daily activities, at home, at work and in the community.” Of interest is the fact that literacy is seen to go beyond an ability to read and write, to incorporate both the need to “understand” and the ability to “use.”[5]

Commenting on the use of this approach, OECD commentators Pont and Werquen note that,

> “... literacy is no longer just a question about being able to read, but is a more complex grouping of skills. The survey included a number of prose sections, such as texts from newspapers and brochures; an array of maps, schedules, charts and graphs to measure document literacy; and arithmetic operations to test basic quantitative literacy. These are the skills identified by experts as being necessary to survive and prosper in advanced industrialized countries.”[6]

In a similar vein, the National Institute for Literacy in the United States relies on the definition of literacy found in the 1988 *Workforce Investment Act*. The definition reads as follows,

> “An individual's ability to read, write, speak in English, compute and solve problems at levels of proficiency necessary to function on the job, in the family of the individual and in society.”

The Institute goes on to comment that,

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[3] The alternative is to view literacy as a “continuum of skills.” See for example Carmen Simich-Dudgeon, “English Literacy Development: Approaches and Strategies that Work with Limited English Proficient Children and Adults,” *Occasional Papers in Bilingual Education*, No. 12, Summer 1989. (Available at www.escort.org).

[4] “The definition of literacy that sufficed for an earlier generation and a different economy has been replaced by a host of higher literacies: computer, scientific, civic, cultural and so on.”
R. Brown, “Testing and Thoughtfulness”, Educational Leadership, Vol. 46, 1989.

[5] “Highlights from the Second Report of the International Adult Literacy Survey: Literacy Skills for the Knowledge Society”, (available at www.nald.ca/nls/ials/ialsreps/ialsrpt2/ials2/high1e.htm)

[6] Beatriz Pont and Patrick Werquin “Literacy in a Thousand Words”, (Education and Training Division, OECD, November, 2000).

> "This is a broader view of literacy than just an individual's ability to read, the more traditional concept of literacy. As information and technology have become increasingly shaped our society, the skills we need to function successfully have gone beyond reading, and literacy has come to include the skills listed in the current definition."[7]

While extending the scope of what literacy means, the definition does lend itself to conceptualizing literacy issues and needs in terms that carry a predominantly economic focus—as that aggregate of skills and abilities required to ensure on-the-job performance in a complex and rapidly-changing economic environment.[8] Business interests, who increasingly participate in literacy debates, generally view literacy needs in this way. Literacy problems are framed in terms of prospective and existing employees lacking the requisite skills to participate in a labour market that places an added premium on technical skill levels and qualities such as problem-solving and adaptability.[9] Following on this, literacy programming is generally viewed as an effort to remediate skill deficiencies in these areas. A recent Conference Board of Canada report exemplifies this approach.[10]

> "The concept and definition of literacy have changed considerably over the past 20 years, affecting how information about literacy and workplace basic skills are (*sic*) used to develop policies and practices. New and more complex definitions allow more sophisticated assessments of the impact of enhanced skills on economic performance and support the introduction of more sophisticated and effective interventions to improve literacy and other workplace basic skills."

At the heart of this view is the notion that enhanced literacy skills carry with them a wide range of economic benefits. These benefits include reduced need for social assistance.[11] In the words of a recent Canadian government study,

> "The connection between education and employability has long been established. Better educated individuals tend to have a lower incidence of unemployment, work more hours, earn more per hour and, as a consequence, rely less on government support programs."[12]

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[7] National Institute for Literacy, "Frequently Asked Questions," (available at www.nifl.gov/nifl/faqs.html#literacy)

[8] In this connection, the main report of the IALS study notes in its introduction that "the report confirms the importance of (literacy) skills for the effective functioning of labour markets and for the economic success and social advancement of both individuals and societies." *Literacy in the Information Age*, (OECD and Statistics Canada, 2000).

[9] The Conference Board of Canada's "Employability Skills 2000+" document gives literacy skill a prominent position when it categorizes employability in terms of fundamental skills (communication, thinking, numeracy, etc.), personal management skills (attitudes, responsibility, adaptability and continuous learning) and teamwork skills (different facets of the ability to work with others).

[10] Michael Bloom and Brenda Lafleur, "Turning Skills into Profit: Economic Benefits of Workplace Education Programs," (Conference Board of Canada) (available at www.conferenceboard.ca/nbec/pdf/skills-profits.pdf) See also Martha Beaudoin, R., Rosanne Casale-Daigneault and Rosemarie Petrucci Zbikowski, "Read Reading: Bridging the gap between school and the workplace for adolescents," *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy*, Vol. 40 No. 7, 1997.

[11] Interestingly, one American study found that the benefits of increased literacy skills were unevenly distributed: "It was found that increased competency or functional literacy was most important to white females and nonwhites in explaining labor market success. White male youths' performance in the labor market was not greatly affected by increased competence." Stuart Greenfield, "The Human Capital Model and American Youth: The Roles of Schooling, Experience and Functional Literacy", (Austin, Southwest Education Development Lab, 1980). This study was conducted more than 20 years ago and it would be interesting to see if the employment demands placed on workers today would yield results along gender and racial lines.

[12] Constantine Kapsalis, "The Connection Between Literacy and Work: Implications for Social Assistance Recipients," (Applied Research Branch, Strategic Policy, Human Resources Development Canada 1998).

At the same time, the IALS study and definition do allude in passing to the beneficial impact of enhanced literacy on other social goals and objectives. A Canadian summary document prepared in association with Statistics Canada notes,

> "the IALS report indicates that a high percentage of people on public assistance and those in prisons have lower than average basic skills. Literacy is also related to health. Persons with higher skill may maintain better health through their ability to understand and interpret health information. They may also be better able to exercise preventive health practices and detect problems so that they can be treated earlier, or make appropriate choices amongst health care options."[13]

Similar views are echoed in studies that focus specifically on health-related costs associated with significant literacy problems.[14] Health Canada's "Population Health Model" lists education as both "key determinant" and "underlying premise" of the promotion of health on a social scale.

> "Health status improves with level of education. Education is closely tied to socioeconomic status, and effective education for children and lifelong learning for adults are key contributors to health and prosperity for individuals, and for the country. Education contributes to health and prosperity by equipping people with knowledge and skills for problem solving, and helps provide a sense of control and mastery over life circumstances. It increases opportunities for job and income security, and job satisfaction. And it improves people's ability to access and understand information to help keep them healthy."[15]

Another recent report from the same federal department frames the issue of literacy and its contribution to public health and well-being more squarely.

> "Literacy is a moving target. … (a)s the demands of society change, so do the necessary literacy skills required to function. Literacy involves comprehension and understanding—not only of the written word, but also of the spoken word. Literacy, for example, is a key factor in the ability to understand and to be able to act upon verbal directions from health professionals, e.g. doctors, pharmacists, physiotherapists and others. Literacy skills enhance flexibility. They enable people to deal with change and with unfamiliar contexts."

These latter approaches place clear emphasis on literacy as an ability to *understand* as well as *use* critical information. In line with this general view, other researchers have spoken of an emergent "information literacy"[16] or of "critical information literacy"[17] in efforts to emphasize skills associated with accessing the steady profusion of information that characterizes a media-oriented society. Explicit here is the view that literacy must comprise an ability to sift, differentiate and organize information and, further, to use information in accordance with its perceived relevance.

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[13] "Highlights from the Second Report of the International Adult Literacy Survey: Literacy Skills for the Knowledge Society", op. cit.

[14] "How Does Literacy Affect the Health of Canadians? A Profile Paper," (Health Canada, 1998) (available at www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hppb/healthpromotiondevelopment/pube/literacy-health/literacy.htm). See also Burt Perrin. "Literacy and Health: Making the Connection: The Research Report of the Literacy and Health Project, Phase One: Making the World Healthier and Safer for People Who Can't Read," (Toronto: Ontario Public Health Association, 1990.) The important connection of literacy to health status is also emphasized in Health Canada's *Towards a Healthy Future: Second Report on the Health of Canadians (1999)* which notes that "Canadians with low literacy skills are more likely to be unemployed and poor, to suffer poorer health and to die earlier than Canadians with high literacy levels."

[15] "Population Health Approach", Health Canada, (available at www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hppb/phdd/determinants/e_determinants.html#education).

[16] "Information literate students are competent, independent learners. They know their information needs and actively engage in the world of ideas. They display confidence in their ability to solve problems and know what is relevant information. They manage technology tools to access information and to communicate. They operate comfortably in situations where there are multiple answers, as well as those with no answers. They hold high standards for their work

Expanded definitions of the term examined to this point nonetheless have a strongly functionalist orientation. They are geared to a view of literacy as a discrete amalgam of functional skills deployed by individuals in the act of reading, writing, and communication, or within the context of market-based job performance. Lacking in this approach is any reference to literacy as a form of expression or of creativity. However an examination of promising practice in adolescent literacy amply demonstrates that it is precisely this aspect of quality literacy programming that can awaken interest in learning and in creative expression amongst youth who have had past negative experiences with schooling.

The consequent need to acknowledge an even broader and more inclusive approach to literacy is reflected in Wikelund's paper, "Social Aspects of Literacy Acquisition and Use." Wikelund defines literacy as a "set of culturally patterned practices" that in turn comprise distinct types of knowledge—technological knowledge, functional knowledge, and social meaning knowledge.[18] Emphasizing all three components is, in her view, key to addressing the broader social, cultural and creative needs of target populations as well as to development and implementation of good programs. Related to this notion is the idea that literacy address not just the acquisition of technical skills but also the ability of students to grasp meaning and to acquire more complex reasoning abilities—what authors like Vacca and Hull call "critical literacy."[19] In this view, adolescent literacy in particular should help "to shape the core strategies by which adolescents learn to negotiate meaning and think critically about the texts in their lives, whether in the context of school or the world outside of school."[20] For literacy practitioners, a key requirement is to understand the complex ecological and social factors that link adolescents with their environments, and to bolster and support adolescents by evolving learning strategies that confront demands posed by these environments.[21]

Another approach emphasizing the need to situate literacy more deeply in community and social life and to recognize inherent flux in the latter can be found in the operative definition currently used by the Centre for Literacy of Quebec. Here,

> "Literacy involves a complex set of abilities to understand and use the dominant symbol systems of a culture for personal and community development. The need and demand for

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and create quality products." Colorado Educational Media Association. (1994) *Model Information Literacy Guidelines.* (ED 373 797).

[17] C. Lankshear, L. Snyder and B. Green, *Teachers and Technoliteracy: Managing Literacy, Technology and Learning in Schools.* (St. Leonards, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 2000). Further information on this approach can be found at the National Forum on Information Literacy Web page at www.infolit.org/.

[18] Karen Reed Wikelund, "Social Aspects of Literacy Acquisition and Use." (1989).

[19] Richard T. Vacca, "Let's not marginalize adolescent literacy."*Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, Vol. 41, No. 8, and Glynda Hull, "Critical literacy at work," *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, Vol. 43, No. 4.

[20] Richard Vacca, ibid.

[21] Allan Luke, John Elkins, "Editorial," *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, Vol. 43, No. 5.

> these abilities vary in different societies… Individuals must be given life-long learning opportunities to move along a continuum that includes reading, writing, and the critical understanding and decision-making abilities they need in their communities."[22]

Connected to these broadened and more developmentally-oriented perspectives is the idea that literacy be seen in the context of power relationships within society and that literacy programming has a role in redressing the potentially negative impacts these relationships can have on learners. J. Willms, in his study "Literacy Skills of Canadian Youth," argues that,

> "Literacy is, itself, a defining characteristic of social class. People become part of a culture by learning to interpret and use its particular signs and symbols… They use language in social relations that increase their knowledge and develop their potential. As such, literacy is an instrument of social power."[23]

Similarly, for Barton, Hamilton and Ivanic,[24]

> "Literacy practices are patterned by social institutions and power relationships, and some literacies are more dominant, visible and influential than others."

From this vantage point, the meaning of literacy comes to reflect both educational challenge as well as barometer of progress in efforts to redress the negative impact of social inequalities within contemporary society.

> "Because literacy is so central to social and economic status, policy measures that decrease inequalities in literacy are fundamental to achieving tolerance, social cohesion, and an equitable distribution of economic opportunity. The concern that we may be becoming two societies … encompasses disparities in literacy skills as well as inequalities in income and polarization in labour markets. Therefore, the level of literacy of a society's youth, and disparities in literacy skills among youth with differing characteristics and family backgrounds, are two important societal indicators. They indicate how the previous generation's investments of material, social, and cultural resources have translated into skills and competencies in the present generation. An explicit goal of public education is to assure equal opportunity across successive generations; therefore, levels of literacy and inequalities mark the success of a society's educational system."[25]

All of which underlines the importance of an expanded and increasingly social view of the meaning of literacy, especially as it applies to adolescent learners. With this general view in mind, Luke and Elkins argue that,[26]

> "Adolescents need to be taught how to second-guess, analyze and weigh, critique and rewrite the texts, not just of literary culture, but of popular culture, online culture, corporate life and citizenship. In a culture where texts are there to position, define, sell, and, indeed, manipulate and shape a population at every turn, to give students anything less than a fully critical literacy would be to abrogate our responsibility as educators."

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[22] The Centre for Literacy of Quebec (available at www.nald.ca/province/que/litcent/whatsnew/21stcent/1.htm)

[23] J. Douglas Willms, "Literacy Skills of Canadian Youth," Statistics Canada, Catalogue no. 89-552-MIE, no. 1, 1997.

[24] David Barton, Mary Hamilton and Roz Ivanic, eds., *Situated Literacies: Reading and Writing in Context,* (London: Routledge, 2000)

[25] J. Douglas Willms, "Literacy Skills of Canadian Youth," op. cit.

[26] Elkins, John, and Allan Luke, "Redefining Adolescent Literacies," *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy*, Vol. 43, No. 3., 1999.

B. Defining "Risk" and "Barriers"

Our examination of research on youth literacy can also benefit from an examination of what is meant by "youth-at-risk." Here, it is important to re-emphasize the observation that out-of-school youth facing literacy challenges are by definition youth for whom the regular school system has failed. In a very real way, therefore, the term "youth-at-risk" overlaps considerably with that of school "dropout." Youth who face literacy challenges and leave school often reflect multiple social and economic barriers in their lives. And, in many instances, they will continue to face barriers in their efforts to acquire a meaningful place in the social, economic and educational mainstream of society.[27]

We can initiate this part of the discussion by posing the question, what is meant by "risk?" A recent Health Canada study had this to offer in response,

> "The concept of risk has become common place in our discussions of health in many ways... A risk approach is used when considering health and illness issues—e.g., mental health and mental health problems; violence, abuse and neglect; suicide; and deteriorating and disabling physical conditions. Populations are identified who might potentially be at risk for specific health problems—young children; women; youth; seniors; people from ethno-cultural minorities; gays, lesbians and bisexuals; people who live in poverty; people who are socially isolated; and people who live in institutions."[28]

From this vantage point, "risk" is an inherent component of social environments. Being "at-risk," therefore, is less a description of the personal attributes of an affected population and more a reference to the impact that adverse social environments can have on these populations. Indeed, in the National Crime Prevention Council's 1997 report, *Promoting Positive Outcomes in Youth Twelve to Eighteen Years of Age*, "risk factors" are defined on the basis of "experiences in a young person's life that increase the chances of victimization or of that person developing one or more behaviour problems."[29]

> "Such problems include self-harming behaviours such as alcohol and other drug abuse, suicide, criminal behaviour directed towards other persons or property. The more risk factors that are present the greater the chances of behaviour problems."

It is largely from a need to clarify this issue that many literacy-focused studies take issue with use of a term like "youth-at-risk." Three reasons lie behind this stance. First is the fact that all youth may in varying degrees face adverse environments, circumstances that can lead to literacy issues and problems.[30] For this reason alone, there is little to be gained analytically by labeling or stigmatizing those youth who are indeed so impacted. Second, the “at-risk” concept generally has problems differentiating cause from effect. To give an example, one recent study concerned with Canadian *Stay in School* initiatives has identified three separate levels to the concept of “students-at-risk:” early at risk signals (such as low family income or educational level), personal at risk factors (such as low self-esteem and self-confidence), and school-related risk factors (such as low grades).[31] In the absence of further clarification, this approach clearly blurs the necessary distinction between factors causing the problem and the impact these factors can and do have on student populations. Third, those factors cited in the literature as having a concrete impact on the failure to acquire literacy skills—poverty, racism, family violence and abuse to name a few—are inherently social, cultural and/or economic in nature.[32] This aspect in particular underlines problems associated with attaching an “at-risk” label to youth, a label which accentuates the view that youth themselves are in possession of deficiencies and failings. When used, labels typically get in the way of efforts to understand the social, cultural and economic bases of contemporary “risk.”

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[27] See J. Hixson and M.B. Tinzmann, "Who Are the 'At-Risk' Students of the 1990s?" North Central Regional Educational Laboratory, Oak Brook, 1990. (available at www.ncrel.org/sdrs/areas/rpl_esys/equity.htm) and S. Wittenburg, "Youth-at-Risk: Who are they, why are they leaving and what can we do?" 1988 (ERIC 301 317). The National Literacy Secretariat 's "Literacy for Pregnant and Parenting Youth" project in Prince Edward Island identified eight barriers that for this project hindered the ability of youth single parent mothers to access educational upgrading. Only two barriers related to personal attributes (confidence and decision-making abilities) while the other six highlighted objective factors like child care, transportation, the inflexibility of educational institutions, housing and inadequate finances. (Synopsis of Literacy Corps, Youth Projects, 1999-2000).

[28] "Background Paper—Risk and Vulnerability - Promise and Potential", (available at www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hppb/mentalhealth/pubs/risk/chap-1-2.htm).

[29] Cited in "Risk Factors – A Fact Sheet", (Centre for Research on Youth-at-Risk, St. Thomas University) (available at www.stthomasu.ca/research/youth/risk.htm)

[30] "Recognizing that the transition to adulthood poses risks for all youth, increasingly there is also recognition that the most powerful and long-term impacts to minimize risks and enhance resiliency for youth require more attention to

It is for reasons such as these that Hixson and Tinzmann make a strong and compelling case for viewing “risk” in larger social and economic terms rather than as a function of personal or individual attributes.[33] The authors opt for an “ecological approach” based on the interrelationship between four interacting “arenas” of activity:

> “(a) the social and academic organization of the school,
> (b) the personal and background characteristics of students and their families,
> (c) the community context of schools, and
> (d) the relationship of each of these factors to the others.”

Within this view,

> “the degree to which students are "at risk" is a function of inadequacies in one or more of these arenas that are not compensated for in the others, or a mismatch between the requirements and expectations in one arena and the ability of other arenas to respond to them. From this perspective, one does not simply define or describe at-risk students, but more appropriately, one regards as at risk the combined characteristics of educational environments taken as a whole in which a significant proportion of students are consistently unsuccessful.”

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holistic interventions that build upon client and community strengths.” “Youth at Risk: MTP Issues Definition”, (Youth Initiative Directorate, Human Resources Development Canada, October, 2000 Draft), p. 14.

[31] G. Ronald Neufeld, Don Chapman and Lynda Handy “Stay in School Book 3: Local Planning Process and Model Goals and Objectives,” (Canadian Council for Exceptional Children, 1992).

[32] An OECD article also notes that “(f)indings of the recent International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) show that drop-outs are twice as likely to have left school for economic or family reasons beyond their control than because of a lack of interest in school or a desire to get a job.” Karen Kovacs, “Preventing Failure at School”, *The OECD Observer*, No. 214 October/November 1998. A sample of the extensive literature dealing with youth and risk would include Cheryl Jackson, “The Link Between Learning and Earning: A Comprehensive Service Delivery Model Designed to Improve the Quality of Life of High School Dropouts and "At-Risk" Youth,” (Atlantic City, 1987), Helen Campbell Murphy and Julie Cool, “Dropping In / Dropping Out: A Study of Youth and Literacy” (Ottawa: Canadian Youth Foundation, no date), “Co-ordinating Services for Children and Youth at Risk: A World View” (OECD) and Bentley, T. and Gurumurthy, R. “Destination Unknown: Engaging with Problems of Marginalised Youth”. (London: Demos Foundation, 1999).

[33] J. Hixson and M.B. Tinzmann, op. cit.

Other fields of research support the idea that a social backdrop of risk correlates strongly with the prevalence of anti-social behaviours and adverse school outcomes. For example, Hengeller has noted that youth involved in delinquent and violent behavior rank lower on cognitive tests as compared with peers who do not engage in such activity.[34] Similarly, research by Richards and Dodge suggests that socially-rejected youth are less skilled at interpreting the intentions of others and more prone to attribute hostile intent where it does not exist.[35] Studies such as these reinforce the view that social and economic circumstance conditions both students' performance and, for many, also trigger adverse reactions including the decision to "dropout."

There is, in consequence, widespread recognition of a need to move the debate away from deficit-oriented formulations that label youth in misleading ways.[36] For some, the concept of risk is abandoned altogether in favour of a discussion framed in terms of "barriers" facing youth and possible means to overcome them.[37] An example can be found in the Australian report *Identifying Good Practice in Supporting Youth Transitions to Independence* (May, 2000) which looks at ways of supporting youth transitions to social and economic independence.[38] The report argues that,

> "There are many barriers to young people's transitions. For the purposes of the present project, these barriers can be divided into two groups:
>
> (a) social, cultural, and community factors and
> (b) educational factors.
>
> The social, cultural and community factors include homelessness, family and socio-economic background, ethnicity, indigenousity, regional disadvantage, and disability, suspension, exclusion, low academic achievement, poor literacy, numeracy and educational attainment.
>
> These two areas do not operate in isolation. Rather, they tend to co-occur and interact. The interaction has a particularly adverse impact on young people's transitions and so a further consideration of disadvantage involves the multiplicity of barriers many young people face."

A recent Canadian study examining youth "barriers" and "risk" had this to say about the specific field of education,[39]

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[34] S.W. Henggeler, "Delinquency in Adolescence". In Kazdin A.E. ed., *Developmental Clinical Psychology and Psychiatry.* (Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 1989).

[35] B.A. Richards, K.A. Dodge, "Social maladjustment and problem solving in school-aged children," *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology.* Vol. 50, 1982.

[36] "Identification of 'at-risk' students should be conducted in ways that avoid the negative effects associated with labeling." G. Ronald Neufeld and Alan Stevens, "Stay in School Initiatives. Book 1: A Summary of Research on School Dropouts and Implications for Special Education," (Canadian Council for Exceptional Children, 1992).

[37] Human Resources Development Canada's own definition of "youth-at-risk" centres around the concept of 'barrier': "persons aged 15-30 who are out of school, unemployed and facing additional barriers to employment, including youth with incomplete high school education, low literacy skills, lone parent youth, Aboriginal and street youth." "HRDC Initiatives for Youth At Risk", October, 2000. See also Cheryl Jackson, "The Link Between Learning and Earning," op.cit.

[38] Keys Young, "Identifying good practice in supporting youth transitions to independence," Prepared for Analysis and Equity Branch, Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs (Sydney: 2000).

[39] Caroline Beauvais, Lindsey McKay and Adam Seddon, "A Literature Review on Youth and Citizenship," (Ottawa: Canadian Policy Research Network Discussion Paper CPRN-02, 2001).

> "For young people, many routes to exclusion still exist in Canadian society. Despite declines in the high school drop-out rate, a full 20 percent of young people fail to graduate. In the past, those with low levels of education could find employment, but those who now fail to complete high school face the very real prospect of being unemployed or finding poor paying jobs and insecure work. They are therefore more likely to live in poverty, without the economic independence considered key to achieving full citizenship. This problem particularly affects Aboriginal youth and those from disadvantaged families, perpetuating inequality across generations."

The relevance of risk-factors to youth *deciding* to leave school is confirmed by youth themselves. In an interview-focused Canadian Youth Foundation study of more than 400 youth, youth respondents confirmed their own decisions to leave school were strongly influenced by factors such as family instability, pregnancy, sexual and other abuse, and poverty. Keam's interviews with young literacy learners in Calgary—some of whom were incarcerated in a youth correctional facility—underlined the importance of committed and caring relationships with adults. The lack of such relationships is evidenced in the backgrounds of many literacy-challenged youth, as well as the need to rebuild them within youth literacy programs.[40] Other literature examining the phenomenon of school dropouts also confirms the presence of major risk factors in the backgrounds of those electing to leave school.[41]

Research also points to a pervasive and deep-seated sense of alienation on the part of these dropout youth. Naylor's study of dropouts in British Columbia's Surrey School District argues that,

> "the major factors causing them to leave schools originated within schools. They considered schools as institutions which had become unresponsive to individual needs, outline a pervasive sense of boredom with teaching methods, saw the curriculum as irrelevant, and described school environments in which they felt physically and psychologically unsafe."[42]

Along a similar vein, Ainley and Lonsdale's report on school non-attendance in Australia argues that "this process of gradual alienation begins with difficulties encountered in the early years of school, leading to behavioural and attitudinal problems early in secondary school, absenteeism and truanting, and eventual 'dropping out'."[43] Fernandez and Shu caution that discussion of education reform agendas and the push to elevate school standards not lead to further alienation of high-risk students.[44] To Shacklock, Smyth and Wilson, countering the "dropping out" problem involves a need to hear the "voices" of dropout youth in research that looks at the problem.[45] At the same time, Horn and Chen's study of high-risk students and educational success looks at factors underlying the ability of students to develop the necessary resiliency to surmount the risk factors in their lives by making a successful transition from secondary to post-secondary education. Their conclusions point to the overall importance of youth being properly connected to parents as well as to peers who share similar educational goals and aspirations.[46]

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[40] Linda Keam, "Youth Literacy Research Project", (Calgary: John Howard Society, 2001).

[41] George Radwanski, op. cit.

[42] Charles Naylor, "Dropping Out of High School: An Exploratory and Critical Analysis" (SFU: Masters Thesis, Professional Development Program, 1990).

[43] John Ainley and Michele Lonsdale, "Non-attendance at School: Report to the Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs," (Australian Council for Educational Research, April 2000).

[44] R.R. Fernandez and G. Shu, "School Dropouts: New Approaches to an Enduring Problem", *Education and Urban Society*, Vo. 24, No. 4, August, 1988.

[45] "Conceptualising and capturing voices in dropout research," by Geoff Shacklock, John Smyth and Noel Wilson, Flinders University of South Australia. (paper presented at Annual Meeting of the Australian Association for Research in Education, 1998)

C. From Risk to Resilience and Wellness: The Importance of Community

A consideration of "risk" or of "risk factors" taken from a social and economic vantage point leads to a consideration of conditions that can provide redress. A recent study by the *Canadian Policy Research Networks* examined a range of socio-economic attributes across Canadian communities with a view to establishing a system of "community accounts" capable of pinpointing the nature and degree of risk factors.[47] Researcher Barbara Legowski draws the conclusion that "the notion of precariousness best captures the experience of youth citizenship with respect to the exercise of rights and responsibilities, as well as access and belonging."[48] Another recent Canadian study looks at factors promoting or inhibiting wellness at the level of the individual, family and the community.[49] It offers, as a guide to effective programming, a series of five interlocking models that stress the development of adolescent and family skills, service integration and community strengthening. Further reflections on the fragmentary nature of social programming as it affects school-aged youth are offered in a recent study by Mahon and Beavais, leading to the conclusion that a dual focus on prevention as well as service integration is overdue.[50]

Findings in these Canadian studies echo those contained in Stanford Education professor Milbrey McLaughlin's "Community Counts: How Youth Organizations Matter for Youth Development."[51] McLaughlin summarizes findings of a range of American community-based organizations (CBOs) working with youth over the past decade. In describing the context of this work, she writes that,

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[46] Laura J. Horn and Xianglei Chen, "Toward Resiliency: At-Risk Students Who Make it to College," (MPR Associates, Inc., 1998).

[47] Barbara Legowski, "A Sampling of Community- and Citizen-Driven Quality of Life/Societal Indicator Projects." Background Paper prepared for Canadian Policy Research Networks, (Ottawa: Canadian Policy Research Networks, 2000).

[48] Ibid. A similar sense of the precarious balance separating success from failure comes from a newspaper report on programming work in Rhode Island underway with young girls from low-income backgrounds. "They are girls of promise," says project director Sister Mary Reilly of Dorcas place in Providence. "Unless we reach out, they are going to be girls at risk." Providence Journal, (8/17/01).

[49] Child Welfare League of Canada, "Promoting Family Wellness and Preventing Child Maltreatment: Fundamentals for Thinking and Action," (Ottawa: Child Welfare League of Canada, 2000).

[50] Rianne Mahon and Caroline Beauvais, "School-aged Children across Canada: A Patchwork of Public Policies," (Ottawa: Canadian Policy Research Networks, 2001). (available at www.cprn.org/cprn.html). To these authors, "(c)hildren's opportunities for the safe and secure development of their full potential require more than a favourable school environment," namely reform in the areas of economic security, health policy, recreation and culture, child protection and justice for service integration to become a reality.

[51] Milbrey W. McLaughlin, "Community Counts: How Youth Organizations Matter for Youth Development", (research supported by the Spencer Foundation in studies conducted from 1987 to 1999). Publication and dissemination supported by the Public Education Network (an executive summary is available at www.nydic.org/commcountsexec.html).

> "Almost without exception, the urban youth we got to know came from low-income, high-risk family and neighborhood settings. Young people we met in these mid-sized towns were typically of lower-middle or lower class and, like their urban counterparts, they came from families struggling with unemployment and social disruption. The rural youth who participated in our research were generally from poor families and wrestled with the unique aspects of their rural communities."

McLaughlin stresses the need for community strengthening and community development in programs geared to youth. These elements represent the only effective way to deal with the needs of high-risk youth.

> "Of greatest importance for society is the compelling evidence from the experiences of these youth that CBOs can play a critical role in meeting the needs of today's young people. They can fill the gap left by families and schools that are stretched to capacity to provide supports to young people. One of the most appealing aspects of these CBOs is that they give young people the opportunity to engage in positive activities, to develop close and caring relationships, and to find value in themselves—even in the face of personal disruption, poor schools, and neighborhoods generally devoid of supports. The impressive accomplishments of these young people from diverse communities around the country warrant community action. Community-based organizations offer a means for reaching youth and they can have a significant impact on the skills, attitudes, and experiences youth need to take their places as confident, contributing adults."

The twin issues of individual "resiliency" and community "capacity" also figure prominently in Human Resources Development Canada's overview study "Youth-at-Risk Issues, Current Government of Canada Programs, and Opportunities for Interdepartmental Co-operation." The report argues that, in recent times,

> "the debate about what constitutes 'at-risk' and how to define it, has shifted to a focus on questions of resilience and capacity. Current research is now more inclined to focus on identifying what and how such positive factors and attributes such as individual resilience, family and neighbourhood supports, and community asset-building, can positively impact on life-situation outcomes for the so-called youth at-risk cohort."[52]

From this vantage point, the health and capabilities of youth who have been described as "at-risk" cannot be separated from the ability of communities to provide a safe environment that nurtures the well-being of its inhabitants. This latter point is one strongly underlined in the subsequent discussion of promising practice in the field of adolescent youth literacy.

The foregoing discussion of literature related to the meaning of literacy, risk and wellness highlights a series of important issues and clarifies a number of valuable insights. First of all, literacy needs to be approached from a broadened perspective that acknowledges not only necessary reading and writing requirements but also a broadened range of social and economic skills as well as critical, reasoning and creative abilities. Secondly, risk is appropriately viewed from a social vantage point that avoids placing labels on youth and others who are adversely affected. And thirdly, understanding wellness as an antidote to risk should proceed by way of acknowledging the critical importance played by community as the supportive context for any and all programming initiatives, including those found in the field of youth literacy.

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[52] "Youth-at-Risk Issues, Current Government of Canada Programs, and Opportunities for Interdepartmental Collaboration,"(Human Resources Development Canada—Youth Initiatives Directorate, 2001).

III. LITERACY AND ADOLESCENT YOUTH: WHAT DOES THE RESEARCH SAY?

At this point we can turn out attention to looking specifically at what available research says about effective youth literacy programming. What are the salient questions to be addressed in looking at programming targeted to this sector? And what implications does the research have for improving on the promise evidenced in actual program experience accumulated to date?

At the outset, this report noted the absence of a body of developed research looking specifically at the area of youth literacy. The overall reason for this state of affairs lies in the fact that the issue has not been clearly demarcated. Partly as a consequence, political "ownership" of the issue and responsibility for taking action are likewise unclear. So-called "youth-at-risk" and literacy programming targeting this group tend therefore to fall through the cracks of educational service provision.

Research into youth literacy that does exist can be broadly categorized in one of a number of ways. First are the varied assessments of "impact" which lend themselves to either a broad demographic, statistical or economic level of analysis. The idea of "cost" is central to these analyses—the cost to society in lost productivity and added social expense arising from pervasive skill and other deficits. Second are the reports that examine particular aspects of literacy programs, their dynamics and challenges and attempt to draw lessons from this experience. Third are the reviews that summarize secondhand the results of literacy practice and experience, typically from the reports of others. And fourth is a range of analysis from other disciplines and areas—looking at issues like risk, wellness, service integration—that develop insights relevant to the field of youth literacy while not falling within its specific scope.

At best, these largely distinct lines of inquiry afford an opportunity to begin constructing an understanding of what youth literacy is, what challenges it faces, and what directions in its practice show promise. The approach taken thus far in this review has been to examine research in each of these areas and to use evident points of contact and intersection to develop a sense of what youth literacy is and how, on the basis of what is known, its experiences might best be understood and described. This being said, the following discussion organizes and generalizes insights that have emerged from the research to date.

A. The research literature underlines the importance of understanding literacy in broad social, cultural as well as economic terms, and in using those broadened definitions in practice.

Support for the broadening of definitions emerges strongly from a range of OECD studies.[53] It is echoed in reports emanating from business sector sources, which go beyond an emphasis on technical skill sets to underline the importance of reasoning ability and adaptability. Other studies emphasize the need to view literacy in relation to the proliferation of information technology and the explosion of content. Still others extend the definition's reach deeper into other cognitive and reasoning areas. The wisdom inherent in using a broadened definition also emerges from research looking at the kinds of programming required to make a real difference in the lives of out-of-school youth. As will be shown, many programs have focused on areas of creative exploration and expression—in new technology, photography, writing or video—that test the boundaries of curricular content. However, such programs can register real success in creating the conditions required for real learning to occur. In this regard, project-based learning has offered a useful framework for considering how the creative side of literacy work can be embodied in programs with promising results.[54]

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[53] In addition to the IALS reports, see for example "Co-ordinating Services for Children and Youth at Risk: A World View" (OECD, 1999).

B. The research points to the need to understand "risk factors" associated with youth literacy. Related here is the need to be aware of the full impact that "risk factors" have on youth, their sense of confidence, self-esteem, belonging and trust.

Several studies have emphasized the risks and barriers faced by literacy learners. The work of Fernandez and others has drawn attention to different kinds of "situational" impediments facing students. Hixson and Tinzmann's study makes reference to how existing mainstream schools could reduce barriers simply by ceasing to do what they know does not work.[55] And Murphy and Cool's research emphasizes the importance of how youth perceive "risk factors" as well as the deep-seated alienation that must be surmounted if youth are to access and benefit from literacy programs designed to address their needs.[56] Other analyses of dropouts underline the degree of alienation felt by youth who decide to leave school.[57] Ryerse's study of literacy and youth-in-care draws attention to the "gross deficits in primary relationships" that characterize incarcerated youth.[58] Arnott's study of women and literacy underscores the negative self-esteem that invariably accompanies educational failure.[59] In sum, the research points to the significant challenge faced by literacy organizations in overcoming these barriers and reaching youth with literacy needs.

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[54] "In its simplest form, project-based learning involves a group of learners taking on an issue close to their hearts, developing a response, and presenting the results to a wider audience." Heide Spruck Wrigley, "Knowledge in Action: The Promise of Project-Based Learning" *Focus On Basics*, Vol. 2, Issue D, December, 1998.

[55] J. Hixson and M.B. Tinzmann, op. cit.

[56] Helen Campbell Murphy and Julie Cool, op. cit.

[57] Charles Naylor, op. cit., G. Ronald Neufeld and Alan Stevens, "Stay in School Initiatives. Book 1: A Summary of Research on School Dropouts and Implications for Special Education" (Canadian Council for Exceptional Children, 1992). See also George Radwanski, op. cit.

[58] Ryerse, op. cit.

[59] Louise Arnott, "What Went Wrong: Women Speak Out About Their School Literacy Problems." (Master's Thesis: The University of Calgary, 1980). (cited in Linda Keam op. cit.)

C. The research suggests the importance of promoting community "wellness" as a preventive antidote to the conditions that create literacy problems among youth.

Youth literacy reflects a failure of organizations like public schools to meet the special needs of a range of learners. Strengthening community-based organizations and agencies and their ability to offer meaningful civic engagement to learners provides a promising point of departure for addressing literacy problems. Such is evident in a range of community-oriented research—by the Canadian Policy Research Network in Canada and, for example, in the "Community Counts" report in the United States—examining the salutary impact community development can have on reducing risk and providing a positive and supportive environment for youth to acquire and develop the literacy and other skills they require to participate fully in community life.[60]

D. Research underlines the importance of flexible and innovative programming able to reach youth and to instill a sense of ownership and responsibility.

Adolescent literacy learners find themselves outside the regular school system because this system has not met their needs. Innovative and flexible programs are those that mobilize non-conventional resources, that utilize opportunities for group collaboration, and that build a sense of community both inside and outside the classroom. A number of authors cite the need to counter "dropping out" by making education more student-centred, and by consciously reducing the barriers that make education inaccessible.[61] Hayes, for example, argues that adult-centred literacy programs have not worked well for youth and that there is a consequent need to develop youth literacy programs *per se*.[62] Others like Perrin emphasize the value of varied, flexible, and holistic approaches developed in partnership with outside agencies and centring on activities like small group sessions, computer skills, community resources, and employment linkages.[63] Young et. al. emphasize structuring classroom environments so that they enhance students' natural desire to learn.[64] A similar perspective is taken by Taylor and Nesheim in their discussion of an alternative school "workshop" model for use with at-risk adolescent learners.[65] Longo and Curtis underline the importance of a multifaceted approach to redressing reading problems, one that bases methods on research, plans instructional modules carefully, and uses a positive class atmosphere to challenge students.[66]

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[60] Milbrey W. McLaughlin, op. cit. Child Welfare League of Canada, "Promoting Family Wellness and Preventing Child Maltreatment: Fundamentals for Thinking and Action," (Ottawa: 2000), and Rianne Mahon, and Caroline Beauvais, op. cit.

[61] For example, "Stay in School: A Community Resource Handbook", Loraine Thompson, ed. SSTA Research Centre Report #91-02. (available at www.ssta.sk.ca/research/school_improvement/91-02.htm) The importance of student-centred classroom to effective literacy instruction is referenced in "The Practice: Roles of the Teacher," Northeast and Islands Regional Educational Laboratory at Brown University, (available at www.knowledgeloom.org).

[62] Elisabeth Hayes, "Youth in Adult Literacy Education Programs", in John Comings, Barbara Garner and Cristine Smith, eds., *Annual Review of Adult Learning and Literacy*, (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1997).

[63] Burt Perrin, "How to Engage Youth in Literacy Lessons Learned from an Evaluation of a Cluster of Youth and Literacy Projects", (Literacy and Youth Cluster Steering Committee, 1998)

[64] Philip Fernandez, "Research into Providing Literacy/Upgrading Programs for Youth Who Have Dropped Out of School." (Toronto: Frontier College, 1999), Josephine Peyton Young, Samuel R. Mathews, Anne Marie Kietzmann, and Todd Westerfield, "Getting Disenchanted Adolescents to Participate in School Literacy Activities: Portfolio Conferences," *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy*, Vol. 40, No.5, 1997. (cited in Linda Keam, op. cit.)

To the students interviewed by Keam, good programming means using videos, having interesting and varied assignments, using stories to illustrate lessons, linking lessons to relevant everyday experiences of youth, and asking youth for direction on how to stimulate interest.[67] Enlisting the assistance of student peers to break down barriers and reinforce positive learning environments has also been shown to have a positive influence, largely through its role in forging peer-level bonds of trust and support.[68]

E. Research emphasizes the need for competent, caring and committed literacy teachers.

The analysis of "risk" points to the absence of caring adult role models for many youth. The presence of educators and other staff with such qualities is essential to overcoming problems left by this absence. These educators are ones who know how to make literacy education relevant to the needs and interests of learners. They know how to balance programs that demand commitment and accountability with classroom environments that are stimulating, engaging and fun.

The literature supporting this view is extensive. Arnott's study of female literacy learners quotes students who recall with anger the teachers who "did not care about them and were 'not there' for them."[69] Similarly, Keam's study gives voice to youth themselves and their interest in "(f)un teachers; teachers who talk to you, laugh with you; who put info in a fun way so students can learn."[70] Mills and Motuz's study of employment programs emphasizes the critical role that knowledgeable and caring adults play in ensuring program success.[71] Burt's study of Caribbean youth titled "Why Invest in Adolescents?" focuses on the need to have competent and caring staff employed within and supported by programs that themselves are holistic, preventive and developmental.[72] Cobb and Allen's case study of a single *America Reads* program centres on the pivotal role played by the "unique personality traits" of one literacy tutor.[73] Oldfather's study of classroom dynamics underlines the role competent teachers can play in giving students the motivation to assume responsibility, leading ultimately to ownership and control of their own learning agendas.[74] In different ways, these studies point to the need for safety, trust and respect among youth, teachers, and other staff within programs.

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[65] Sheryl Taylor and Dennis Nesheim, "Making literacy real for 'high-risk' adolescent emerging readers: An innovative application of readers' workshop," *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, (Dec., 2000/Jan., 2001).

[66] Mary E. Curtis and Ann Marie Longo, eds., *When Adolescents Can't Read: Methods and Materials that Work*, (Boys Town Reading Centre, 1999).

[67] Linda Keam, op. cit.

[68] "Youth to Youth Peer Literacy Project" at South Westminster Learning Centre, Surrey, B.C., 2000.

[69] Louise Arnott, op. cit.

[70] Linda Keam, op. cit.

[71] "Lessons Learned on the Effectiveness of Youth Employment Programs – Draft," David Mills and Carol Motuz, KomoKoa Corporation, May, 2001

[72] Martha R. Burt, "Why Should We Invest in Adolescents" (Washington: Urban Institute, 1996)

[73] Jeanne Cobb and Diane Allen "When a criminal justice major becomes an America Reads literacy tutor: A case study," *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*. (Newark; March 2001).

Different options have been proposed for bringing this educational ethos to life. Some suggest, recruiting, supporting and retaining teachers with the aptitudes and approaches required to reach youth. Others suggest that mainstream schools themselves ought to be restructured so as not to repeat past failures to reach a sizeable volume of students. At least one has suggested the strategic use of paraprofessional staff in stimulating an interest in reading.[75]

F. Creative programming includes that which is oriented to developing community linkages, partnerships and programs in areas that extend beyond the scope of literacy instruction *per se*.

Communities and people impacted by risk and barriers require a mobilization of supportive services if youth in literacy programs are to get the best chance as sustaining efforts to break the cycle of marginalization and despair. McLaughlin's summary study of research conducted on "community-based organizations" confirms the vital importance of these organizations to providing a supportive network and context for programs directed at youth.[76] Other studies centring on community wellness arrive at similar conclusions.[77] Perrin argues that proper community outreach is difficult, but that constructing these partnerships is essential to successful literacy programming for youth.[78]

From a preventive approach different researchers have argued that "school-based, after-school programs" offer solutions to a host of problems from poor academic achievement, to gang participation, and drug use.[79] Burt, Resnick and Matheson favour programs that deal with the "whole child" by integrating parents, neighbourhoods and communities in the provision of appropriate care.[80] All of these studies demonstrate the kinds of community-level supports required to enable youth to "drop back in."[81]

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[74] Penny Oldfather, "When Students Do Not Feel Motivated for Literacy Learning: How a Responsive Classroom Culture Helps." (available at www.knowledgeloom.org)

[75] Vincent Carbone, "Improving the Literacy Skills of Delinquent Adolescents Through Cottage-Based Whole Language Activities and Experiences," (Nova University Doctoral Practicuum Report, 1991).

[76] Milbrey McLaughlin, "Community Counts", op. cit.

[77] Canadian Policy Research Network, "A Sampling of Community- and Citizen-driven Quality of Life/Societal Indicator Projects," op. cit. and Child Welfare League of Canada, "Promoting Family Wellness and Preventing Child Maltreatment: Fundamental for Thinking and Action," op. cit.

[78] Burt Perrin, op. cit.

[79] Jean Baldwin Grossman, Karen Walker Rebecca Raley, "Challenges and Opportunities in After-School Programs: Lessons for Policymakers and Funders," (April 2001). (available at www.ppv.org/content/reports/esssummary.html). In addition, see J. Kahne, J. Nagaoka, A. Brown, J. O'Brien, T. Quinn and K. Thiede, "Assessing After-School Programs as Contexts for Youth Development," *Youth & Society*, Vol. 32, No. 4, June, 2001.

[80] Martha B. Burt, Gary Resnick and Nancy Matheson, "Comprehensive Service Integration Programs for Youth-at-Risk," (Washington: Urban Institute, 1992).

[81] See also Cheryl Jackson, op. cit.

G. Research supports the need to develop programs that integrate relevant, hands-on job skills and training.

The National Literacy Secretariat's own summary evaluation of work-place-oriented literacy programs concludes that experientially-based training is the "best hope for the eventual attainment of educational skills and re-entry into mainstream society."[82] A similar conclusion is reached in Mill's and Motuz's draft report on youth employment programs and their effectiveness, alongside the observation that multi-faceted and holistic programs work the best but require integration and follow-up, and carry the greatest expense.[83] Certain American experiences—in particular the CET program in San Jose, California—lead to similar conclusions.[84] Keam, Schultz and Beaudoin et. al. emphasize different aspects of the importance of work-relevant learning to youth and the need to establish school-workplace linkages.[85] And, when asked, youth readily identify an interest in acquiring skills that can assist them to negotiate meaningful entry into the world of work.[86]

H. Research affirms the need to listen to youth, to take their perspectives seriously, to learn about their issues and needs, and to value their insights into what works for them.

Gove and Kennedy-Calloway stress the need to engage students in "class building" activities capable of establishing the groundwork for authentic learning.[87] Ryerse's study of youth in care emphasizes that "the best way to determine the most effective way of assisting youth in care with their learning and literacy skills is to ask the young people themselves."[88] Keam's interview-based study underlines the importance of making youth active participants in assuming control of their own education. In a similar vein, Perrin's work underlines the responsibility that accompanies youth acquiring control of their education and promotes an approach centring on self-discipline and the development of coping skills with youth.[89]

A key element that emerges from the research centres on the need to reach out to youth with programs that break down barriers with innovative and relevant programs and supportive learning environments. Common to virtually all of the research is an implicit recognition of the need to impart to youth not just literacy skills but more importantly, the opportunity and ability to take control of their lives and to build resilience in the face of risk. This latter theme—of building resilience—is one which offers a logical starting point and unifying thread for the examination of promising practice in the field of youth literacy.

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[82] "An Evaluation of Work-Based Programs for Youth: A Report to the National Literacy Secretariat," (Ottawa: Social Research and Demonstration Corporation, 1999).

[83] David Mills and Carol Motuz, "Lessons Learned on the Effectiveness of Youth Employment Programs – Draft," (KomoKoa Corporation, May, 2001).

[84] See the discussion in Section V of this report on work-based training.

[85] Linda Keam, "Youth Literacy Research Project," op. cit., Katherine Schultz, "Between School and Work: The Literacies of Urban Adolescent Females." *Anthropology & Education Quarterly*; Vol. 27 No. 4 Dec 1996. 1996. (1997) and Martha R. Beaudoin, , Rosanne Casale-Daigneault and Rosemarie Petrucci Zbikowski, "Read Reading: Bridging the gap between school and the workplace for adolescents," *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy*, Vol. 40, No. 7.

[86] Julie Cool and Kathy Campbell, op. cit.

[87] Mary K. Gove and Connie Kennedy-Calloway, "Action research: Empowering teachers to work with at-risk students," *Journal of Reading*, 1992. Vol. 35, No. 7.

[88] Cathy Ryerse, op. cit.

[89] Burt Perrin, op. cit.

IV. PROMISING PRACTICES IN ADOLESCENT YOUTH LITERACY

It is at the point of finding, developing and nurturing resilience amongst youth who face risk and adversity that real promise can be found. With this thought in mind, this section sets out a series of six different "promising practice" themes under which program examples are offered. Following this, the section summarizes elements and approaches common to all themes and examples.

A. Build resilience though creative literacy approaches and methods.

A near-universal theme in the literature surrounding promising practices is the need for creative youth-oriented programming. The reason many adolescents find themselves facing serious literacy issues is the fact that the regular K-12 school system did not meet their needs. All of this underlines the need to put creative systems and practices in place to reach those whom the regular school system has failed.

> "Community Counts" is an American research initiative referenced previously with considerable experience in what is required to develop creative programming opportunities for youth. While not directly-focused on the field of literacy, the program favours "alternative pathways of training and credentialing for youth workers" designed with the interests and needs of youth in mind. One program deserving of mention in this regard is the "Takin' it to the Streets" initiative of Portland, Oregon which emphasizes a street-level effort at developing and sustaining basic skills amongst youth, including literacy.[90] The program provides individualized or small group tutoring, drop-in help or topical workshops tailored to the youth's specific interests and needs with a strong reliance on volunteerism. In keeping with the need to craft literacy programs and structures that are more accessible to youth, the "Literacy and Youth Project Cluster," funded by National Literacy Secretariat in Scarborough, Ontario, has emphasized the need for intensive programming centring on classes limited to between eight and ten students.[91]

B. Build resilience though the acquisition of relevant and hands-on job market skills.

The importance of combining literacy instruction with the development of job skills and/or work-based learning is a recurring theme. An example is offered by the American program YouthBuild.[92]

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[90] Karen Reed Wikelund and Nancy Faires Conklin, *Takin' It to the Streets: Basic Skills Training for Street Youth. A Manual for Volunteer Tutors*, (Portland: Northwest Regional Educational Lab, 1989) (ED 306 333).

[91] Reported in "Synopsis of Youth Corps, Literacy Programs, 1999-2000".

[92] Information on the YouthBuild program is available at www.youthbuild.org/history.html.

> "YouthBuild traces its beginning back to 1978 when a group of New York City teenagers expressed their desire to renovate abandoned buildings and revitalize their community. Dorothy Stoneman, then director of the Youth Action Program in East Harlem Block Schools, helped them select a building, raise funds, and hire adult trainers. The teenagers' successful renovation of a Harlem tenement led the Youth Action Program to form a coalition of local not-for-profit organizations seeking to replicate the program. When the coalition expanded nationwide in 1988, it became the YouthBuild Coalition."

At the current time, the program operates in some 145 locations in 43 American states. Unemployed young people acquire construction skills, finish high school, and receive other training while working on housing for low income and the homeless. On the academic side, the program emphasizes a specialized form of high-school equivalency that includes the development of reading and writing skills.

> "Geared to provide a meaningful and useful education, the curriculum integrates academic skills, reading, writing, and mathematics with life skills, social studies, leadership opportunities, and vocational training. The classes are small, allowing instructors to provide one-on-one attention and enabling the students to feel respected and supported. A nurturing, "family-like" environment encourages students to solve problems together and see the strength in cooperation."

A Canadian example is offered by the Alberta Workforce Essential Skills Committee which has supported a food safety training initiative integrated with literacy instruction through a partnership with both the Alberta Food Processors Association and Norquest College.[93] The program highlights a series of methods used to bridge language gaps between workers and to invite worker input into pinpointing the language or literary barriers faced in the course of on-the-job work requirements in this sector.

Other programs worthy of mention are the "Skills to Go" initiative operated by the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board where actual food processing business sites that offered job and job-language training were opened up to learners facing barriers to academic upgrading. Here, students were able to learn the "language and math needed to be successful in this sector" and to practice "the skills of customer service in real-life, real-time situations rather than in simulations."[94] In like manner, Goodwill Industries of Hamilton, Ontario operates a program which offers learners the opportunity to acquire skills and hands-on experience in business computer applications, office procedures and sales.[95]

C. Build resilience though active peer involvement in programming.

YouthBuild's experiences also cast light on the role played by peer involvement and peer support in the development of promising practice. Other program experiences point to the role played by student peers in assisting others to break down the hostility towards education carried from past experience. At the South Westminster Learning Centre in Surrey, B.C., use of a "peer-on-peer" model of literacy programming achieved a beneficial result by helping eliminate psychological barriers felt by youth entering the program. Peers also helped youth learners in valuing the acquisition of reading and writing skills. Such has been confirmed largely anecdotally through positive feedback from youth as well as parents.[96] Similarly, Nipissing University operates a program designed to meet the needs of aboriginal learners by building academic, cultural and social supports. A peer tutoring component for students plays a significant role in this initiative.[97] Positive experience in the use of peers has been reported by the "Peer Literacy Outreach Initiative" in Nova Scotia, targeting black and First Nations youth.[98]

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[93] "Adding Skills, Adding Value—The Essential Skill Needs of Alberta's Food Processing Industry", (Edmonton: Alberta Food Processors Association, 2000)

[94] "Skills to Go!" *Best Practices and Innovations,* (Toronto: Ontario Literacy Coalition, 2000).

[95] Ibid.

Peer involvement also plays a major role in the transmission of information regarding available programs. In the *Dropping In / Dropping Out* report, youth cited "peer contact" as the most important source of information about programs that could meet their literacy needs.[99] Here, youth ranked their own perceptions of what literacy meant to them in terms of knowing goals in life, getting better job opportunities, developing positive attitudes, and acquiring better self-respect. At the same time, a Canada Child Welfare League report on wellness had this to offer by way of comment on peer involvement in educational programs.[100]

> "Programs that have used peers as tutors, mediators, and counselors have been effective in decreasing substance abuse, and in improving academic performance and school attendance. In being positioned to help others, peer helpers also experience positive outcomes such as improved academic performance, school attendance and school behaviour, and decreased rates of dropout."

And, in looking to the future,

> "there are strong arguments for experimenting with these types of support strategies for youth, both for their potential benefits to participating adolescents, and for their potential to relieve pressure on the family. Extra assistance may be required because of the demands of participation and the ability of teens to interact positively with one another. These strategies have been found to increase academic performance and school attendance, and reduce delinquent behaviour."

D. Build resilience though specialized skills; using new technologies creatively.

New technology is "cool" to youth and, for this reason, many literacy programs have availed themselves of new technology in ways that support learning strategies. These approaches do not start from the premise that computerizing the classroom provides an educational panacea, nor do they necessarily see hands-on computer skill as creating a readily marketable job skill. Rather, programs see the use of new technology as a point of entry into the life and experience of youth, which affords learners new opportunities for creative expression and communication. In addition, they are seen to offer youth the potential to create products and/or content in areas they perceive as relevant.

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[96] "Youth to Youth Peer Literacy Project," (Reported in "Synopsis of Youth Corps, Literacy Programs, 1999-2000.")

[97] "Skills to Go!" *Best Practices and Innovations*, op. cit.

[98] Reported in the National Literacy Secretariat, Synopsis of Youth Corps, Literacy Programs, 1997-1998.

[99] Julie Cool and Helen Murphy, op. cit., A similar experience is reported by the "Support for Learning" project in Summerside, P.E.I. where "word of mouth" information through peers was the most important source of learner information about the literacy program. (Reported in Synopsis of Youth Corps, Literacy Programs, 1997-1998).

[100] Child Welfare League, "Promoting Family Wellness and Preventing Child Maltreatment: Fundamentals for Thinking and Action," op. cit.

Kids Learning in Computer Klub houses (KLICK!) is an example of a program that explicitly uses computer technology to break down barriers, build literacy and skills, and forge contacts with other youth and communities.

KLICK! is a consortium of several urban and rural Michigan school districts with the support of the College of Education at Michigan State University.[101] Its stated goal is to offer young people the opportunity to "experience technology" in safe settings. The program describes its approach in the following terms.

> "KLICK! is establishing a virtual network of ten middle school computer Klubhouses as community learning centers. These extra-curricular Klubhouses will enable at-risk students to engage in authentic learning opportunities through the use of computers and computer-related technology. Middle school students will become a helpful technology resource to all facets of their communities including senior citizens, service organizations, their school community, and others in need of their services. Each school site is staffed with an on-site coordinator and volunteers, and is equipped with a variety of technology resources. MSU provides ongoing training and support for the school coordinators and local advisory committees to develop Klubhouses that respond to local needs of students and their communities. The Klubhouses provide safe environments that break down the barriers of isolation imposed by poverty, distance, and age.
>
> The KLICK! program sees it primary function as one of using computer access to overcome barriers faced by adolescent youth. Computers offer a medium whereby youth explore experiences, means of self-expression and opportunities for connections with others. A prime educational focus of the program is the provision of "leadership training."
>
> Your site coordinator will be asking each of the Summer Institute participants about their interests in the project areas. Once we've determined class sizes and membership, the instructor for each class will send a note with instructions for how to get ready for the project before the Institute begins. For example, the Digital Video project instructors might want a plot and storyboard for a video idea, or the Web Design instructor might want some digital clip art to be collected."

Information regarding the success of this initiative is not readily accessible; however, the involvement of educational partners such as Michigan State University would appear to augur well for the program. At the same time, the program appears to have had success using computer media as a means of stimulating learner interests. Enhanced community-level linkages are also highlighted in the program's description of itself and the factors it feels have been beneficial to its operation.

E. Build resilience though initiatives that integrate services for youth.

The concept of integrated service delivery for youth and adolescents facing risk is a central underlying theme in the research and practice of adolescent youth literacy. Indeed, the National Literacy Secretariat's "Research into Providing Literacy Programs for Youth" project, operated through Frontier College in Toronto, confirmed a broad range of

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[101] Information on KLICK! Can be acquired at www.klick.org/website/index.asp/.

"personal and social obstacles" faced by youth in their efforts to return to school along with the need for programs to address these obstacles in an integrated way.[102]

A number of reports look at how family pressures can leave youth unsupervised after school. To one author,

> "The number of children and adolescents without family supervision after school is increasing. Further, the once common notion that self-care led to greater maturity has been replaced with the knowledge that many "latchkey" children, home alone after school, may experience loneliness, fear, and worry. They also risk injury, victimization, bad nutrition, and the negative impact of excessive television viewing… Those who 'hang out' with similarly aimless friends may join gangs or engage in premature sexual activity, drug and alcohol use, and other anti-social behavior. Idle youth are particularly prone to many negative influences in urban areas."[103]

Canadian research initiatives referenced in the research section of this document underscore the importance of these initiatives to building communities' abilities to care for their youth.[104] Additionally, the New Jersey Job Corps program previously described offers some interesting insights into service integration factors contributing to increased success in programs developed to combat unemployment and illiteracy amongst out-of-school youth. Here, participants are exposed to a comprehensive range of educational and vocational experiences and follow a sequential series of steps that leads from intake and orientation through community service to basic skills development and supportive services like counseling.[105]

F. Build resilience through literacy programming that nurtures the creativity of learners.

The examples offered in this section show in a concrete way how an expanded view of literacy can be operationalized, typically through project-based initiatives. As important as the stimulation of creativity is in its own right, these examples also afford insight into how creative expression provides a natural springboard for the development of literacy and social skills in youth.

1. The "Write to Read" Youth Literacy Program

This program is a school-based initiative operating within the United States whose broad target is "at-risk" or economically-challenged young writers having both the desire and aptitude to write.[106] Originating in New Mexico, the program is being prototyped in middle and high-schools for deployment in a range of other venues in school year 2002-2003.

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[102] Reported in NLS, Synopsis of Youth Corps, Literacy Programs, 1997-1998.

[103] "After-School Programs for Urban Youth". ERIC/CUE Digest No. 114.

[104] For an example, see Rianne Mahon and Caroline Beauvais, "School-aged Children across Canada: A Patchwork of Public Policies," op. cit.

[105] Overall, the national Job Corps program advertises a 73 per cent success rate in the transition to either paid employment, the military or post-secondary education. (Additional information on this program can be found at www.hbi.org/jobcorps/jc2.html).

[106] Additional information on the project is available at www.authorsvenue.com/youth_outreach.htm.

> "Write To Read is a series of weekly writing workshops beginning in September during the school year. The program culminates with a contest and the entries are judged by publishing industry professionals. Winners will be honored at an Awards Banquet attended by publishers and civic leaders with a special keynote speech by a celebrity author… Write To Read can even help some of our young writers get published. We will publish an anthology of the young writers' best work at the end of the program. The literary achievement of 'getting published' will last a lifetime and can contribute to successful careers in writing and other fields."

The program's central educational focus lies with the building of students' self-esteem.

> "Self-expression through writing is one of the key fundamentals of literacy. Self-discipline, self-respect, and self-esteem—these are the qualities that this program helps to instill. If one can write, one can read. And if we can show young people new opportunities, then the Write To Read program will help them create new possibilities for future careers."

2. "Literacy Through the Lens"—literacy and the development of photographic skills

Literacy instruction centring on students building portfolios of photographs and using these portfolios was the object behind the "Ways of Seeing: Literacy Through the Lens" project running in the fall of 2000 and spring of 2001 by the Canadian Centre for Educational Development in conjunction with community partners in suburban Vancouver, B.C.[107] Part of a federal "Literacy Corps" grant funded the time of a professional photographer and staff member at Emily Carr College of Art. Funding from VanCity Foundation assisted students by providing camera equipment, film supplies, film developing and framing materials. Because of limited budgets, students were encouraged to photograph their immediate work and living environments. Student portfolios were developed by all who took part and were later used as a focal point for written work. At the end of the project, a display of photos was presented at a branch of VanCity Savings Credit Union where local media provided coverage and subsequent community response was both positive and widespread.

Students in this program acquired hands-on skills in the varied facets of photography. They also received valuable insight and experience in building a portfolio of work that could be used to demonstrate acquired skill and experience to others. But, most importantly, students acquired a living sense of their own creativity and the public validation that comes when opportunity, encouragement and support are used to make an innovative project happen.

3. Literacy, digital video and Web programming

The KLICK! Program described earlier contained a component whereby students were encouraged to document their experiences through production of a digital video. This video can be downloaded from the project's WEB site and provides an illustration of ways literacy can combine with technology and creativity to allow learners to produce digital content for presentation to the outside world through the Internet.

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[107] "'Ways of Seeing: Literacy Through The Lens' aimed to have an active and engaged group of at-risk youth learn core photography skills and begin to create works which speak to their self expression as well as explorations of their environment. The second phase incorporated students writing about the images they have collected." Susan Stewart, "Literacy Through the Lens Interim Project Report," (June 2001).

4. Youth learners working with radio and theatre

The "Youth Educate!" project operated with support from the National Literacy Secretariat through Frontier College involved youth in the creation and broadcasting of radio programs centred on a variety of "challenging life experiences."[108] Summary reports from this program draw attention to the promise inherent in this approach. The National Literacy Secretariat also reports positive results in the use of theatre with the Winnipeg-based "Youth Literacy Awareness Project" where learners wrote, scripted and performed their own play, exploring and developing a range of theatre skills in the process.[109] In each of these examples, creative outlets worked to instill a positive sense of accomplishment while the products of group initiative facilitated development of more traditional reading and writing skills.

What do these varied examples of promising practice share in common? And what unifying threads link these very different initiatives as we attempt to learn more about innovative literacy strategies aimed at adolescent youth? To answer these questions, we can reflect on the following themes that are common to the programs previously identified.

First of all, the programs all made explicit efforts to model literacy instruction in ways that bolstered and developed youth's sense of worth and self-esteem. Such is an important ingredient to overcoming negative past experiences with formal education that have left youth lacking a clear sense of what they might be capable of. At the same time, it is a prerequisite to tapping a reservoir of latent skill, aptitude and creativity on the part of adolescent learners. Expressed another way, this ingredient helps make learning possible.

Second, it is important to look at the way each program addressed the need to provide a caring and supportive environment for learning to take place. It is in this area that programs can bring their own creativity to bear in crafting styles and models of instruction to fit so-called "target" populations. At the same time, the programs consciously emphasize the need to balance program flexibility with clear, real and consistent expectations of youth.

Third, many of the examples reflect varied, flexible and integrated models of programming that extend linkages into surrounding communities so as to support the social, economic and educational needs of youth in programs. In some cases, the ability of youth to draw on after-school programs is an important variable. For youth "on the street", programming this can include linkages to relevant social services networks can provide assistance in dealing with food, shelter and other needs.

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[108] Reported in "Synopsis of Youth Corps, Literacy Programs, 1999-2000."

[109] Reported in "Synopsis of Youth Corps, Literacy Programs, 1997-1998".

Fourth, all promising practice examples rely implicitly on an expanded sense of what literacy means and what literacy is to develop their program models. This attribute is most apparent in programs that focus on the creative needs and potential of youth—whether they encourage youth to write creatively, to take still photographs, to explore the use of video or to develop skills in the field of WEB page design and implementation. All of these examples illustrate an approach to literacy instruction that by going well beyond a traditional focus on reading and writing have an undeniably beneficial impact on the latter.

V. YOUTH AND WORK-BASED PROGRAMS

The section of this report dealing with "promising practices" touched briefly on the issue of literacy and its connection to the world of work. The latter area is of special significance in that it goes to the heart of the potential role literacy can play in helping youth gain the resiliency required to find meaningful and productive entry into the labour market. The following section offers a more extended discussion of program experiences in this area in Canada and the United States and of areas where promising practices have been documented.[110]

There are unfortunately few examples of programs for youth facing risk that evidence clearly measurable gains in regards to employment and earnings outcomes. This observation seems equally true for Canada, Europe and the United States. As a recent report to Human Resources Development Canada states,[111]

> "A recent OECD review of programs aimed at increasing youth at risk integration into the labour market found that: 'The most dismal picture emerged with respect to youth: almost no training program worked for them. On average, OECD countries devoted 12 percent of spending on active policies to these measures in 1996. One of the most disappointing conclusions is that almost all evaluations show that special measures are not effective for disadvantaged youths. This holds not only for public training programs, but also for targeted wage subsidy measures too."

And further,

> "An evaluation of the Youth Service Canada program also found no statistically significant benefits of program participation on earnings, hours worked or annual social assistance benefits."

These results parallel similar findings of an extensive study of out-of-school youth programs funded under the *Job Training Partnership Act* (JTPA) in the United States.

> "The findings for the out-of-school youth component of the program were discouraging. JTPA produced no statistically significant positive effects for out-of-school youths, either male or female. This finding held true over a two and a half year follow-up period, and for all the different service strategies that were used—classroom training, OJT/job search

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[110] American experiences detailed in this section rely on information and background provided by Jim Powrie.

[111] David Mills and Carol Motuz, op. cit.

> assistance, or a mix of less intensive services. In addition, no reduction in youth crime rates or welfare receipt was found."[112]

A parallel study conducted by the U.S. Department of Labor of its Jobstart program, which targeted economically disadvantaged high school dropouts with low reading skills, found similar results. The thirteen program sites studied provided a mixture of basic skills education, vocational training, support services, and job search assistance. Participants were tracked for four years after completing the program and a randomly assigned control group was used for comparison. Generally, the results were disappointing.

> "When the results from all the sites are combined, there was no significant increase in overall employment rates or earnings for the total period or any individual year. Average earnings gains of over $400 (8 per cent), which were close to statistically significant, were found during the third and fourth years of the follow-up. However, these gains are not nearly large enough to counterbalance the costs of training. The program also does not appear to have reduced welfare receipt."[113]

A significant and singular exception to this bleak picture is the performance of one of the evaluation sites, that operated by Center for Employment Training (CET) in San Jose, California.

> "(T)he most striking bright spot in the program's results was the remarkable performance of one of the program's 13 sites – the Center for Employment Training (CET) in San Jose...The Jobstart study found that youth at the San Jose CET site showed sustained annual earnings of over $3,000. Combining earnings gains from the third and fourth years after entry into the program, young CET participants earned over $6,000 more than control group members, which was a 40% earnings increase. These are among the largest training effects ever recorded in a youth training program. When combined with CET's impressive performance in training minority single parents, this program has an excellent record of achievement."[114]

The report indicates that "the basic element that sets CET apart from other training programs is its strong focus on employment, a focus which is integrated into every element of the program." The report further points out that CET offers an "integrated basic education and vocational skills training, with an emphasis on the latter."

> "The basic education is tightly connected to skills training. At entry trainees immediately begin vocational training designed to simulate a real job situation. If trainees have difficulty with basic reading or math during this training, they are given individual assistance on the spot by basic skills tutors present during the training. Instead of being taught academic skills through classroom instruction, students learn them in the context of job training."

Because CET provides basic skills instruction while youth are involved in training, it does not have to use prerequisites that would otherwise screen out those with educational barriers. For this reason, over 75 percent of its trainees—adults and youth—have not completed high school when entering training. However, many CET trainees complete the General Equivalency Diploma (GED) or obtain a high school diploma while participating in job training.

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[112] "What's Working (and What's Not): A Summary of Research on the Economic Impacts of Employment and Training Programs," (U.S. Department of Labor, January 1995).

[113] Ibid.

[114] Ibid.

Although CET is a well documented and good example of the effectiveness of a tightly integrated comprehensive literacy education and job training program, replicating its program model in Canada raises some problems. The organization's job training orientation emphasizes "hands-on" learning in shops and office-like settings that simulate actual work environments. As such, it is a capital-intensive model that goes beyond the capacity of most non-governmental organizations. Nevertheless, the key strategy of providing literacy instruction in the context of experiential learning related to a highly-desired goal such as getting a job, contributing to one's community, or moving on to further career-oriented education is something highly relevant both to youth-focused literacy programs and to workforce preparation programs.

VI. WHERE ARE THERE GAPS IN THE RESEARCH?

As was suggested, literacy programming for adolescent youth is still a somewhat rarified field of research. To date this area has not been researched or analyzed in any in-depth or systematic way. There is, however, a body of practice and experience that has been the subject of reporting, description and discussion. Additionally, the field of youth literacy programming abounds with examples of "promising practice," documented largely in an anecdotal or journalistic manner, or by way of project end-reports intended to fulfill contractual obligations. Both of these areas have been scrutinized in the course of this report. But what is absent from the literature are larger-scale and longer-term initiatives to track programs, learners and outcomes using methods common to the field of social scientific research. Were they to exist, these initiatives might provide hard data and documented research regarding concrete methods and practices on the instructional side, and student progress and results on the outcome side. Yet, without this developed body of knowledge, the elaboration of public policy grounded in and informed by hard and durable evidence is greatly hampered.

That being said, our research into existing practice does carry with it important insights into "what works" for learners and many of these insights can be transferred into other areas or leveraged into other types of literacy programming. Further efforts are required to make the promise of transferability a real and viable prospect. As suggested previously, developing a broadened understanding of youth literacy can proceed by way of analyzing points of intersection with other areas and disciplines. Critical linkages are required to extend insights developed in the areas of "risk" and "risk factors" as well as community "wellness" into what is known about literacy programming for adolescents.

Establishing a rigourous research foundation for public policy on adolescent youth literacy is a large and daunting task. Despite some examples, research work targeting this goal is still in its early stages. All of this suggests that a focus on deepening our knowledge, on further developing linkages, and on leveraging insights gained into the improvement of programming and practice is an important priority. Together, these elements point to the need to develop and demonstrate a program model of literacy programming for youth impacted by risk. A project of this nature could also assist in exploring and documenting systematically the vital interplay of program elements and practices that currently show promise. It could also play a role in developing teaching approaches, tools and curricular materials able to register measurable positive outcomes with this particular group. And it could clarify the importance of community-based networks and linkages that are mentioned repeatedly in current program reporting as having a positive influence.

VII. CONCLUSIONS

The analysis contained in this paper leads to a number of overall conclusions. At this point, we can briefly summarize what the key points are to emerge from the available research and from a review of promising practice examples from the field.

A. Develop flexible methods of and approaches to literacy programming that make the learning process both more accessible as well as more relevant to the target population.

Youth with literacy issues typically report problems dealing with structures and procedures found in the regular K-12 public school system. This fact alone points to the need for literacy programs to look critically at how literacy can be taught, what methods work best, and how the needs of the target population need to be considered in structuring programs so that chances of success can be maximized. These reflections need to examine instructional models, hours of operation, program accessibility and availability. At the same time, programs need to have clear and attainable expectations of youth. Only the latter can help develop the resilience necessary to assist them to overcome the social and educational barriers they face.

B. Pay serious attention to service integration at the community level.

Existing research on youth literacy repeatedly points to the need to integrate services at the community level. Various programming models have as a common underlying theme the idea of providing supports to families and communities, of providing follow-up counseling and support, and of developing necessary linkages into the workplace. All of these initiatives look to address the educational needs of youth in a broad way by reintegrating youth into their communities.

C. Move from practice to research and development and then to policy.

The foregoing discussion advanced some ideas regarding the need for further research into the field of literacy for out-of-school youth. These suggestions have clear implications not only for research but also for policy development. An orientation that looks both at solidifying research as well as at developing a model of adolescent literacy programming for deployment in the field would appear to hold significant promise at this time. Following this approach will lead to establishment of a more stable foundation for public policy in the youth literacy field.

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