PEDAGOGY AND POLITICS IN NATIVE LITERACY PROJECTS:  
THE CASE OF THE NATIVE ADULT LEARNING GROUP

JANE E. HENSON,  
505 Parkside Drive,  
Toronto, Ontario,  
Canada, M6R 2Z9.

ABSTRACT/RESUME

The author first of all describes a project to combat illiteracy among native adults residing in Toronto, and then presents the analysis of the diverse elements contributing to the successes and failures of the program. In her study, she considers illiteracy as a social problem, and describes, in order to contribute to the effectiveness of future efforts in this domain, the needs to be satisfied, the goals to be attained, and the methods to be utilized.

L'auteur décrit tout d'abord un projet pour combattre l'analphabétisme parmi les indigènes adultes résidant à Toronto, et passe ensuite à l'analyse des divers éléments qui ont contribué aux succès et aux échecs de ce programme. Dans son étude, elle considère l'analphabétisme comme un problème social, et décrit, afin de contribuer à l'efficacité des efforts futurs dans ce domaine, les besoins à combler les buts à atteindre, et les méthodes de travail à emprunter.
INTRODUCTION

Native adult illiteracy in both rural and urban contexts is an important indicator of the extent of native underdevelopment in Canada. The effects of illiteracy are felt severely not only in the wastage of individual human resources and potential but also in the restrictions placed on native community economic and social development. It is a fundamental assumption of this article that native illiteracy both results from and in turn contributes to the colonial relations characteristic of native-dominant society interaction in all spheres.

There is a pressing need to analyze the forces that produce illiteracy, in particular the structural inequalities of access to educational opportunities facing native people, a situation which allows the problem to persist and hinders its eradication. Efforts to change this situation are hampered by both micro- and macro-factors.

I will describe one attempt to address native illiteracy in the urban context through an examination of the Native Adult Learning Group (NALG) in Toronto. This paper is divided into seven sections. The first four sections provide an overview of the history, goals and objectives, literacy model, and methodology and curriculum of NALG. The final three sections discuss the limitations and contradictions, and themes and assumptions of native literacy projects and attempt to outline what needs to be done in future native literacy work in Canada.

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF THE NATIVE ADULT LEARNING GROUP

The Native Adult Learning Group was formed in June 1980 under the sponsorship of Wandering Spirit Survival School in Toronto. It was funded by World Literacy of Canada I to design and develop a literacy program for urban native adults resident in Toronto. The major tasks of NALG in this design phase were: to form a Native Advisory Council and develop with them the goals of the project; to design a model for a literacy project; to find ongoing funding to implement the model; to do outreach to find students; to gather appropriate resources for curriculum development; and to hold a community workshop on native education to report on Wandering Spirit School’s progress. Two workers were hired as project staff: a co-ordinator and a native literacy worker-trainee.

After World Literacy of Canada funding terminated in mid-September, the co-ordinator of the project (the author) worked on a voluntary basis until Employment and Immigration funds were received in early November. The funding was granted for an eight-month period in order to implement the project. Within the first two weeks, 11 students began classes and had identified their learning goals. Classes continued with anywhere from three to seven students until just before Christmas. In January 1981, attendance dropped off to virtually zero, with an occasional student attending from time-to-time. The project as designed was clearly not working. A number of problems were identified as key factors in the failure to attract and keep students.

With the benefit of experience gained thus far, material resources gathered
since the beginning of the project, the advice of the Native Advisory Council and interested resource people, and in consultation with Native Manpower Counsellors, the co-ordinator of the project re-designed the literacy approach and curriculum materials. Staff also contacted Council Fire and other native institutions in downtown Toronto and Native Manpower Counsellors in order to locate students to start the classes again.

The first student was identified, interviewed and began attending classes in mid-February. A second student joined the class in early March. These two students attended classes together regularly, twice a week for three hours per evening (sometimes longer), until the completion of the project in late June. Both students were new to the city (one to four months), in their twenties, had an unstable work record, and, coincidentally, came from the same reserve.

In addition to the literacy classes, NALG acted as an educational resource for other urban native people. With funding provided by the National Association of Friendship Centres, a series of Native Awareness Nights were offered with resource people speaking on topics such as The Circle of Life, Rediscovering Native Spirituality, and Native Legends. In addition, requests for up-grading, blueprint reading, French (correspondence) courses, individual tutoring and general educational information were received on a regular basis as the project became more widely known in the community.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The goals of the project as identified by the Native Advisory Council in the initial design phase of the project continued throughout: to provide a basic literacy, life skills and native awareness program to urban Toronto native adults; to help participants develop their skills, understanding and confidence in dealing with the dominant non-native social system, and to link adult and children's native education, through Wandering Spirit Survival School, in an integrated approach to Native education in the urban context.

NALG was successful in providing a basic literacy program. The program included a life skills section as an essential component. The native awareness aspect was carried out through discussion around central themes included in the "Suggested Activities and Questions for Discussion Guide", as well as through the Native Awareness Nights.

Feedback from the students indicated that, in terms of their literacy and life skills learning, the program was a success. They increased their ability to read and research basic information; find their way around Toronto; read job ads, fill out job application forms and apply for jobs; deal with such non-native agencies as Community and Social Services and Employment and Immigration. They also extended their knowledge of such native institutions as the Native Centre and Council Fire. Furthermore, the students experienced a (sometimes dramatic) increase in their confidence and ability to make decisions affecting their lives, including the general skills of articulating their needs, wants and opinions. Specifically, the students developed reading and writing skills to carry out the following functions: build sentences, express causal relationships,
increase their vocabularies, describe events, express needs and make requests, give opinions and voice disagreements, and develop strategies for appropriate behaviour in particular situations.

Feedback from others also indicated that the program had benefited the students. A relative of one of the students said that his brother's confidence had increased markedly and this related positively to his finding and keeping a job. In addition a staff member at the Native Centre noted that the other student had made use of the Counselling Unit there, something she doubted would have taken place without his having made contact with the Centre and without his confidence having increased greatly through the program.

LITERACY PROJECT MODEL

Our initial program model was developed with the Native Advisory Council. At first, this called for the use of group process involving 8-10 people in a literacy class. The group process model was chosen for a variety of reasons. First, it develops a support group among participants as they share and learn from each other. Second, it can enhance learning and is more in keeping with the traditional native learning styles. Third, it meets the social and educational needs of isolated individuals. Finally, it lessens the dependency that a student often develops for a tutor in a one-to-one teaching situation.

It became clear however that the group of 11 students as first constituted in November was not functioning successfully. A variety of factors accounted for this. First, there was a diversity of literacy levels among the participants, from almost totally illiterate individuals to a few with fairly sophisticated reading and writing skills. Secondly, there was a diversity of goals among the participants. Some wanted to learn to read and write. A few wanted to acquire specific life skills such as getting a driver's licence and filling out forms. Others were attracted by the native awareness component of the program and wanted to learn about their native heritage.

The two students who began the program in late February on the other hand, were basically at the same literacy level and shared many of the same goals. Despite the fact that they had very different learning abilities, emotional make-up, and personal background and support, they formed a homogenous group and it was possible to design a curriculum which responded to their learning needs.

Therefore, it would be inaccurate to conclude from the failure of the first attempt that the group process model is unworkable. NALG's second attempt was far more limited in terms to numbers (two students) but quite successful in terms of developing a small group experience in literacy learning. (Most of the exercises and materials are designed to be adapted to group discussion as an essential component of the literacy learning and group building). This points up the importance of selecting a homogenous group from the beginning. Because of these experiences we also conclude that our initial proposal to form a group as large as 8-10 students for an intensive literacy program is unrealistic.

We must acknowledge that native literacy students are doubly oppressed:
as illiterates or semi-literates they share their oppression with many other Canadians who have been rejected by the educational system and branded as failures. As native people they share a unique history as individual members of a distinctly oppressed ethnic group. Therefore, the need for individual one-to-one tutoring and counselling to supplement the group process mitigates against a larger group of 8-10 students. In addition, we learned from the experience of non-native literacy projects (such as those at St. Stephen's House, Toronto, and Douglas College in Vancouver) that a manageable size for a literacy group is from four to seven students. We found, then, that an effective literacy model should involve both group process and one-to-one tutoring/counselling. However, two pre-requisites are necessary here. First, members must have similar ability, interest and attendance record, and second, they must constitute a manageable number in terms of group size.

METHODOLOGY AND CURRICULUM

In any literacy project, goals and purposes will, to a great extent, determine curriculum content and pedagogy. We tried to adopt the Freirian methodology in that we saw our purpose as helping students "deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world" (Freire, 1972:15). This must be seen in sharp contrast to the traditional "banking" theory of education which treats the students as mere depositories of information. We aimed instead at helping the students to analyse the forces acting on their lives and to build their skills in dealing effectively with obstacles they faced. For example, when one of the students went home to his reserve for a visit, we used the experience as an opportunity to develop a discussion about migration patterns and the differences in life-style and economic base between the reserve and the city. When one of the students had to go for an interview at the Social Services office, we used it as an opportunity to examine the rights and duties of welfare recipients, the distribution of total national income in Canada, and the range of appropriate and inappropriate behaviours to be used in dealing with welfare workers. Being able to transform their world presupposes that students not only become conscious or aware of their situation but also that they acquire the skills necessary to change it and that they do so as members of interest groups and broader collectivities. Based on Freire's methodology, the content of the program emerges from a particular educational process, one whose ultimate goals are individual and collective liberation. This process is based on a number of inter-related aspects. The first aspect is that the curriculum content and non-authoritarian approach of the teacher validate the experience of the learner, and in fact, are based on the assumption that the learner has something to offer to, and learn from, the world. The second is the development of an analysis. It is not enough to train people to become better workers; they must understand, question and challenge their relationship with the work world. The third aspect is in the use of discussion and question-and-answer forms. This approach involves a fundamental commitment to dialogue as a means of sharing information, validating experience and developing analysis.
The methodology in the NALG classes was based on the needs and aspirations of the participants. Individuals came together to talk, listen and share in order to learn to read and write within the context of developing their skills for successful survival in the city, understanding the larger system within which they operate, and exchanging coping strategies.

In our first attempt at forming a literacy group, we learned that without allowing participants to identify their own learning goals, we had no structure to present to them within which they could organize their literacy efforts. This deficiency fragmented the process so that it became very difficult to find common ground to use as our starting point. The situation of students having diverse literacy levels compounded the problem and resulted in staff initiatives being scattered, disorganized, and unable to respond to the needs of participants at either basic or advanced literacy levels. We did make some headway using an approach based on syllables or "atomistic decoding" of words, but this was not contextual or relevant enough to meet student needs.

As participants began to drop out, we were forced to rethink our approach, trying to place ourselves in the situation of illiterate native people in the city. We identified five theme areas which we felt would respond to the practical needs of the students: the transportation system in Toronto; employment search, housing, food and nutrition, and native services. Curriculum units were developed around the first two themes, incorporating lessons, student-produced material, and a "Suggested Activities and Questions Guide" into one package. We did this in two steps. First, we identified some of the skills learners need to help them overcome their survival problems, and second, we built learning units around these skills, which could then be further adapted through students' input and involvement.

We developed these units using the English Language Manual of the Nicaraguan Literacy Campaign as a linguistic and structural guide. We adapted it to the themes and content of the North American urban and native reality. For units on employment, we referred to "Making Changes", an orientation program for immigrant women, currently offered by the Cross Cultural Communication Centre in Toronto.

This material was developed on the basis of three major assumptions:

1. Adults and children read for meaning. They must learn in a context, which, to be meaningful, they must define. Therefore, reading for sense or in a context is far more important than word recognition alone.

2. Learning to read and write English should be based on a sound pattern approach, not on a phonetic approach. Thus, our first attempt using syllables or an "atomistic decoding" of words was ineffective. Our second approach involved "meaningful language chunking," of word recognition based on word patterns or word-chunks and not simply syllables. This later method resulted in much faster and easier building of written and spoken vocabulary. It is related to the fact that English (unlike Spanish) is not a phonetic language.

3. Learning should take place within a social context, not as an individualized process. Thus, the Native Awareness Nights were important for bringing people (students and non-students) together to learn about native spirituality as well
as experiences of other urban native people. In this way students were exposed to others who had gone through similar experiences. This helped to validate their own experience and build their confidence. Material from these sessions was adapted to the basic literacy level and later fed back into the classes.

Responding to students' needs also meant being crisis-oriented. This is inevitable and must be anticipated by any program. It results from the social and economic reality in which illiterate native people find themselves. Like other illiterates, native illiterates lack the skills and experience to participate in the industrial workforce. They are part of the reserve army of unemployed - the last hired and the first fired, especially in times of recession. They are often new to the city and not familiar with the stresses of city living. Being unaware of the services available to help them adds to their adjustment difficulties. They may or may not have family or other means of personal support to assist them through difficult times. This often results in great personal insecurity and crisis-reaction, as well as a constant wearing away of any confidence they may have had in themselves.

Literacy teachers must be prepared to respond, in terms of program design, to these needs of native participants. Thus, helping students analyse their experiences with dominant institutions, assisting them in finding jobs, developing communications skills and helping them respond to the crisis in their lives should all be included in the literacy program. There needs to be a balance between the pre-designed structure of the program and learner-input. The "Suggested Activities and Questions Guide" attempted to do this. After the first few sessions, we found we were spending only half of the class time on the lessons themselves. The other half was taken up with activities and discussions amplifying the theme of the lesson.

Another means of gaining learner input is to have a pre-class interview with each student. This gives the teacher an opportunity to gather information on the background, current situation and goals of each student. This can be incorporated into the curriculum design.

Some students also carry with them the legacy of years of physical and emotional abuse from the educational system and their families, which often results in emotional blocks to learning. The most important way teachers can respond to such students is to create a supportive and encouraging environment, to be extremely patient, and to look constantly for the roots of student problems and for creative ways to "unblock" student learning.

The extent to which teachers can become involved in the lives of the students beyond class time is a function of such factors as personal time and interest, expectations, the quality of interaction between teacher and students in terms of shared values, beliefs and interests and the counselling skills of the teacher. It is also vitally important for the teacher to be a part of or at least aware of what is happening in the native community and to use that connection to help students find personal support and services available to help them. The development of community support for the students decreases students' dependence on the teacher.

In terms of curriculum materials, the use of visuals and tape recorders
added immeasurably to the students' ability to create their own learning materials and had a positive overall effect on their learning processes. Both photography and drawings are important tools in generating interest and discussion on themes, and can be useful in group-building. If such visuals are relevant, people can easily identify with them. In addition, visuals can be used to link written words with visual memory as an aid in learning to recognize and then duplicate words and word patterns. Maps, particularly of native lands or of the city, are also excellent tools to generate interest and discussion because of their expression of facts and experiences relevant to the lives of students.

The use of cassette recorders is an excellent way to validate students' experiences and assist them in building their confidence. Having students interview each other helps them develop vocabulary, structures and sentences to get and give information. The taped material can then be summarized and written up as a story and brought back to the students to work on and discuss further, as was done with a story entitled “Going Home to the Reserve”.

A final practical method we employed was to introduce reading and writing at the same time. We found in general that these two processes reinforce each other and aided in the retention of the literacy learning.

LIMITATIONS, CONTRADICTIONS AND STRUCTURAL INEQUALITY

Others attempting to develop native literacy projects should be aware of a number of inherent limitations and contradictions in such projects. I will discuss these limitations and contradictions as they manifested themselves in the experience of the Native Adult Learning Group in Toronto.

First, there is a serious lack of awareness and recognition of the existence of native adult illiteracy, at both the individual and collective or organizational levels. The causes of, and crippling problems created by, illiteracy are generally not acknowledged. There are a number of important implications here. First, this lack of awareness limits the degree to which resources can be mobilized for literacy programs. Second, it makes outreach to find students that much more necessary and also more difficult. Finally, it means that literacy groups have virtually no native-initiated and native-controlled models, nor do they have appropriate curriculum materials from which to work.

A second limitation relates to the question of how far one can develop a community education project in the urban settings. What is the native "community" in Toronto? Does there in fact exist a number of communities? If so, what are the criteria used in defining them? In Toronto, for example, there are said to be 15,000 to 20,000 native people (Canada, 1980:136), yet one is only peripherally aware of the native presence on the street and little is known about where native residents of the city live and work. A central problem is, therefore, how such an amorphous group, or certain parts of it, can be reached and organized.

Third, the issue of native illiteracy is an issue related to both race and class. It is a racial issue because native people in this country experience, as a racial minority, structural inequalities that result in poor educational achievement
generally. These structural inequalities include the isolation of native communities from educational and economic opportunities in the dominant non-native society. For example, because secondary schools are usually unavailable within remote Indian communities, participation is seriously restricted at that level. The report Indian Conditions documents low levels of life expectancy and health, high rates of social assistance, unemployment and violent deaths, and crowded and improperly serviced housing conditions in Indian communities as compared with average rates for all Canadians. Conditions are virtually the same, if not worse, for non-status Indian and Metis communities. In addition, for status Indians, the Indian Act restricts the degree and manner in which they may exploit and develop reserve resources. Thus, their legal status as Indians adds another restrictive dimension to their inequitable location in the Canadian social structure. The lack of access to educational and economic opportunities experienced by native people, as a racial group, intersects with their class position. Native illiteracy is generally caused by and in turn perpetuates the existence of the native lumpenproletariat who are on the periphery of wage-labour production and/or who move in and out of the reserve army of unemployed. They share this marginalized location with many other illiterate Canadians.

This raises the fourth limitation. Because native adult illiterates are marginalized, how are they going to gain access to resources and power to change their situation? What is their organizational base? From which organizations are they going to receive political support? Who will take responsibility for addressing the illiteracy issue? One side of the question is ensuring that native children and youth receive adequate education in their home communities, rural and urban. Clearly, the very existence of native illiteracy points up the inadequacy of the education young native people are currently receiving and the imperative of appropriate curriculum development to meet their special learning goals and aspirations.

The Bands and Metis and Non-Status Indian Organizations are the groups which, primarily at their local levels, are taking responsibility for control and development of appropriate native education in their communities. How much responsibility should they and can they be taking for native education and adult literacy, plus up-grading programs in cities like Toronto, where thousands of native people live? If not they, then what is the responsibility of a group such as the Ontario Federation of Native Friendship Centres to address the problem in the urban setting? Clearly, an articulate, well-informed group or coalition of groups must exist in order to lobby the Ministry of Education, the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, Employment and Immigration, Secretary of State and other federal and provincial bureaucracies to provide native adult literacy and training programs.

However, to assume that the native organizations and state bureaucrats who are native consistently represent the interests of the mass of working class and marginalized native people is to obscure an essential feature of the colonial system which characterizes native-dominant society relations: the creation of a middle class native elite. As Dosman (1972:23) notes, the historical roots of
this phenomenon were in the creation of "leading families" among reserve and, later, urban Indians, as a means of assimilating and controlling the native population by the Indian Affairs Branch. Through the years the descendants of these leading families have, for the most part, consolidated their positions.

Because of their historical, geographical, and legal lack of access to and control over land-based resources, and perhaps also because of the persistence of certain cultural values such as cooperation and community-based action, large numbers of native people have remained outside the dominant wage-labour economy, either as workers or as owners. As Loxley (1981) notes "... native people were restricted not only in the degree to which they were proletarianized but also in the extent to which they could join the petty bourgeois class." Individually many native people have also resisted domination by continuing to live in close relationship with the land in the traditional native manner of hunting and fishing. As a result, a strong and powerful native capitalist elite based on control of capital and resources has not been created. However, in recent years a growing native middle-class has situated and consolidated itself within the state apparatus, filling in particular the ranks of middle managers and functionaries in native-oriented programs. Members of this class also include leaders and organizers of political, cultural, educational, and other native organizations, which are almost exclusively state-funded. The increasing formation and integration of a native middle-class can be illustrated by educational statistics from Indian Conditions. On the one hand, "University enrolment has shown great proportional and numerical improvement over the last 15 years..." (Canada, 1980:5S). On the other hand, the total secondary school participation as a percentage of the 14-18 year age group enrolled in school "has more than doubled since 1956 but the proportion of Children enrolled has been steadily declining since a peak in 1972-1975" (ibid:49, emphasis added). The implications of these data are two-fold. First, they seem to indicate that there is a growing elite of well-educated, articulate Indian graduates who, regardless of their levels of politicization, will demand access to positions of relative power. Second, it appears that there remains a relatively large and perhaps growing proportion of Indian youth who do not complete secondary schooling and presumably have great difficulty finding and keeping jobs. These trends would seem to indicate a process of class polarization among Canadian Indians. This issue is addressed in more detail in the pages to follow.

It must be emphasized, furthermore, that in relation to the state apparatus, the native middle-class occupies a contradictory class location (Wright:61-97). We can examine this position in the light of its functions and relationships with regard to both state managers and the native working class. The function of the native middle-class within the state is to manage state-initiated and controlled native programs, that is to carry out and administer state policies. Because of this class location, the native middle-class also has access to resources (education, funding) which allows some of its members to consolidate their positions as owners and managers. Moreover, by the relationships they form with other members of the middle-class at large, the native bureaucrats tend to distance themselves from working class and marginalized natives. At the same time, the
function of the native bureaucrats is to represent and articulate the needs of the native working and marginalized native classes. The relationship between the native middle-class within the state and the native working and marginalized classes is also very tenuous. In the case of NALG, it appeared that there was a symbiotic relationship, a relationship of mutual dependence. The native bureaucrats needed groups such as ours as a means to enhance their power and effectiveness within the state. We needed them in order to articulate our needs within the bureaucracy. The relationship becomes fragile, however, when one or the other side is unable to deliver what it has promised.

The position of the native bureaucratic elite is, furthermore, very tenuous in general within the state during a recession. Some Government cutbacks mean that native bureaucrats will inevitably be forced out, and will move either laterally to other state positions or into other locations within the petty bourgeoisie, or downward into the working class, depending on their competitive ability to manipulate scarce resources and many other factors.

Finally, it should be noted that the position of native middle-class within the state is, in many respects, similar to that of the "leading families" historically. That is, the function of both groups is, in general terms, to control and to channel native demands for access to power and resources. In this sense the entrenchment of a small native elite - however, tenuous its power relations with dominant elements within the state - is a logical extension of the earlier phenomenon, assisting as well further class stratification within the native population and further integration of native people into the dominant capitalist political economy.

Thus far, this analysis points to a few promising directions for organizing and action. It is necessary, therefore, to ask why middle-class native leaders would support native literacy programs. What incentives do or should they have in order to do so? Advocates of grass-roots literacy programs must consider what pressure they can exert to obtain the backing of the native middle-class state bureaucrats and political leadership.

Returning to the initial discussion on limitations and contradictions, a fifth limitation experienced by NALG was having, as its funding source, the most rigid of Canada Employment and Immigration Commission (CEIC) programs - the Canadian Manpower Training Program (CMTP). From the beginning, we were locked into "the numbers game", as the agreement was for a "private purchase", with Wandering Spirit Survival School, of 10 training seats. The pressure we felt from CMTP to find 10 students, and then the even greater pressure when our initial group began to drift away due to its members' disparate needs and goals and our inability to meet them, was enormous. We felt unable, as an innovative pilot project, to experiment, make our own mistakes, and then learn from them, even though we tried to make it clear we were undertaking the work in good faith. We were also caught by CMTP's goal to provide skill training to enable the students to integrate more fully into the wage economy.

The essential contradiction here was the same as is faced by many other education and training projects who have social change goals: the difficulty of
providing liberating education that will help people take control over their lives when the source of funding constantly pressures us to provide skill training for students to become more fully integrated into, and subordinated by, the economy as industrial workers. Training programs are, however, scarce and entry is very difficult. In addition, a structural weakness of the Canadian economy emerges here. The base to employ industrial workers is shrinking, especially in the current era of restraint and recession. Despite this structural weakness, the mandate of CEIC is still to train workers for the industrial economy.

Responses on the part of the various federal and provincial state bureaucracies are also structurally inadequate. First, there is little official state recognition or acceptance of responsibility for illiteracy in general, and there is no recognition of the special needs of illiterates. Literacy is an issue ignored by the provincial Ministry of Education in Ontario, and is not addressed adequately by any other provincial or federal agency. Second, this structural problem is magnified by the unique jurisdictional and legal situation of native people. The Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development will not take responsibility for literacy training for off-reserve Indian people in the cities. CEIC won’t provide adult basic education (because education is a provincial jurisdiction) unless it is primarily oriented toward skill and job training. The Ontario Ministry of Education simply does nothing.

Beyond the problem of insufficient resources for native training, there is the larger, macro-economic context. In this context, the twin processes of stagnation and inflation (Robinson, 1980:5), and the "ballooning of the financial superstructure of the economy out of all proportion to the sluggish growth of the underlying base of production and real capital formation . . ." leading to "the expansion of debt, public and private" (Sweezy, 1981:1-2) is creating an international capitalist economy in grave crisis, contracting and slowing down. The effect of these factors on an unorganized, non-politicized labour force is to make workers more quiescent and more individualistic as they compete with each other for fewer and fewer jobs. Native people, who have unequal access to educational training and work opportunities to begin with, are left further behind. An alternative response, of course, is for labour organizations and native political organizations to use the increasing immiserization of workers as an organizing and politicizing issue.

There is another major force that is an essential part of the current crisis. That is the development and impact of technology on the production, educational and consumption processes in our society. The impetus behind technological change relates to the possibilities it unleashes for increased production, leading in turn to increased profit and capital accumulation. Increased profit and capital accumulation are the imperatives within capitalism that lead toward monopoly forms of economic organization and increasing concentration of resources and decision-making in the hands of an enormously powerful ruling class (Braverman, 1974).

Technological change results in the working class (and especially that segment in skilled, high-technology industries) shrinking and the marginalized
lumpenproletariat (the reserve army of unemployed) becoming larger as industries close down and workers are laid off. Under these conditions the state has made two basic training responses. Through the school system, the state is beginning (belatedly) to train new young workers to take on jobs in the high technology fields. And, through state-sponsored retraining programs, it retrains a small number of skilled workers to shift into new areas. The other workers are discarded. Technological change has particularly severe effects on unskilled and illiterate workers. In essence, they are at the "bottom of the heap". They will rarely be at the level of receiving retraining because they have not made it to the "first-base" of having training for skilled jobs. And native workers, in such a situation, will be left even further behind.

It seems clear that the effect of all of these structural and technological changes is, in Canadian society at large, increasing class polarization and restricting class mobility. Decisions will be made by fewer and fewer people who have access to, and control over, enormous resources, while a smaller number of workers gain employment, and a growing number are marginalized. Because the new skills required for capitalist production are so complex and because of increasingly unequal access to and control over technology, it will be increasingly difficult for marginalized semi-skilled and unskilled workers to improve their economic and social positions in society.

The current situation illustrates the point that education always appears to be running behind the production process. We are well into the age of advanced technology, but our education system still inadequately prepares workers to meet capitalist demands. This is described graphically in the recent House of Commons Special Committee's report *Work For Tomorrow: Employment Opportunities in the 80's*.

A final constraint in an adult literacy program such as NALG, given the situation of native illiterates outlined above, is that the solutions are not only educational. Solutions for active illiterates must be educational, cultural and economic: educational, in terms of the student learning information and skills to survive and cope better on a day-to-day basis with the crises in life, as well as learning how to set realistic goals and aspirations; cultural, in learning more about native heritage and developing pride in it; and economic, in learning skills that can help find and keep a job and obtain access to retraining opportunities. How far any one program can go in meeting all of these needs is at this point a question of application and experimentation.

**LESSONS FOR NATIVE ADULT TRAINING**

A number of important lessons emerge from the foregoing analysis which can be applied to literacy projects and other adult education efforts in a variety of settings.

First, I would propose a basic definition of development by which adult education and training projects can be measured and evaluated. For such projects, development must be defined as individual and collective action leading to the creation of structures controlled by and for the benefit of communities.
Second, training should take place within the context of community control. This means that there should be structures that allow members of the native community to set the goals and control the direction of their programs. They should not be relegated merely to administering or delivering programs whose goals and direction are set elsewhere (by the state, in particular), but should actually be accountable and responsible for the projects they themselves develop, direct and monitor.

Third, when considering training projects, we should be asking the questions: in whose interests is the project designed and who has access to training? We should be analysing the class interests of those benefiting from our projects as well as those involved in them. This also leads us to a consideration of with whom we need to ally ourselves in order to ensure the survival of our projects. In addition, we should not lose sight of the fact that training is not an end in itself, but the means by which people develop skills and analysis, and gain new knowledge, for an action purpose often of broader social scope.

Fourth, people are their own experts. In order for training to be relevant and action-oriented, participants must collectively integrate their existing knowledge and goals. People are experts because they know their own situation best. They have a sense that no outside expert will have of what will be possible in their situation, although they may choose to engage outside technical expertise to complement their own expertise.

Fifth, training is an ongoing, never-ending process and assumes that people have the basic experience, content and skills to effectively analyse their situation.

Sixth, the methodology is at least as important as, if not more important than, the content in the sense that it creates the conditions in which participants uncover, de-mystify, and examine in detail the forces acting upon their lives. The methodology of this type of training is also focused on the development of critical, "macro" analysis as well as concrete survival skills for immediate tasks.

Seventh, outside technical information can be vitally important but only if the process by which it is introduced and assimilated is controlled by the participants themselves.

Eighth, projects must constantly be on guard to prevent being taken over or dictated to by state funding agencies whose interest in preserving the status quo runs counter to the interest of the participants in developing the skills and knowledge to change the forces causing their exploitation and repression.

Finally, a number of inter-related organizational questions emerge with respect to the development of native literacy projects. What priority can or will native political organizations give to training in general? How can they give priority to training without endangering or exhausting their own budgets whose general priorities are urgent political matters? Also, what will be the institutional base for non-traditional approaches to training? Should the political organizations alone be the sponsors of training efforts? Where will the funding come from, and what will be its limits?
CONTINUING THE STRUGGLE: WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE?

In light of the above, the following are some specific suggestions for action to address the problem of native adult illiteracy through the provision of appropriate literacy programs. These suggestions are grouped into two major categories - those operating at the structural level and those operating at the program level.

Structural Level.

1. At the structural level, we should ask what the institutional base of native literacy programs will be. I assume that it is the native organizations themselves - in conjunction with federal and provincial agencies - which must take responsibility for addressing the problem because the state is clearly not doing so. Native organizations and state bureaucracies must first of all recognize and acknowledge that native illiteracy exists. They should identify the causes and document the extent of illiteracy among native people. They should also recognize that native illiteracy is only one side of the educational chain. Inadequate and inappropriate education for native children contributes significantly to native adult illiteracy. Thus, while programs addressing adult illiteracy might go a long way to remedying the situation, the problem must also be attacked at one of its root causes, children's education.

2. Having recognized the nature and extent of native illiteracy, native organizations should decide how they can respond to it, separately as well as collectively. The formation of a broadly-based coalition may prove useful. Specifically, what kind of commitment will they make to native adult literacy programs in terms of financial, human and technical resources and expertise and political support?

3. Native organizations should then lobby federal and provincial ministries for policy changes, first, to gain recognition of the problem and resources allocated to it, and then to gain access to the money to operate the programs themselves.

4. Native educational organizations should develop adult literacy programs. They should design appropriate native curricula that incorporates educational, cultural, and economic approaches to real problems faced by adult students. They should experiment with different project models (one-to-one tutoring, small groups) in their rural and urban communities.

5. Native organizations should begin to relate the question of adult basic education to job training and retraining for their communities. The question should be asked by native communities, "What do we want people to be trained to do?" (Which really means, what kind of development do we want?) For rural reserves and Metis and Non-Status Indian communities, this could involve adult basic education for special groups including primary producers such as trappers and fishermen, women's health, economic development and other committees, and band councillors and other com-
6. Native organizations should mobilize personnel and other resources in support of their adult literacy programs. In addition to the literacy teaching itself, the programs should offer counselling and information services. They should also be able to mobilize media and voluntary support. In addition, and perhaps most importantly, the organizations will have to address the critical shortage of native literacy workers, and determine the kind of training programs they will be able to offer native people who want to enter this field. Presumably, native literacy workers must have not only the technical ability to teach literacy but also counselling and community organizing skills. There is an infra-structure set up in many urban areas for English-as-a-second-language teaching from which resources and expertise can be drawn. However, it is also important that distinctions be made between the needs of English-as-a-second-language students and literacy students and between the approaches to teaching the two groups. For native literacy programs, the need for trained personnel will become critical, if literacy becomes identified as an important field within native movements, in part because trained native adult educators are at this point in very short supply.

Program Level.

At the program level, NALG taught us much about the design and operation of a grass-roots literacy project. Some of the following recommendations for action result from this specific experience and may not apply to others, but they are presented here to stimulate further dialogue and experimentation.

1. An adequate amount of time for a design phase should be built into the program for research, community liaison and outreach, in order to lay the groundwork for the implementation phase. In particular, outreach to publicize the program and find students must be recognized as a priority. This work should be carried out by a native person with the appropriate interpersonal and community development skills. In addition, the development of a basic curriculum should be built into the design phase so that the students' framework within which to organize their literacy learning will be established early in the process.

2. The methodology of any literacy project needs to be based on the needs and wants of the learners. Photography, drawing, tape recorders and so on should be used to enable students to create their own learning materials. The learning model for a native literacy project should be based on some combination of a group process and one-to-one tutoring together with counselling. The specific size of the group will vary according to local circumstances and needs, but a group of four to seven students should be tested for an urban native literacy project, given the distractions and stresses of the city and the migration patterns from urban to rural communities.
According to research published by the International Development and Research Centre, a dropout rate of over 50% is experienced by most literacy projects, usually because of factors (such as personal needs, migration patterns, etc.) beyond the control of the literacy project itself (Hall et al., 1980), and this needs to be taken into account prior to project start-up.

3. Funding should be obtained for students for their transportation and day care needs in order to attend classes. This funding is vital, given the economic situation in which students find themselves. Such assistance helps stabilize class attendance, other things being equal. NALG had to raise its own transportation funds by holding a fund-raising event with the Parents Group at the Native Centre in Toronto. With respect to day-care assistance, we felt that it was no accident that we had no women among our second group of students. Many illiterate women are sole-support mothers for whom day-care is essential if they are to attend classes. If we are serious about meeting their learning needs, we must structure in such concrete assistance from the beginning.

4. Especially in an urban area, a native adult education program should be viewed as a community education program, so that student support from within the community can be built in. In particular, a Native Advisory Council should be formed as advisors with whom project staff can work out goals, model, and evaluation and solve ongoing problems. The members of this Council should have a broad range and depth of community education experience and know their community well. They should also be people with specific educational expertise and people who have the interests of the students as the primary goal. Some groups from whom Advisory Council members might be chosen are community groups, students, educational consultants, and leaders of local political organizations. Some groups might choose to include representation from their funding agencies.

A Native Awareness component can be built into the program, according to the interest and needs of the students. There will probably be a wide range of interests on the part of the students in such a component (some might resist the idea), so that Native Awareness topics must be sensitively selected. Basic survival is such a priority for students that the program has to respond to their practical needs in this area first. In all probability only after a period of time and after good communications have been established in the group, can aspects of Native Awareness be introduced effectively.

As a community-based initiative, a native literacy project should establish effective liaison between itself and other native community resources, service groups and individuals. This is important in building information and contacts both for identifying potential students and for marshalling resources to help those already participating. An important implication for students is that they, perhaps for the first time, begin to articulate their aspirations and goals. However, by so doing, they may begin to put distance between themselves and those factors that prevent them from realizing their goals. Where will they go to develop new supportive relationships? What is the responsibility of the learning group and the teacher to support students in this situation? How can the teacher
respond without having the students become dependent? This is where the knowledge of other native resources and support provided through the learning group can help the students establish the kind of supportive relationships they need to make changes in and take greater control over their lives.

5. Linked with the suggestion in the Structural Level recommendations that native organizations offer training programs for native literacy workers, a literacy program can provide a unique on-the-job training opportunity for interested people, or at least, a practicum experience for those in a traditional academic training program.

6. Literacy projects should consider how they will support and encourage literacy retention after the initial classes are over. This can take two forms. First, learning to read and write is a process that starts with establishing initial reading skills and attitudes and developing writing skills, and, also involves acquiring reading habits. Therefore, a literacy project should make explicit the connection between reading in the class and reading outside the class. This connection will more easily follow when the curriculum is based on the development of skills, vocabulary and information dealing with concrete situations. It is especially important, given the fact that students are likely to migrate back and forth between their home communities and the cities and will not always have the interest or the possibility of attending classes. It is important, therefore, to help the students identify where, what, and when they want to read, and establish habits in doing so, in order that they can have opportunities for developing and applying their new-found skills. Second, although basic literacy can be taught in two to three months, there must be follow-up for retention to take place. Advocates of new literacy programs should consider what kind of follow-up they will build into their programs. What, for example, will be the connection between literacy and upgrading courses? A number of factors affect retention (including family background, personal support, ability to satisfy basic needs, income, availability of books and migration patterns), and must be considered in any follow-up program.

These suggestions and recommendations for future work grow out of one particular experience and may not be applicable in full to other contexts, although there would appear to be much in the NALG experience that is common to many situations. One direction for further analysis is in literacy efforts and needs in rural native communities. We should be examining, in particular, how literacy can be connected to economic and political projects such as land-use studies, renewable resource research and the development of self-governing systems, in ways which enhance community control and self-determination. In turn, the impact of such projects on the political literacy as well as the technical literacy skills of participants must be more completely examined and understood.

The effort to establish native literacy projects brings us directly up against the forces of domination in their many forms. The struggle against these forces is an ongoing one, and we must continually assess where and how we can move and how to organize our own forces. At this moment there is an urgent need
for both native and non-native efforts in literacy, and in training generally, to come together to share information and refine our analysis in a spirit of mutual support, creativity and development.

NOTES

1. A small Canadian-based non-governmental agency which primarily provides funding for literacy projects in The Third World.

REFERENCES

Braverman, Harry

Canada

Canada
1980 Indian Conditions. Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, Ottawa.

Dosman, Edgar

Freire, Paulo

Hail, Budd L., Kidd, J. Rely, Shrivastava, Virginia and Gayfer, Margaret.

Loxley, John

Robinson, Lukin

Sweezy, P.

Wright, Erik Olin