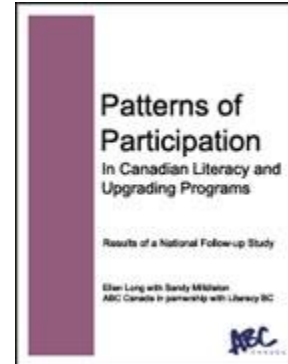

Review

A long way to go: Canadian literacy policy and programs

Review of *Patterns of Participation in Canadian Literacy and Upgrading Programs*,
Results of a Follow-up Study by Ellen Long with
Sandy Middleton
ABC CANADA in partnership with Literacy BC



Who tries to access adult literacy and upgrading programs, for what reasons, who actually enrolls, and how do they fare once they begin? *Patterns of Participation* is the most comprehensive Canadian study to date of this subject and adds to a small but thoughtful international literature.*

A preview of this study entitled *Who Wants to Learn?* was circulated at the National Summit in October 2000 and highlighted in the last issue of LACMF (15.1). The full study presents an excellent literature review, a description of the methodology used in this study and detailed interpretations of the data collected. They reveal the complexity of motives that drive participation and how far removed most policy and programs are from answering the needs [see [BOX](#)]. The findings fly in the face of a recent Ontario policy decision to test welfare recipients on reading and math and force those who fail into classes. As suggested in much of the literature, Long and Middleton found that participants were generally influenced by three clusters of factors that they have called socioeconomic-circumstantial, cognitive-emotive, and program-and-policy related, all of which are defined. Still, they caution that patterns “are not easily compartmentalized.” Multiple factors are likely to affect a person simultaneously. They present this study as “a significant step” in the research that “should direct us toward shaping clear theoretical models and integrated explanations of participation in literacy programs.” The body of credible Canadian research on adult literacy is beginning to take shape. *Patterns of Participation* is a significant contribution to the entire field.

A set of recommendations follow-ing from but not included in this publication will be published later this year. [LS]

Report: www.abc-canada.org

Recommendations:

E-mail: elong@interlog.com

* The 1996 Winter Institute, sponsored by The Centre for Literacy in collaboration with the

Georgia Tech Lifelong Learning Network, in Atlanta, focused entirely on participation and drew heavily on research by Hal Beder and Tom Valentine. Researcher Liz Dillon Black prepared a bibliography that we published in Volume 11, No.4. The lead article on participation is available on our web site under Newsletter Archive. www.nald.ca/litcent.htm

Access in Canada

There is a serious problem with access to literacy and upgrading education in Canada. While literacy may be more on the public agenda than ever before, it is nevertheless not at a level to fundamentally shift the rates of adult literacy in Canada. The current demand, to say nothing of the potential demand, is not being met.

The shocking statistic is perhaps no longer how many Canadians have low literacy skills, but rather how few are being helped by the country's current service delivery mechanisms. And yet, it is encouraging that more than three-quarters of those who dropped out or didn't enroll in the first place said they would seek help again in the future. Much needs to be done to ensure a more positive picture when they do call again.

Patterns of Participation, Chapter Five, p.77

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