

Connecting literacy, media and technology in the schools, community and workplace

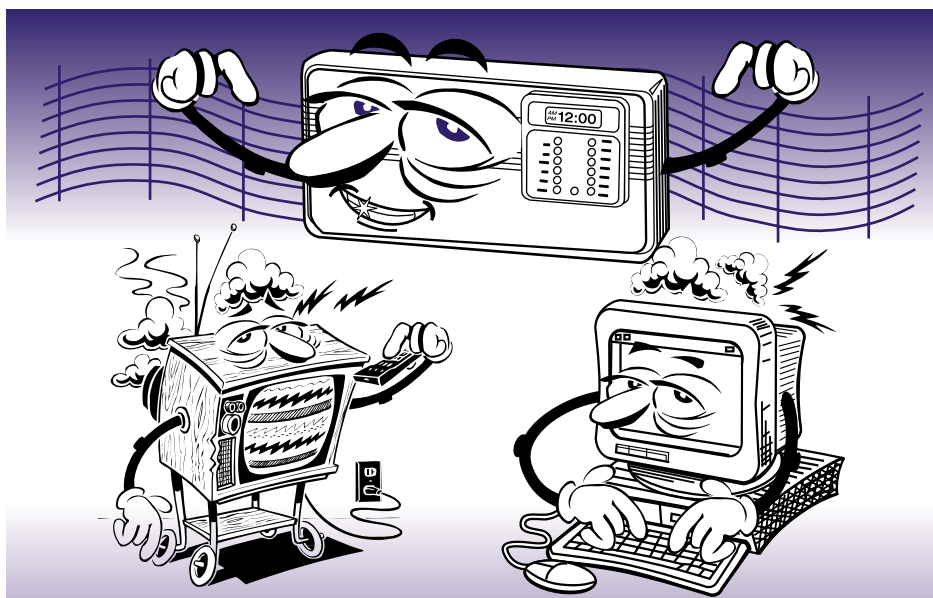
Reaching learners where they are

Riding the promise of educational technology in general, the literature on adult literacy and television reveals high hopes and investment in the 1960s and the 1970s.

In the early 1960s, television teaching programs were created in the states of Florida and Alabama and tracked for some time; adult educators wrote about the promise of this new technology to reach people where they lived.

Through televised broadcasts, TEVEC in Quebec claimed to have reached thousands of adults with less than grade 9 education in a rural region in the early 1970s. In the mid-1970s, the UK raised the bar, by using TV in a national campaign to motivate people to register in programs and by creating *On the Move*, a BBC series with a storyline that integrated basic skills teaching into the program and offered supporting materials for those who requested them. The demand was overwhelming, beyond the capacity of basic skills providers to respond [see Hargreaves p. 19]. In 1988, TVOntario studied the use of closed-captioned TV for learners who were not hearing impaired but who had other difficulties.

Today, nobody remembers the Florida/Alabama experiment or the Quebec project. There



is little talk about closed captioning. The BBC projects, more widely studied, have remained a touchstone in the field. The questions raised by those efforts remain the questions facing anyone contemplating using television for basic skills awareness or provision today.

Today, however, the questions are not asked very often, because by the mid-1980s, most educators had transferred their enthusiasm away from television, which

had largely failed to deliver, to the promise of computers, and in the 1990s have extended it to the Internet. In making this shift, we may be overlooking one of the most obvious ways of reaching learners; we are certainly overlooking the fact that every new technology of the twentieth century has failed in its educational promise because it was never critically examined by decision-makers, never fully understood by educators, and never integrated into curriculum or

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teacher training. What might be possible if we took lessons from the past, and reconsidered ways of using technologies that we take for granted?

In Ireland, where a massive national campaign got underway this fall, they have turned back to radio—for both awareness-raising and instruction. The key to using media and technology for adult basic skills means considering the complex ways that people today live with old and new technologies. To reach people where they live, educators have to acknowledge that much, if not most, learning happens outside classrooms, and that there are credible ways of recognizing or accrediting non-traditional learning.

This issue of *LACMF* turns its lens on several areas where non-traditional learning offers possibilities for adult basic skills students in ways that connect directly to their lives. It shares the insights, knowledge and questions of participants at The Centre for Literacy's Summer Institute 2000 which examined adult

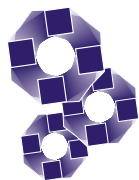
literacy and television through forty years of experience and a look at the future. Can TV teach? Can it motivate? Can ABE students learn without a teacher? Do teachers understand the potential? What role should volunteers be playing? What is the relationship between print and media literacies? So much knowledge has been shelved or lost. One idea that enthused participants was that of "repurposing." As presented by Europe Singh from the UK's University for Industry (Ufi), repurposing is what most teachers have done naturally for years — that is, take excerpts of material from one medium or discipline to use in another context. When used as a formal strategy across merging technologies, Singh suggests, repurposing can give educators access to low-cost, high-quality materials. [See pp. 23]

LACMF also looks at health as a point of engagement in learning, through reports from a national conference on health and literacy, and other sources. What is "health literacy?" Does most of the work in health and literacy

emphasize plain language too heavily and overlook the many complexities of health interventions between patient and professional? Do we label and stereotype "low-literate" patients?

Finally, this issue continues to shine a light on community-based writing as it was represented at the 2000 Blue Metropolis Literary Festival in Montreal. Through Grassroots, the community writing strand of the festival, we invited writers from labour groups, from community publishers in the UK, and from a local anti-poverty group to participate — workers, immigrants, and survivors of the mental health system where silence is more common than voice.

The thread among these themes is reaching learners where they are. One teacher at the Summer Institute said, "We always insist that students come over to our side of the street, but sometimes we have to go over to theirs, ...to understand where they are coming from." LS



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Literacy for the 21st century

Literacy encompasses a complex set of abilities to understand and use the dominant symbol systems of a culture for personal and community development. In a technological society, the concept of literacy is expanding to include the media and electronic text, in addition to alphabetic and number systems. These abilities vary in different social and cultural contexts according to need and demand. Individuals must be given life-long learning opportunities to move along a continuum that includes the reading and writing, critical understanding, and decision-making abilities they need in their community.

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