Adult literacy research: What does philosophy have to offer?

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ABSTRACT

I wish to argue in this paper that when considering adult literacy, our most fundamental concern should be to explore the question 'literacy for what?'. To take this task seriously is to acknowledge the worth of philosophical and (other) theoretical works on literacy, whilst nevertheless recognising the necessity of confronting the issue of adult illiteracy in a practical way. The paper falls into four parts. The first section provides a brief overview of the literature on adult literacy, while the second makes some critical comments on this literature. The third section concentrates specifically on adult literacy research in New Zealand. The final part proposes a particular orientation toward the problem of literacy and explores some implications of this approach for research.

Introduction

In the past, it was commonly thought that the problem of adult illiteracy was largely confined to the Third World. In the United States, Britain, Australia, and New Zealand it was often taken for granted that every adult knew how to read and write. This assumption was based on the widely-held belief that any problems that a person might have with print would be identified and addressed through the schooling system. We now know that this confidence was misplaced, and that in many areas of the contemporary western world there are substantial numbers of adults experiencing difficulties with reading and writing. Recent estimates of adult illiteracy or functional illiteracy in the United States, for example, range from twenty-three million to almost eighty million people. In Britain the figure may be as high as six to eight million. Ten percent of Australian adults, and fifty to one hundred thousand New Zealanders over the age of 15, have reading and writing difficulties (Lankshear with Lawler, 1987: 132).

Of course, the weight that ought to be attached to these figures is dependent on the crucial issue of how such key terms as 'literacy', 'illiteracy' and 'functional literacy' are to be defined. Without denying the importance of addressing the question of definition I wish to suggest in this paper that there is a line of inquiry which warrants more urgent consideration. Specifically, my argument is that our most fundamental concern should be to explore the question 'literacy for *what*?'. To take this task seriously is to acknowledge the worth of philosophical and (other) theoretical works on literacy, whilst nevertheless recognising the necessity of confronting the issue of adult illiteracy in a practical way.

The paper falls into four parts. The first section provides a brief overview of the literature on adult literacy, while the second makes some critical comments on this literature. The third section concentrates specifically on adult literacy research in New Zealand. The final part proposes a

particular orientation toward the problem of literacy and explores some implications of this approach for research.

The literature on adult literacy

While the literature on adult literacy can be examined from an infinite number of different angles, there appear to be four categories within which many studies fall: instructional, programme evaluation, individual case-study, and psychological.

Instructional material

A large amount of the literature on adult literacy deals with practical suggestions for adult literacy instruction. The emphasis here, to put it crudely, is on the 'how to do it' approach and many articles under this rubric actually specify 'helpful hints' for adult literacy instructors (see, for example, Clark, 1982). Some authors pass on 'favourite techniques' based upon their own experience as adult literacy tutors (eg Richardson & Harbour, 1982), or recommend a specific method or approach for improving the teaching of reading and writing skills. This might be anything from mnemonics (Giordano, 1978), to the use of graphics (Sofo, 1985), basic word lists (Taschow, 1977), 'interest inventories' (Heathington & Koskinen, 1982), or everyday reading materials (Manning, 1978). Other authors have looked at ways in which family and friends can be 'utilized' to assist in literacy instruction for adult illiterates (see Scoble, Topping & Wigglesworth, 1988), or at the role that schools might play in helping parents who cannot read (France & Meeks, 1987).

Programme evaluation

The second category in the literature on adult literacy consists of those articles, books and reports which are concerned with evaluating so e form of adult literacy programme, policy, or campaign. In the context of the western world, the Adult Performance Level (APL) programme in the United States attracted much attention in the 1970s and 1980s (cf. Kazemek, 1985; Griffith & Cerverno, 1977; Clarke, 1977; Cerverno, 1980). Hargreaves (1980) has completed a thorough analysis of the BBC's experience with adult literacy education and broadcasting. In a similar vein, Rossman (1975) evaluated the programme of recruitment of adult literacy students through the media in Massachusetts. Fields (1986) identified industry-based programmes as a growing source for adult literacy development.

National literacy campaigns in Third World and non-western countries have also been extensively evaluated. The most famous of these campaigns in recent years is the Nicaraguan literacy crusade of 1980 (see Angus, 1980/81; Cardenal & Miller, 1981; Lankshear with Lawler, 1987) which - with its primer based on discussion of overtly political themes, and its mobilisation of large numbers of student volunteers - has often been compared to the Cuban campaign of two decades earlier (see Kozol, 1978; Morales, 1981). Of the other countries where large-scale literacy campaigns have taken place, evaluative comment has been made on programmes in such diverse places as Ethiopia (Mammo, 1982), Mexico (Miller, 1985), Vietnam (Khoi, 1976), China (Hayford, 1987), and Russia (Eklof, 1987).

Personal case studies

A number of articles focus on individual case studies of adults who have experienced difficulties with reading and writing. These often include sensitive accounts of an adult's life history, with much credence being given to the student's own analysis of the reasons for his or her illiteracy (cf. Meyer, 1987; Forester, 1988; Miccinati & Gillies, 1977; Hopkins, 1977). Sometimes the person who has

tutored a student will detail the methods used with that person to overcome literacy difficulties (see, for instance, Otto, 1988; Delany, 1980). In adult literacy journals and newsletters, the case studies are frequently autobiographical (eg Pearce, 1988).

Psychological studies of adult literacy

Although most psychological work has focused on reading and writing for children, there have been a number of psychological studies of adult literacy. Malicky and Norman (1982) demonstrated that adults achieved better reading comprehension using grammatical clue strategies than through phonics. In other work the same researchers relate the reading stages identified by Chall in her account of the reading process for children, to adult readers (Nonnan & Malicky, 1987). Mikulecky & Ehlinger (1986) found a strong correlational relationship between the metacognitive aspects of literacy and (high) job performance for electronics technicians. Bristow and Leslie (1988) discovered that oral reading accuracy and comprehension were valid indicators of difficulty for adult illiterates. Boyd and Martin (1984) have developed a methodology for the analysis of psychosocial profiles of adults with limited literacy skills.

Critical comments

It is difficult to know where to begin in analysing the literature on adult literacy. The literature is so vast, and is spread across so many diverse sources (journals, books, adult literacy newsletters, pamphlets, reports, etc.), that it is sometimes easy to lose sight of the wood for the trees. A comprehensive critique is beyond the scope of this paper, but, in terms of the categories within the literature that have been identified, I would like to make four brief comments. First, it concerns me that there is an overwhelming and unquestioning acceptance of the assumption that literacy is something which is good, valuable and desirable, and that illiteracy is something which is undesirable. While I do not think that many of us would want to deny that literacy has the potential to be tremendously worthwhile for human beings, and illiteracy the potential to be devastating in print-dominated societies, this is not really the point. Rather, we must acknowledge that the value we accord literacy is dependent upon our presuppositions about what is good, desirable and necessary in specific social settings, under particular historical circumstances. Literacy has value for us to the extent that it enables us to do certain things, or to achieve certain goals, which we - at a given time and place - regard as desirable.

We also need to recognise that literacy takes many different forms, some of which can actually be considered *harmful* for human beings, rather than beneficial. Becoming literate opens people up to the possibility of manipulation through the printed word (by the media, by government, perhaps even by teachers). Teaching the skills of reading and writing can, some have argued (eg Graff, 1979), become an exercise in social control if those learning these skills are not encouraged to question the material that they are reading. A literate population, others have pointed out, is a population that can be governed: literacy allows people to read instructions, to fallow written rules and regulations, to become compliant and obedient, and so on (see Postman, 1970).

I do not think that I need to push the point any further at this stage. My main worry is that the value of literacy in much of the literature on adult literacy is simply taken for granted, and the negative nature of illiteracy is assumed uncritically, without any real exploration of the issue.

Second, I am also bothered by the focus on *skills* in much of the literature. Clearly, this is most explicit in the instructional material, but it is also highly visible in the psychological literature on adult literacy. There is much talk not only of 'the skills of reading and writing' (which are to be mastered by those becoming literate), but also of the techniques that can be employed by instructors in assisting the acquisition of literacy 'skills'.

Now, let me be quite clear about the basis for my criticism here. As I see it, there is nothing wrong with teaching people whatever skills they need to participate actively and fully in their jobs, in educational institutions, etc. Indeed, in today's everchanging world, where advances occur daily in technology, the learning and relearning of specific skills (in handling machinery, in dealing with complex business systems, in operating computers) is almost essential. The problem arises when we start to think of literacy *purely* in terms of skills.

This, for a start, might narrow our view of what counts as literacy, with any definitions that speak of literacy in terms of qualities beyond the technical aspects of reading and writing being pushed aside or ignored. But, more importantly, if we concentrate too much on the teaching of reading and writing skills, and spend little time on anything else, then the danger is that adults may learn *how* to perform certain tasks but not know *why* they are performing them. This is where the trouble lies with much of the instructional literature: numerous techniques and methods have been devised for assisting adults in learning how to read and write, but rather less is said about what these reading and writing skills might be *for.* They *may* be for the enhancement of all aspects of a particular adult's life, but on the basis of what is discussed in most instructional material, we have no way of determining this. It is the skills themselves that are the centre of attention in the instructional literature, not what adults do with these skills.

This brings me to my third criticism, which is that there has been insufficient attention devoted to examining the relationship between literacy (or illiteracy) and social structure. It should be noted that this relationship *has* been. addressed in many of the studies of literacy campaigns in revolutionary societies (eg the Cuban and Nicaraguan campaigns). In these campaigns literacy was seen (and has been written about in these terms) as a crucial part of the overall process of structural change under revolutionary conditions. And Paulo Freire has long stressed that literacy and politics are inextricably intertwined. I shall return to Freire' s work later.

The neglect of structural questions is, however, very evident in the instructional and psychological work. Here questions about the social context within which literacy 'skills' are practised and acquired are conveniently left to one side. But the case studies also suffer from a lack of depth in this area. In many of these studies the reasons for adults wanting to become literate, or to improve their existing literacy abilities, are explored. In addition, such studies have given adult literacy students an opportunity to consider some of the reasons for their difficulties with reading and writing. The trauma that many people have experienced as illiterate adults in a literate world is at times vividly portrayed in personal case studies. Yet while the consequences of illiteracy for *individual* adult literacy students have often been made reasonably clear in such studies, the wider structural dimensions of illiteracy usually have not. In many cases, neither the student nor the tutor nor the author have made a reasoned link between what C. Wright Mills (1975) termed 'biography (ie the student's personal experiences) and 'structure' (the organisation of the society in which he or she lives). Yet, there is a great deal of evidence which suggests that illiteracy occurs in definite patterns, with disproportionate numbers of adult illiterates coming from the ranks of the poor and from ethnic minority groups, reflecting wider social inequalities and divisions (Hunter with Harman, 1979; Lankshear, 1988).

The case-study approach seems to have a great deal of potential, and has been used to good effect in combination with a wider call for political action on adult illiteracy by Jonathan Kozol in parts of his classic study *Illiterate America* (1986). But for the most part, the potential for analysing the individual experience of illiteracy in structural terms has not been realised in case study work.

The fourth and final point I wish to raise is a broad one about adult literacy research, namely that extended theoretical work in *general* has often taken a back seat to (what have been perceived as) the more pressing practical concerns associated with literacy education. This is not to suggest that theoretical analysis has been absent from *all* adult literacy work; such a claim, made without qualification, would obviously be ridiculous. Some of the programme evaluation studies, in particular, possess a great deal of theoretical depth. This is especially true of the work on Third World

countries, but theoretical analysis is also strong in some of the First World studies (see, for instance, Kazemek, 1985; Griffith & Cerverno, 1977). It is, however, weak in others (eg Clarke, 977). One or two of the psychological studies of adult literacy consider theoretical questions at length (see, for example, Boyd & Martin, 1984), and there are exceptions scattered across other categories within the literature as well. But in much of the literature, *in-depth* theorising about the nature of adult literacy and illiteracy has often been down-played.

In many ways, this is not altogether surprising. Adult literacy work has traditionally been underfunded. (A chat with anyone who has worked in the adult literacy area in New Zealand will confirm this.) Tutoring in many countries (including our own) has in the pas been largely carried out by volunteers who usually work in one-to-one situations with adults experiencing difficulties. The primary goal in the adult literacy movement in the western world has almost always been to simply ensure that adults are given opportunities to attain a certain level of competence with print in order to achieve very definite goals. The goals are often specified by students themselves, and might include anything from obtaining a driver's licence, through being able to write letters to relatives, to reading classic literary texts. In many cases adult literacy workers, even if they might have had the inclination, have not had the time to pursue extended theoretical studies. Energy has been directed first and foremost at a very practical problem: how to effectively assist adults who wish to learn to read and write.

On the face of it this goal is an admirable one, particularly given the trying circumstances (lack of funding, and lack of recognition that the problem of adult illiteracy even exists in western countries) under which many involved in the adult literacy movement have had to work. The fact that a small group of dedicated people has recognised that there is a 'problem' and has done something about it, with very little in the way of support, is indeed something that ought to be applauded.

Yet, difficult circumstances notwithstanding, the lack of detailed attention to questions of theory remains a cause for concern. Without a solid theoretical base, adult literacy work can at best be informed by practical experience; at worst, it can proceed with no particular goal in mind (aside from merely teaching some rudimentary skills), and be woefully bereft of any substantial guidance from the range of disciplines - history, sociology, anthropology, etc. - that have contributed to our understanding of literacy.

Adult literacy research in New Zealand

Adult literacy programmes in New Zealand have historically been underfunded, and much of the work that has been tirelessly conducted by organisations such as the Adult Reading and Learning Assistance federation (ARLA) has been voluntary. ARLA's quarterly journal, Adult Reading Assistance News (ARAN),[1] provides details on adult literacy activities in New Zealand ·and is a useful source of practical information on methods of teaching reading and writing. Work of a theoretical nature, however, is not very prominent. Where it does appear, it is often in the form of reprints from overseas books and journals (though there have been some notable exceptions to this in recent issues). In addition to the material published in ARAN, there have been a sprinkling of articles on adult literacy published in New Zealand continuing education and adult education journals over the years (cf. Somerville, 1975, 1978, 1980; James, 1983, 1987; Noakes & Verboeket, 1983; Walton, 1985). Several university theses have addressed issues relating to adult literacy (Walton, 1982; Anderson, 1979; Nemec, 1990). Angela Irwin (1988) has drawn attention to the literacy needs of Access students in New Zealand,[2] and John Benseman has published a study of the Auckland adult literacy scheme (Benseman, 1989).

But there is still a great deal more work that needs to be done. We do not even know with certainty how many adult illiterates there are in this country (although a common estimate by ARLA workers is around 100,000). To the best of my knowledge, no extensive studies have been

conducted on the relationship between adult illiteracy and social class in New Zealand. Some excellent historical research on literacy, orality and culture has been carried out (Jackson, 1975; McKenzie, 1985), but there is room for much more. Detailed theoretical studies of literacy - with the exception of Colin Lankshear's work (1985a, 1985b, 1985c, 1986, 1988; Lankshear with Lawler, 1987) - have appeared only infrequently. The field in New Zealand is, as they say, wide open.

Literacy for what? In search of a key question

The possibilities for future research in the area of adult literacy are almost endless. In New Zealand, especially, we are in desperate need of further empirical and theoretical study of almost all dimensions of adult literacy. Rather than attempting to traverse the full range of perspectives (historical, anthropological, sociological, political, economic, literary, etc.) which have informed the field of literacy studies in the past two decades, I shall confine myself in the concluding pages of this paper to a few comments on the contribution that might be made by one discipline (philosophy) and one question ('literacy for what?') to adult literacy in theory and practice.

Let us assume, for the sake of argument, that literacy comprises in minimum some kind of ability with reading and writing. If one is literate, then the potential exists for the abilities that one possesses to be practised or used in certain ways. In order to make decisions about the way that literacy should be used, we must have some sort of understanding of the possible ends to which reading and writing can be put (ie the possible forms that literacy can take). It is here that the historical, anthropological and sociological literature on literacy becomes invaluable: this work has shown us that literacy can take numerous and varied forms, some of which we might term 'liberating' (eg where critical thought is promoted), others of which are clearly oppressive (eg the teaching of reading as an exercise in social control) (see, among others, Graff, 1979; Pattison, 1982; Street, 1984; Levine, 1986; Lankshear with Lawler, 1987). But even if we are fully aware of a range of ends to which reading and writing can be put, we still need some sort of basis from which to make decisions about the ends to which reading and writing ought to be put.

To say that literacy' ought' to be used in a particular way is to suggest that there are good reasons for using literacy in that way rather than in other ways. But making decisions about what constitute 'good reasons' for using something one way rather than another ultimately involves making decisions about what is good or worthwhile and what is 'bad' or harmful or undesirable. The moment at which questions regarding such things as 'the good' are raised is the moment at which we begin to consider questions of ethics.

If we are to make informed decisions about the ways in which reading and writing ought to be practised, it is essential that we develop a clear, detailed ethical theory. Yet, with one important exception (to which I tum shortly), this task has never really been taken up by literacy theorists. I am not talking here of passing references to questions about the nature and purposes of literacy. Rather, I am referring to the idea of developing of a full ethical theory (constituting, say, one or two chapters of book) as part of a wider study on literacy. There need not, in the first instance, be any reference whatsoever to literacy. In fact, surely the first question that needs to be addressed is 'what is our conception of the human being?' Once we have some grasp of what it means to be human (having explored the issue thoroughly in a theoretical - of empirical? - manner), we might then be able to ask ourselves what sort of human ideal we wish to uphold. It-is not until we have reached the point where we have a clear notion of the human good, or the worthwhile life - ie an ethical ideal -. that we can begin to consider the question of what literacy ought to be for.

The extent to which these sorts of issues have been addressed in adult literacy programmes is difficult to gauge: we have no real way of knowing whether ethical questions have been pursued by instructors and programme planners and organisers. I suspect that there has been a good deal of debate and soul-searching amongst adult literacy educators about problems which are at least *implicitly* ethical in nature. But the fact that policy statements, adult literacy newsletters, and the

like do not offer much evidence of extended, explicit attention to ethical questions suggests that other matters pertaining to adult literacy have been seen as worthy of more urgent consideration.

There is only one person who has devoted anything like the sort of attention I am advocating here to questions of ontology and ethics, and that is Paulo Freire. Freire has a particular understanding of the human being and of the world, and, despite all of the twists and turns that he has taken in his professional career, he has held on to this theory quite consistently. This theory of the human being informs Freire's notion of the human ideal, which, although not as consistent and coherent as his ontology, is nevertheless rigourously developed (Roberts, 1989). Freire's theoretical work is supported by his practical contribution to literacy campaigns and programmes in a number of Third World countries (see Freire, 1974, 1978; Freire and Macedo, 1987). What separates Freire from other theorists is the fact that for Freire questions about the nature of being human and the human ideal are given as much attention as questions about literacy itself (consider, for example, Freire, 1972a, 1972b, 1974). The theories that Freire has developed on literacy and education arise out of, and are informed by, his ontology and ethic. The ethic is not something that is 'pinned on' almost as an afterthought; it is central to the entire enterprise.

The lack of detailed attention to questions of ethics must surely be seen as one of the biggest gaps in the discourse on literacy. The efforts of adult literacy educators in both Third World and First World countries are to be commended: so much time and effort has been expended by those willing to offer their services as tutors or organisers in adult literacy programmes. But this makes it all the more important that we consider *why* so much effort ought to be put into literacy policies and programmes, and into the teaching of reading and writing. Whether our intentions are good or bad, we must in all of this have some notion of the human· ideal in mind, or at least some vague idea of what kind of human qualities we wish to promote or uphold through literacy. Yet, theorists and practitioners alike have been loathe to make these ideas explicit, or at least to explore the issue fully. But if we do not make the effort to investigate ontological and ethical questions, then we must be prepared to bear the consequences of this decision in whatever outcomes may arise from literacy policies and practices. Sometimes these consequences may turn out to be positive and worthwhile, but the history of literacy has shown that sometimes they do not (see Graff, 1987a).

An ethical theory can serve as a guide in making decisions about literacy policy and practice. But such a theory should, in turn, be informed by practice and experience, and by an understanding of the ways in which literacy has been used in the past. We need to look at the actual forms that reading and writing take across a diverse range of cultures, and learn from literacy practices in both Third World and First World countries. If we are prepared to invest our ethical theory with insights gained from a critical examination of the rich range of (adult) literacy programmes past and present, the theory can be only the stronger for it. Let me stress that I am not advocating the delineation of a single set of ethical principles - fixed, immovable and applicable in all situations involving reading and writing. My thesis is simply that it is important to *address* ethical questions - thoroughly and carefully - in both theoretical and practical settings.

This is why I maintain that the question 'literacy for what?' provides an indispensable starting-point for any literacy endeavour - be it 'theoretical' or 'practical'. Although I have couched my argument in philosophical terms (and even then, my comments have been limited to a somewhat superficial discussion of ethics), the question 'literacy for what?', I would argue, could serve equally well as a focal point for the study of literacy from historical or sociological perspectives. Sociologists, for example, might ask whether literacy is used in school settings for reproducing inequalities across class, ethnic and gender lines, or for challenging such inequalities (cf. Gilmore, 1985; Malmstad, Ginsburg & Croft, 1983; Simon & Willinsky, 1980; Rockhill, 1987); historians might compare the uses to which reading and writing were put by (say) the early Greeks with literacy practices in the medieval period (see, for example, Graff, 1987b).

As far as literacy instructors are concerned, the question 'literacy for what?' might conceivably be asked at every level of the education system (both formal and informal). From the selection of

texts in teaching school children, to the adoption of one style of pedagogy over another in assisting adults with reading and writing, the crucial issues remain the same: in every instance teachers and instructors must make decisions about which forms of literacy practice matter most - in the particular circumstances in which they find themselves - and act in accordance with these decisions. Of course their ability to institute forms of literacy pedagogy which are in keeping with whatever educational and human ideal they have in mind (however vague this may be) is often constrained by influences beyond their control. A classic case in point is the school teacher, bound to a considerable degree by government-imposed syllabi, and given minimal latitude for teaching and testing unconventional reading and writing programmes. But adult literacy workers, too, must confront the enormous weight of political bureaucracy, frequently having to lobby vigorously to even have the existence of widespread illiteracy recognised and acknowledged. But decisions still have to be made: ideals must be played off against political (and other) impediments and choices made about which direction to proceed in setting up reading and writing programmes. Making such choices is invariably a matter of weighing up ideas of what we would *like* to do with appraisals of what we (realistically) *can* do. The question 'literacy for what?'. gives literacy educators the scope both to contemplate questions about what reading and writing *ought* to be for, and to interrogate and rework their ideals in light of observations of the limits to what is *possible* as far as literacy pedagogy is concerned in a given social context.

When we talk of adult literacy, we typically think of policies, programmes and issues pertaining to adults who are 'illiterate' or experiencing difficulties with reading and writing. But placing the question 'literacy for what?' at the centre of our inquiry invites us to consider the ends to which reading and writing ought to be put by those (adults) who are 'already' literate, as well as those who are about to 'become' literate. University lecturers (and teachers in other tertiary institutions) have as much right to claim an interest in 'adult literacy' as those who work in community-based programmes of one-to-one instruction for adults with reading and writing difficulties. Tertiary teachers, after all, must make decisions about what adults ought to read for particular courses, and must assign and assess written work Anyone responsible for producing, selecting, evaluating, or reading the printed word for or with adults deals in some way with 'adult literacy'. Thus defined, the subject of adult literacy offers almost unlimited scope for research.

Conclusion

Having emphasised the importance of addressing ethical questions in the theory and practice of adult literacy education, I would not like to give the impression that the 'technical' aspects of literacy should be neglected. To consider *only* questions pertaining to the human ideal and the social context(s) within which reading and writing are practised, whilst ignoring the very real requirements of teaching people how to decode print, how to form the letters of the alphabet, how to construct sentences, and so on, is to fail to do our job completely. It is crucial that we continue to explore a range of techniques and· methods for learning how to use the medium of print. The modern world demands an increasing degree of technical competence from its citizens, and it is important that we do not deny those who wish to become proficient with print the opportunity to do so. The very notion of 'literacy' itself is being challenged and <u>reformulated</u> as new modes of communication technology assume an ever-greater presence in our lives. It is now commonplace, for example, to hear talk of the need to become 'computer literate' (ie to be able to understand the 'language' of computing and to operate particular computer systems) in contemporary western society. In many respects, more emphasis needs to be placed on 'how to' (methodological and technical) questions than ever before. But, as I have stressed repeatedly throughout this article, there is more to literacy than *simply* the learning of certain techniques for dealing with print. In acknowledging this, and in openly celebrating the complexity of the social practices of reading and writing, we take the first step towards addressing the question 'literacy for what?'. In so doing, we open up the possibility of

a deeper theoretical understanding of literacy and enhance our chances of developing genuinely worthwhile adult literacy initiatives.

Notes

1. Formerly *Adult Reading Assistance Newsletter*.

2. Access is a training/transition programme instituted by the Labour Government of New Zealand in the 1980s with the stated aim of 'helping students to obtain enhanced work readiness or to move on to work or further training' (Irwin, 1988: 23).

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