**Justice-orientated Citizenship and the History of Canadian ESL and Literacy Instruction**

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**Introduction**

This article outlines the findings of a study I recently conducted with eight experienced ESL and literacy teachers in Ontario and British Columbia. The study examined the career trajectories of these eight teachers as they negotiated the shifting parameters of adult ESL and literacy education. The findings indicate that over the course of their careers, these teachers developed a keen awareness of the importance of bringing critical perspectives to their curriculum work. Much of what these teachers volunteered had to do with how they viewed their work in relationship to Canadian nation building. I argue, in part, that the histories of the two fields show that the critical orientations towards citizenship that these teachers adopted are no accident. Furthermore, I contend that the beliefs that these teachers held dovetailed nicely with the theoretical literature related to justice-orientated citizenship education.

This article begins with an outline of the two theoretical frameworks used for the basis of this study: justice-orientated citizenship and critical literacy. I then examine the historic background for those unfamiliar with this context. In this regard, I first treat the history of Canadian literacy instruction and then that for Canadian ESL instruction. These two histories are provided as a way of demonstrating concretely that there has been a long-term relationship between both fields in terms of their citizenship foci. Understanding these histories is important if one is to grasp the overall context for the study. This section is followed by an outline of the findings that are pertinent to my discussion here. In the interests of brevity, these findings are presented in summary form primarily through the use of appendices. I then discuss theories related to justice-orientated education and how they relate to the orientations towards curriculum that these teachers endorsed, arguing that these theories reflect the general orientation that these teachers adopted in their pedagogical practice. I conclude with some thoughts on the parallels between citizenship theory, classroom practice and the history of ESL and literacy education.

**Theoretical Framework 1: Justice-orientated Citizenship**

Lankshear and Knobel (1997) argue that meaningful citizenship education can only take place within second language and literacy education when teachers deliberately adopt justice-orientated paradigms. This study’s findings indicate that the linkages Lankshear and Knobel recommended find resonance with veteran teachers. The majority of my respondents clearly saw the need to emphasize these links, but did so in the contexts of the needs of their learners. They emphasized the diversity of learners within their classrooms and saw the challenge they faced in terms of finding ways of building upon the private, everyday concerns of learners and using critical literacy to promote social justice orientations towards concrete issues within the broader community. As Papen (2005) noted and as my participants confirmed, one starts with what is personally meaningful for the students. Then, as Morgan and Ramanathan (2005) have stressed, critical teaching helps students make their own connections between the larger community and the need for societal change. In this way, “learning to read both the word and the world critically, adult literacy learners regain their sense of themselves as agents who can change the social situations in which they find themselves” (Janks, 2008, p. 185).

Westheimer and Kahne (2005) have argued that education forcitizenship should encourage students to become critical citizens who explore the causes of social problems in order to work for substantial societal change. Within their framework, three different types of roles are possible as part of one’s civic identity: the *personally responsible citizen*, the *participatory citizen* and the *justice-orientated citizen*. The personally responsible citizen is honest, self-disciplined and hard working. A citizen with this type of orientation may contribute time or money to charitable causes and do such things as volunteering at a food bank over a holiday period. Voting is the quintessential activity that this form of citizenship takes. The second form of citizenship, the participatory citizen, is distinguished by the attributes of the first type, but is more involved and has a greater understanding of the inner workings of government and civic institutions. This citizen organizes charitable activities such as food banks and develops relationships that feature common understandings and commitments. A citizen with this type of orientation might seek political office for the purposes of making a contribution to existing institutions and traditions in uncritical ways. The third form of citizenship, the justice-orientated citizen, has the attributes of the other two, but has also developed a critical understanding of civic institutions and overall societal contexts. This type of citizen seeks fundamental change that addresses social inequality and redress in the context of pressing current issues but does not limit his or her activities to voting. Instead, citizens of this sort work to connect a critical analysis of pressing social issues to collective social action. As Westheimer and Kahne (2005) put it, justice-orientated citizens “critically assess social, political and economic structures and explore strategies for change that address root causes of problems” (p. 29).

**Theoretical Framework 2: Critical Literacy**

As Street (1984) points out, literacy is more than a simple set of skills centered on coding and decoding text. Rather, it is a form of social practice in which multiple forms of text are negotiated and critically examined through explorations of the relationships between language practice, power relations and identity. In general, Papen (2005) has noted that it is important to understand how literacyis practiced within everyday life beyond the institutional restraints of school and work. Literacy practice takes place at the personal level in the home, family and community. In addition, a critical examination of contemporary literacy practice must also take into account the enormous change and variability exhibited by the emerging globalized and digital age (New London Group, 1996). At the level of concrete practice, Dionne (2010) recommends that teachers follow a set of guidelines originally formulated by the literacy theorist Lenski (2008):

• Examine the representation of various groups in the text.

• Understand that texts offer a particular view of the world.

• Analyze the methods used to transmit the message.

• Take into consideration the power of the language used by the author.

• Read the text from different perspectives.

• Encourage students to take a stand on the author’s statements.

• Provide students with the opportunity to consider and clarify their own points of view.

• Provide students with the opportunity to take social action.

In recent years, the influence of critical literacy theory has been felt within second language education literature. Morgan and Ramanathan (2005), for example, recommend that ESL teachers should adopt a critical orientation towards literacy and “advocate a pluralized notion of literacies and multiliteracies [in order] to help students negotiate a broader range of text-types and modes of persuasion, not only via print, but also sound, images, gestures, spaces, and their multimodal integration“ (p. 152). Others within this literature note that pluralized notions of literacy should be viewed as being “socially and historically constructed within particular relations of power” (Norton, 2008, p. 49) and that the ultimate goal of looking at literacy in this way is to enhance learner empowerment (Pennycook, 2007).

**Citizenship and the History of Literacy Education in Canada**

Literacy education, as an aspect of adult education, has always been very closely associated with citizenship, second language training, social reform and nation building (Tight, 2002). This has been especially true in Canada, as has been stressed by most of our more influential literacy organizations. Alfred Fitzpatrick, the founder of Frontier College, for example, made it very clear that one of the principle aims of his work was to assimilate immigrants into the new Canadian nation state (Walter, 2003).

As Tight (2002) makes clear, the nation-building goals that many have had for literacy education should be seen in view of the fact that the field has long been associated with organized labour and attempts at political reform. In England, for example, literacy education was a major aspect of the Luddite movement in the early 1800’s and the women’s temperance and suffragette movements of the 1850's. Formal forms of labour education for adults, in fact, developed quite rapidly in the second half of that century. By the advent of the First World War, up to 150,000 adults were enrolled in adult education programs organized by labour unions and other workers' organizations in the U.K. Untold numbers of people also attended informal educational programs, discussion circles or lectures.

This trend also occurred in the United States. Although labour organizations were instrumental in the formation of what were called labour lyceums, mechanics’ institutes or innovative institutions such as Myles Horton's Highlander Centre, adult education in the U.S. was more marked by individualistic self-improvement movements that never really challenged the status quo. The hugely popular Chautauqua Movement in the 1870’s stands as a good example of this (Tight, 2002).

Early adult education in the U.S. was subject to much greater government support than in Britain. Beginning with the Hatch Act in 1887, the federal government poured a significant amount of money into industrial training for poorer, immigrant and rural citizens. This money supported programs for individualized skills training and did nothing to upset the economic order. This funding expanded greater still in more recent times, beginning with the Johnson administration in the 1960's (Tight, 2002).

In Canada, literacy education borrowed more heavily from British models than American ones due to the heavy involvement of the labour movement, through lyceums or mechanics' institutes, the women's' movement or such social democratic or Marxist organizations such as the Farm Radio Forum, the Citizens Forum, Fogo Island, the Centre for Community Studies, the Antigonish Movement, and Frontier College (Perry, 2008).

Canadian government involvement in literacy education tended to be crisis driven, as when considerable government resources were devoted to retraining returning servicemen at the end of the Second World War. Government funding for literacy education, as documents reveal in the history of university extension programs in the 20's and 30's, were established explicitly to counter the perceived influence of Bolshevism on adult education that was linked to the labour movement's struggle for union rights (Cray & Currie, 2004).

Literacy education, then as now, has been marked by intense ideological struggle. A good example of this struggle is what occurred within the Workers' Educational Association (WEA). Radical union activists and intellectuals struggled against and with academics for control over who taught the courses and curricular content. Sometimes these activists won, as is evidenced by some of the courses that featured explicit Marxist and practical organizing content. More often than not, however, liberal and social democratic content were ascendant, as is evidenced by the progressively more prominent role in the WEA played by J. S. Woodworth (the first leader of the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation) and well-known liberal professors W. L. Grant, R. M. McIver and W. S. Milner (Morrison, 1989).

These struggles for curricular control also took place in Frontier College, the most prominent literacy organization in Canada. Its dedicated and dynamic founder, Alfred Fitzpatrick, was nevertheless a social conservative who inculcated a racialised vision of Canada within the organization. As Walter has put it (2003), “Frontier College, in providing literacy and citizenship education to laboring immigrant men on the resource frontier, was the quintessential embodiment of the grand project of Anglo-Canadian nation building” (p.1). At the same time many left-wing activists, such as Norman Bethune, cut their political teeth within the College.

Governments in Canada only began to develop a systematic approach to adult education in the mid-50's. This approach was designed to be completely divorced from labour education through funding the construction of adult orientated collegiate institutes through school districts (most notably in Toronto and Vancouver). These were essentially high schools in which adult and teenaged students studied work and skills-related subjects in the same setting. At this time, however, most jurisdictions did not separate adult and teenaged students. Unlike today, adults simply went to day school if their scheduled allowed for it. Night school was established for students who worked during the day, regardless of age (Ashworth, 2001).

In the mid-60's, these institutes were rapidly replaced by community college systems which specialized in the vocational training of adult students. In this period, Canadian high schools offered programs and courses exclusively to minors and a. dult pedagogy developed as a specialization all on its own. Whereas educational theorists of Dewey's time made few distinctions between childhood and adult education, this became a hallmark of new theoretical models such as andragogy (Knowles, 1984) and conscientization (Freire, 1970). In recent years, over 35% of all Canadian workers aged 25- 64 undergo some form of job-related training (Statistics Canada, 2003) each year.

**Citizenship and the History of ESL Instruction in Canada**

In contrast to literacy education, Canadian ESL and second language instruction has long been a form of pedagogy under government control and has enjoyed little involvement from the labour movement. Government policy historically has stressed the value of acculturating and assimilating new immigrants. This was certainly true for the first school in what would become Canada, founded in 1632 by the Jesuit order in Quebec, which exposed its multicultural student body to explicit Christian indoctrination (Tomkins, 1978).

The assimilationist trend in much of Canadian second language education has many parallels with residential schools, the notorious system in which aboriginal children were forcibly taken from their parents and communities for the express purpose of eradicating their languages and cultures (Abele, Dittburner & Graham, 2000).

This trend has also been in evidence in mainstream schools. In 1844, for example, Egerton Ryerson’s rationale for founding the pubic school system in Ontario was explicitly to assimilate the newly arrived Catholic Irish and promote protestant and Anglo-centric cultural values (Tomkins, 1978).

On the prairies, one of the most influential educators of new Canadians, James Anderson (1918), emphasized the need for teachers to adopt what he described as a missionary spirit for the task of stamping out bilingualism and promoting Anglo-Canadian values and culture. Anderson, later elected premier of Saskatchewan, headed a notoriously conservative government that restricted French and minority language rights until being defeated at the polls in 1934, accused of corruption and having links with the Ku Klux Klan.

The systematic provision of ESL Education by government did not commence until the 1970’s, two decades after similar measures for literacy education (Ashworth, 2001). The impetus for his provision was the two major policy initiatives undertaken by the Trudeau governments to remake the modern Canadian nation-state: bilingualism and multiculturalism. The first of these, bilingualism, is a central part of the federal strategy to maintain national unity in the face of one of the greatest political challenges facing the modern Canadian nation state: Quebec separatism. The second, multiculturalism, is designed as a way to integrate increased numbers of immigrants (Esses & Gardiner, 1996).

As Ashworth notes (2001), official multicultural policy quickly opened the door for programs that promoted heritage languages for children, but did not lead immediately to the systematic provision of adult ESL. Many difficulties arose over conflicts between federal and provincial jurisdictions. Under the Canadian Constitution, education is primarily a provincial responsibility. Immigration and citizenship is predominately federal. Both jurisdictions have claimed that adult second language education was the responsibility of the other. Ontario and Quebec developed provincial funding formulas that allowed various bodies, such as school districts, colleges and community agencies to provide limited access to English and French language education, respectively. This led to some innovative and far-reaching program planning, most notably by the Toronto School Board, which had to cope with the enormous demographic changes of a city subject to a massive influx of immigrants. Few other jurisdictions in the country acted (Ashworth, 2001).

Major changes to Canadian second language policy and planning have been undertaken in recent years in an attempt to overcome previously identified financial barriers to participation. The federal and provincial ministries concerned have also invested considerable time and effort in significant program, assessment, curriculum and materials development. Despite this, no more than a third of adult newcomers to Canada take advantage of ESL programming (Fleming, 2007).

Space does not permit a detailed account of the policy development associated with current ESL provision within the country. For this the reader should consult a number of other texts that are listed in my references (Burnaby, 2002; Cray & Currie, 2004). It is suffice to note here that ESL provision was by and large haphazard until 1990, when the federal government formulated its first four year Immigration Plan (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 1990). The Plan was a major change in direction for the federal government and came at a time when major demographic changes in Canadian society were becoming more evident and was framed within the context of the constitutional negotiations then under way between the federal and provincial governments. Significantly, the document gives prominence to the need to integrate ESL training with “building a new Canada” (p. 3).

As I have outlined elsewhere (Fleming, 2007), most current ESL training is done through Language Instruction to Newcomers to Canada (LINC) and its provincial counterparts. Through a complex set of contractual agreements, the federal government has, for the most part, devolved the responsibility for integrating immigrants (and the significant amount of money associated with this: in excess of $300 million) to the provinces. For my purposes here, I wish to emphasize that the policy documents associated with LINC stress that language instruction is meant to take up only one half of the goals for programming. Immigrant integration is meant to be the other (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2006)

**Eight Veteran Teachers**

Methodology.

The research question guiding the overall study was “how do veteran ESL and literacy teachers understand the purposes of ESL and literacy education”. The eight participants were recommended to me by the supervising managers of two large continuing education departments: one in Ontario and the other in British Columbia. The interviews were first audio taped and transcribed and then coded through the use of NVivo Qualitative Research software. The University of Ottawa’s Ethical Review Board approved the ethical protocols for the study and informed consent was obtained from all eight participants.

Although an initial start list of questions was utilized, the interviews were conducted informally. The participants were first asked to describe the highlights of their careers and then encouraged to provide definitions of ESL and literacy. The interviews then focused on what the participants believed to be the overall purposes of these forms of education. Finally, the participants were asked about how their understandings changed over time and encouraged to provide concrete examples from their teaching practice.

Findings.

In the subsections below, I provide quotes from the interviews for each of the eight respondents.

First participant.

My first interview was with a long-time literacy practitioner who at the time of this study was serving in an executive capacity for one of the largest provincial literacy organizations in the country. This practitioner had been involved in ESL and literacy education for over 15 years as a teacher, program director and curriculum writer.

This participant noted that a recently published research report (Ontario Literacy Coalition, 2007) identified serious confusion and overlap in the knowledge base related to the fields of ESL and literacy education around definitions and terminology. Unfortunately, as my respondent stressed, the confusion associated with this overlap is nothing new. She, in fact, remembered discussing these issues at the beginning of her career. She stressed the need to make distinctions between these types of programs.

This respondent noted that the confusion related to the overlap between the two fields has had serious practical implications in terms of how citizenship is treated. Although “citizenship is extremely important” in both ESL and literacy education, she felt that one should tailor-make curriculum development and programming appropriately for the two fields. Learners born in Canada and immersed in the predominate culture have different citizenship education needs than those born elsewhere. She argued that clear definitions could streamline how citizenship is treated in both fields, stressing “we have to make a lot more connections between different kinds of programs and citizenship”.

For this participant, justice-orientated citizenship lay at the core of literacy education. As she put it,

this is what the value of literacy is. It is about citizenship. It is about how you get involved, how you understand what your community is, what it is as a citizen, what you are entitled to, what you should be giving back and the whole concept of citizenship at large.

Moreover, according to this participant, learners from disadvantaged backgrounds need to be shown that their desires for social change were “legitimate”.

In terms of Westheimer and Kahne’s (2005) framework, this teacher strongly endorsed a justice-orientated notion of citizenship and a critical orientation towards literacy along the lines recommended by Street (1984).

Second participant.

My second participant taught elementary school for six years before entering adult ESL and literacy education. She then taught employability skills at a community college level before taking on a supervisory role in literacy programs at the school board. She had several decades worth of experience in literacy programs. At the time of our interview she was concluding 5 years experience in a program designed to assist foreign trained professions gain the credentials needed to access the Canadian labor market.

This participant corroborated many of the things my first respondent noted, especially in terms of the importance of making a differentiation between the needs of ESL and literacy learners. She told us that when she was first employed at the school district, “we were fortunate because there was a distinction between literacy and ESL”. This meant that literacy students could be streamed into classes that more effectively met their needs.

In connection to this, my respondent had significant things to say about the links between literacy and citizenship. She noted that for many students who lack literacy skills, issues related to citizenship are “really foreign to their personal lives. [Citizenship] is something they haven’t considered because they are in a day-to-day struggle, so they don’t see things from other perspectives and what their role or responsibility is as a Canadian”. My respondent thus noted that the economic pressures on these learners and their limited access to more sophisticated forms of media gives them a restricted sense of the overall forces at play in society. By implication, then, she noted that limits to literacy are limitations on citizenship.

My respondent stressed that literacy education must not be limited to reading and writing skills, but must also engage learners in an awareness of what is going on in society. As she put it, “it’s a consciousness raising kind of thing”. My respondent stressed that this would mean, for example, that teachers must find specific ways to discuss voting rights in the classroom through the context of the concrete issues affecting one’s learners and their community. My respondent thus closely linked critical forms of literacy to justice-orientated forms of citizenship.

Similarly to my first participant, in terms of Westheimer and Kahne’s (2005) framework, this teacher strongly endorsed a justice-orientated notion of citizenship and a critical orientation towards literacy (Street, 1984).

Third participant.

Although my third respondent had been trained as an ESL teacher, most of her twenty years of work experience in programs was as a supervisor of joint ESL/literacy programs. As part of her duties, she was conducting a multitude of training workshops for instructors.

My respondent noted that in her estimation second language literacy learners do not simply lack graphic language skills. They also quite commonly have limited vocabulary and an incomplete command of syntax in the target language. In addition, these learners lack an understanding of the culture of the surrounding social environment. Literacy learners whose first language is English, on the other hand, usually possess a command of common vocabulary and have few problems understanding anything that an interlocutor says to them. Significantly, these other learners identify themselves as belonging to the surrounding culture. For these reasons, this participant believed that it was important to cover citizenship explicitly for the foreign-born learners in her classes.

Although this respondent conceptualized literacy as being more than a set of decoding skills, she did not stress critical notions related to the interrogation of the underlying assumptions inherent within texts. Significantly, in terms of my focus here, she did not emphasize justice-orientated forms of citizenship.

Fourth participant.

My fourth participant had over ten years teaching experience in both ESL and literacy education. In addition, at the time of my interview she had worked for five years as an editor of a national magazine that focused on literacy. This participant started her career as a volunteer tutor in the school district’s ESL program and only gradually moved into literacy education through a pilot program designed to strengthen the writing skills of second language learners. Her employment became permanent when that pilot was expanded into a full-scale literacy program.

This respondent told me that many beginning ESL classes typically developed focus on broadly-based notions of literacy because of the needs of particular learners, noting that many immigrants from poorer backgrounds or warzones often have had limited experience in formal classroom situations. Literacy could not be conceptualized in these circumstances simply in terms of skills. She provided me with an example of a class from the start of her teaching career that was designed to develop the oral English skills of Gambian immigrants. By necessity, my respondent found that her students lacked the ability to attend to classroom tasks, goals setting, cognitive restructuring and self-evaluation. My respondent felt that she could turn to skill-based instruction only after her students had “learned how to learn” in a classroom setting.

My respondent made the link between literacy and citizenship explicit by noting that literacy helps you clarify,

how you feel about yourself as a part of this community and a part of this place, it is about the stuff that happens around the learning to read. As people learn to read, they start to analyze class and privilege. One of the things that people do in literacy programs is they start to make connections.

In ways that were similar to my first and second participants, this teacher strongly endorsed a justice-orientated notion of citizenship and a critical orientation towards literacy.

Fifth participant.

My fifth respondent had taught extensively in both the ESL and literary components of her District’s Continuing Education Program before becoming its administrator. She possessed a Masters in Curriculum Studies and was working on her doctorate at the time of our interview.

She emphasized that an ESL classroom is “a very complex classroom environment to teach in” because one is not only dealing with “the nuts and bolts of the English language” [but also with the] very really needs the students have in terms of settlement, day to day life, frustrations and struggles”. Given the diversity of needs of the learners in these classrooms, covering literacy involves helping them such basic skills as the physical mechanics of writing as well as deciphering the messages contained within advanced technological media.

Dealing with citizenship meant helping learners make an “inquiry into the culture being of Canadian and what it means to be a Canadian”. In her program, as she expressed it, “we most certainly do not limit ourselves to teaching to a citizenship test” that focuses on such objective facts as the names of provincial capitals or the date of Confederation. Rather, teachers should interweave principles related to “participatory citizenship into everything they do”, so as to help students who are becoming Canadian and “attempting to navigate in our culture and sort of juggling their own culture at the same time”.

In terms of Westheimer and Kahne’s (2005) framework, this teacher endorsed a participatory notion of citizenship. Although it might not be termed fully critical in the way in which Street (1984) uses the term, this teacher had an orientation that went beyond a skill-based notion of literacy.

Sixth participant.

My sixth participant started her career 34 years prior to the interview as a high school teacher in Kuwait where she taught grades 11 and 12 English. At the time of the interview, she had lived and taught adult ESL in Canada for eleven years. One thing that this respondent stressed was the extreme variability of the learners that the teachers in her milieu faced in their classes. There were “a lot of challenges [because] the needs [of these students] were quite different”. This meant that teachers in this context have “to have different preparations for different students”. For some students, “holding a pen or pencil was pretty challenging”. Others “could read perfectly well but needed conversation skills”.

Literacy programs, like the one in this respondent taught, were designed for students who “didn’t really get the kind of education they needed”. As a result, these students needed a “place where they could come and have a safe learning environment”. Thus, literacy teachers had to spend a lot of time paying attention to the special needs of these learners and avoid developing curricula in which language was rigidly defined or linear. Such classes had to be flexible both in terms of content and delivery.

Part of this teacher’s mandate was to prepare students for the multiple choice citizenship tests that featured the set of normative “facts” that my fifth participant described. However, in a similar fashion, my sixth participant stressed the need to go beyond these tests in order to develop their own thinking about what it means to be Canadian. This participant gave a multitude of examples from her classroom practice in which she organized debates and mock elections.

Just prior to our interview, she and her colleagues had invited actual local candidates for the upcoming provincial election to speak to the student body. She and her colleagues had then organized an election for student council that featured debates on local issues of real pertinence to the students in her program. These activities, which took about a month of class time to complete, were for the purpose of helping students explore the meaning of

being a good person, being a good citizen, and being a role model for others and bringing in the compassion and the generosity to help others, the vision for future… You need to have basic knowledge of what it is you are looking into, what the country needs… a good citizen would be a person who is doing his or her best for the betterment of humanity.

In terms of Westheimer and Kahne’s (2005) framework, in my estimation this teacher endorsed a participatory notion of citizenship that came very close to being justice-orientated. Again, although it might not be termed critical in the way in which Street (1984) defined it, this teacher had an orientation that clearly went beyond skill-based notions of literacy.

Seventh participant.

My seventh participant had been teaching full time in an ESL program for about four years at the time of the interview. Previous to this, she had taught extensively on a part-time basis in a literacy program for the same school district and been a teachers’ aide in a local elementary school for about eight years.

When asked about whether there is a skill component to literacy, this teacher strongly emphasized that “it is more than that”. Literacy instruction does have a skill-based dimension, but there is a second level that “is like trying to invent a third language” in which students learn self-confidence and autonomy. As this teacher expressed it, “confidence, yes, because if learners feel they are less competent… they cannot articulate their rights and needs”.

This teacher had an orientation that went beyond a skill-based notion of literacy and clearly linked this to a justice-orientated notion of citizenship.

Eighth participant.

My eighth participant had been teaching in literacy and ESL programs for 21 years at the time of our interview. The class that she taught was expressly designed to meet the needs of learners who were at the basic levels of English language proficiency and/or literacy skills. Most of her students had no prior knowledge of English whatsoever. Some spoke English as their first language but were not proficient in the physical mechanics of writing. Others had very few literacy skills in their first or second languages.

This teacher noted that the multiple needs of her particular students led her to focus her class content on writing skills. As she put it, she was “making [her] lessons more towards formal practicable skills that they can immediately use: life skills”. This is because the literacy students in her class either had not or would not “do well in the regular school system or have dropped out for one reason or another” and needed more practical and less abstract content in their classes.

It is important to note that this teacher also took her class to the school’s computer lab once a week for the express purpose of exposing her students to different modes of writing. She assigned basic readings and writing tasks that made systematic use of Internet and word processing technology. Thus, although it could be argued that she had a skill-based notion of literacy, she encouraged the development of these skills in multimodal directions.

This teacher placed a lot of emphasis on teaching the factual content of the Canadian citizenship test discussed above by my fifth participant and, in fact, taught a special half-hour class most mornings that focused on memorizing the answers to the multiple-choice questions that constituted that test. Nonetheless, this teacher participated fully in the activities described above by the sixth respondent above that were designed to inculcate a participatory orientation towards citizenship.

Given the needs of her particular students, this teacher had adopted what she felt by necessity was a skill-based definition of literacy. However, her classroom practice included activities that were designed to expand the skills of her students into technologically based modes of expression. In addition, her classroom practice, by virtue of her involvement in the school activities around elections described above, also emphasized a participatory orientation towards citizenship. At first glance, this teacher could be characterized as having imposed limits to how both literacy and citizenship were treated in her classroom. However, I think it important to emphasize that this teacher believed that these limits were a function of the basic proficiency and skill levels of her students. She did not believe that these were universal or static limits.

In summary:

* Half of the participants in this study (1,2,4,7) endorsed justice-orientated versions of citizenship and critical orientations towards literacy. They also made strong links between the two.
* Two respondents (5,6) endorsed participatory notions of citizenship and adopted positions that went well beyond skill-based orientations towards literacy.
* One respondent (3) conceived of literacy as being more than a set of decoding skills. However, she did not did not emphasize participatory or justice-orientated forms of citizenship.
* Another participant (8) had a skill-based definition of literacy and a “fact-based” notion of citizenship. Nonetheless, this teacher conducted multimodal literacy activities and was involved in school participatory citizenship education projects.

In the interests of clarity, I have summarized the main points that each of these respondents made and matched them to their backgrounds in the two appendices that appear at the end of this article.

**Conclusion: Implications for Future Research and Practice**

As indicated above, citizenship has been a common programming component historically in both ESL and literacy education. As this study indicates, the critical tradition within this history continues today. The majority of the veteran teachers who participated in this study believe that this critical tradition can be productively used for the promotion of justice-orientated citizenship. Although the teachers in this study might not have explicitly referred to the theoretical models espoused by such theorists as Westheimer and Kahne (2005), the majority adopted very similar curricular orientations to the ones these academics recommend.

This relates strongly to the question of how theory relates to practice. I find it unfortunate that these two domains are often said seem to operate in separate worlds. I believe that this is a false dichotomy. I echo Freire’s (1970) endorsement of the notion of *praxis*, a meaningful balance between theory and practice. This notion emphasizes that relevant theory is a distillation of successful practice and that meaningful practice is informed by grounded theory. They are two sides of the same coin.

It is unfortunate that the teachers in my study were not aware of the theoretical models I outlined above. As all of the eight noted in the course of my interviews with them, teaching in nonstandard milieus such as ESL and literacy is often an isolated and lonely task. As a long-time practitioner in this milieu myself, I can well imagine how they could have gained greater strength by being made aware that their beliefs found support in the academic literature.

Given these contexts, I see the implications of this study as two-fold. The first is that researchers and theorists must pay more attention to and learn from successful practice. The other is that more effort must be put into distilling the lessons we learn from our research and bring it back to the learners and practitioners we serve.

Concretely, this means that when we conduct research we should be asking teachers for reasons that they give for their choices in terms of treatment options and take serious their rationales for accepting or rejecting the abstract models that we in academia often hold so dear. It is not enough to say that teachers don’t “get it” when we present academic work to them. We should acknowledge that we are in a partnership in which one or the other half of this divide can lag behind the other.

There have been many cases in which theory has lagged behind pedagogical practice. In second language education, for example, the most notable example in my own experience is in how grammar has been taken up or rejected as a necessary curriculum component. At one time (around the time I was taking my own teacher training), grammar was firmly rejected theoretically. Teachers were strongly advised to avoid explicit grammar instruction at all costs. Practice (my own and others) proved that this position was far too categorical and found that grammar has an important role to play in adult ESL. Theory has caught up to this position through such orientations as the “Focus on Form” Approach, which calls for a measured and strategically placed role for grammar.

In the case of this study, my veteran respondents instinctively expressed views not too far off the justice-orientated models that are espoused in academia. However, the fact that the veteran teachers I interviewed were unaware of the theoretical models I outlined above shows to me that we have to do a better job of making these reciprocating connections, especially to novice teachers and teacher candidates. Concretely, this means that we have to systematically take what we have learned theoretically and from these veteran teachers to our teacher education and professional development programs. One way to do this is through programs like the one Isacsson, Lalonde, and McLean (this volume) outline.

As I myself have experienced on both sides of the divide, the connections between theorists and practitioners are often tenuous and strained. Concrete measures around professional development and training are important but really point to the need to develop a new and more integrated relationship between academic researchers and practitioners in which we take one another’s points of view more seriously and respectfully.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 15yrs+ as a teacher, program supervisor, curriculum writer and director of a literacy organization. | 6yrs elementary teaching experience; 20yrs+ adult literacy, ESL teaching and supervisory experience. | 20yrs+ years as teacher, professional development trainer and supervisor in joint ESL/literacy programs. | 10yrs+ experience in both ESL and literacy education; 5yrs+ as editor of a national literacy magazine; 5yrs+ as volunteer community tutor. |
| Explicitly stated justice-orientated notion of citizenship that was linked to a critical orientation towards literacy. | An implicit justice-orientated notion of citizenship and a critical orientation towards literacy. | Although conceived of literacy as more than a set of decoding skills, did not stress critical notions or justice-orientated forms of citizenship. | Explicitly stated justice-orientated notion of citizenship that was linked to a critical orientation towards literacy. |

Appendix 1: Ontario-based Participants

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 |
| 10yrs+ ESL and literary teaching experience; 6yrs+ in a supervisory role. | 21yrs teaching high school and 11yrs+ in adult ESL and literacy. | 8yrs+ as ESL and literacy teacher’s aide and 4yrs+ as an ESL teacher. | 21yrs+ in adult ESL and literacy. |
| Endorsed a participatory notion of citizenship and an orientation that went beyond skill-based definitions of literacy. | Participatory notion of citizenship that came very close to being justice-orientated; a definition of literacy that went clearly beyond skill-based notions. | An orientation towards literacy that went beyond skill-based notions; clearly linked this to a justice-orientated notion of citizenship. | Although defined literacy as skills and citizenship as factual knowledge, engaged in activities that stressed participatory citizenship and multimodal forms of literacy. |

Appendix 2: British Columbia-based Participants

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