

and convention to experiment with reflection on all aspects of their lives” (p. 369). The reader who has experienced a very different reality in schooling can look to contributors such as Hart to draw out the very real barriers to critical reflection toward transformative learning and emancipatory education.

In the concluding chapter, Mezirow acknowledges the contributors’ potential disagreement with his approach but focuses on his own ideas in relating the diverse collection of approaches and ideologies. Also in this chapter, he highlights other approaches toward emancipatory education—Argyris and Schon’s model of interpersonal communication, Shor and Freire’s “dialogic method of teaching”, and Brookfield’s discussion of strategies such as assumptions analysis and options thinking.

A desirable addition to this book would have been an expansion of the diversity of perspectives with colleagues from other cultures with foci such as the somatic and the spiritual. Also useful would have been a dialogue among the contributors regarding issues such as the appropriate ways to address tensions between the private and the public, the personal and the professional; the ethics of helpers and experts provoking an unease (p. 266) as a catalyst toward transformative learning; and the need for interaction with others and as yet unknown parts of the self as a balancing tool against distorted meaning perspectives. As it is, the book provokes critical reflection on previous ways of viewing learning and education.

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**SOMETHING IN MY MIND BESIDES THE EVERYDAY:
WOMEN AND LITERACY**

Jenny Horsman. 1991. Toronto: Women’s Press

This book is the first full-length study of women and literacy in Canada. The author focuses on the everyday lives of women—and the ways in which women yearn to move beyond the constraints inherent in those lives. She demonstrates how the social construction of “illiteracy” has particular meaning and implications for women who work in literacy as students and for women who work in literacy as volunteers and paid program staff:

If we are to challenge the myths of illiteracy, we need studies which start from the standpoint of the women who are labelled "illiterate" or "silent". We need to listen to women's own account of their lives. Only in this way can we hope to create programs for women that will meet their needs and enable them to challenge the status quo. (p. 15)

Horsman's critique of the labels "illiterate" and "silent" allows us to focus on current academic theorizing around "women's ways of knowing" that accepts and builds on the construction of "silent" women as passive, isolated and unable to understand their own reality.

Instead of unquestioningly accepting an account of women written by privileged men and women, Horsman insists that researchers listen to women from a perspective that includes in its sightlines the material circumstances of their everyday lives. Women who do not have access to "the power of voice" within the research context must be allowed to speak from within their own context. Instead of being constructed as "stupid", because of their failure to "know" and articulate answers to research questions, they can be discovered as survivors who have an acute, sometimes contradictory, insight into the social organization of their lives.

In 1986, Horsman talked with 23 women in a rural county of Nova Scotia about their experience as students in adult literacy, academic upgrading and training programs. She also talked with ten women who worked as volunteer one-to-one tutors, paid upgrading and training instructors, and social service agency counsellors. Women with limited formal education (there are 44,000 in Nova Scotia) are restricted to a narrow range of low-paid, often part-time, physically demanding work in factories, restaurants and motels. In 1981, there were 1,215 single-parent families in this county with an average income of \$11,000. Provincial family benefits for a single mother came to \$8,100., municipal welfare was \$5,220. There was subsidized childcare space for 24 children.

Government data show that 98 percent of the county population identify English as their first language. Primarily of British origin, the residents of the county also include three small Black communities within the county town and one Micmac community with approximately 500 residents. Of the 23 program participants Horsman interviewed, however, 22 were white:

The separation of the Black and Micmac communities from the white community meant that few Black or Native students were involved in the education programs I located, so I was only able to identify the one mixed-race participant whom I interviewed. Although it was not my intention, it is clear that I have carried out a study of white women in the county with limited literacy skills. (p. 20)

All the direct service workers that she interviewed were also white, many of them older women who had been divorced and who had entered the paid workforce as single mothers. In her work, Horsman identifies the social location of students and direct service workers. She also explores the social location of tutors and trainers, and her own social location as researcher. Each woman is seen to be both constructed by and actively constructing her own reality—often in contradictory, always in complex, ways.

Horsman refuses two assumptions she could use to explore women's lives. First, she rejects the perspective that women re-act solely as victims of either institutional power relations and subjective false consciousness. Second, she rejects the perspective that women who have limited literacy skills are "other" than those who function through literacy. She insists that we consider the ways in which both women students and women volunteers or paid staff enter into and resist dominant discourse that constructs some women as "functional" and others as "dysfunctional".

These women have endured many oppressions and yet continue to be strong, functioning competently in the midst of problems that would perhaps defeat many of those who judge them incompetent and unable to function. They face the world with a self-deprecating humour and an enduring hope that they can improve their lives or their children's lives. Listening to their words forces us to question many of the persistent myths about the "illiterate" and the education programs they "need" (p. 24).

Understanding that her critical feminist perspective is as contextualized as the often idealized liberal humanist perspective of the women students, Horsman acknowledges their interpretations of their lives and opportunities as equally complex as her own. She recognizes that "...dreams of change can tie women firmly into the dominant discourse,

but they also have the potential to be subversive, a site of resistance" (p. 217). More unusually, perhaps, Horsman demonstrates her respect for the position of women volunteers and paid staff whose work is often accomplished through a charity or social work model that embeds conservative functionalist perspectives of literacy within standardized curriculums and government-defined training programs.

She also challenges these women's understanding of literacy, distinguishing between the functional approach that sees literacy training as allowing women to complete particular tasks, the humanistic approach that sees literacy education as the opportunity for individual woman to create a better life and the social context approach to literacy education that "views illiteracy as a reflection of structural and political realities" (p. 127) often reflected in institutionalized racism and poverty.

Horsman shows how most of the women who carry the label of "illiterate" left school because of their perceived responsibility for others. After the age of 12, they had to care for their parents or siblings. After becoming pregnant, they had to care for their child. After marriage they had to care for their husband. After going on welfare, they had to care for the concerns of the state. They had to struggle with conventional beliefs around being a good daughter and sister, a good mother, a good wife, a good citizen. They had to confront the contradiction that they needed more education in order to fulfill both social and state requirements for these roles. Yet by getting more education, they threatened the balance of power in the family and began to question the role of the state in their lives.

The tension between their responsibility for others and their responsibility towards themselves is a material, not an ideological, issue for the women. Their inability to act independently leaves them open to abuse. Yet, despite all the odds, the women fight the isolation by resisting their tutors and teachers and insisting on a social context for their literacy work. They resist the passive and active violence of their partners' responses and insist on their right to learn. They resist the drudgery of minimum wage labour and insist that their dream of a middle class career will come true if they increase their academic skills. They resist the professional understanding of "family illiteracy" and insist on continuing their upgrading so their children might have a better chance than they have had. As Frieda, one of the women interviewed said:

Well, you're doing something for yourself, after you quit school at fifteen and you're forty years old. It's a big thing to have a grade twelve education. And you earned it, you didn't just say "I can do that, I can do that and give me my certificate". You earned it, you worked to get it, and it's satisfaction and everybody needs a little bit of satisfaction in their life. That's the way I look at it (p. 219).

Using Horsman's book, those of us involved in adult literacy, basic education and academic upgrading can better understand why women both resist and take part in the programming available for them. We can better understand the way in which their dreams intersect with the often disheartening realities of their day-to-day lives as individuals, family members, community members and workers. As Judy says: "I'm even feeling better just learning, having something else in my mind besides the everyday" (p. 218).

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THE POLITICS OF NONFORMAL EDUCATION IN LATIN AMERICA

Carlos Alberto Torres. 1990. New York: Praeger Publishers

In his introduction to a slim monograph on Antonio Gramsci and Brazil, Timothy Ireland makes the cryptic observation:

Having worked in the field of Adult Education both at an academic and a practical level, in Britain and Brazil, I have become increasingly impatient of the lack of any really solid theoretical postulates capable of helping us to sustain...the study and practice of adult education.... We have a tendency to reduce the problems of adult education to the field of adult education and not to set education within the social context in which it takes place (p. 1).

The Politics of Nonformal Education in Latin America presents us with a mirror which forces us to look more critically at our practice and our lack of theoretical postulates. Much more than a mirror, however, Torres has provided the field a penetrating and, in my opinion, desperately