Humane Literacy: *A Review of Language and Literacy in Canada.* Ottawa, Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, 1981, 147 pp.

"Literacy" is a troublesome word. To some it means the ability to read and write; yet others talk about "illiterate speech" implying that the converse "literate" cannot be restricted to the use of written language. To some the term refers to the so-called basic, functional skills in reading and writing, while to others literacy should provide access to the best thoughts of a culture expressed in its great literature. We also talk about scientific literacy and, more recently, about computer literacy.

Add to this complex word the prepositional phrase, "in Canada," which brings with it all the extra linguistic and intellectual challenges of life in a country that is officially bilingual and actually multicultural, and you have a formidable subject for a workshop and an ambitious title for a report. There is not even a word in French for literacy.

There is an implied tribute here to the courage and ambition of the 22 workshop participants who spent two days discussing language and literacy in Canada and drawing up a set of research recommendations to present to the sponsoring Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. The 147-page report, published by the Council (without copy editing in the interests of "timeliness") is an interesting starting point from which to consider literacy as an educational target in this country. The Council apparently hoped for guidance from the academic community as it moves towards the inclusion of literacy in its strategic grants program.

In addition to the 45 recommendations, the report contains the text of five invited papers and nine shorter position papers that helped to focus the discussion. One of the major papers is in French and another was presented by Richard Hoggart. Chairman and organizer, Michael Hornyansky wrote an introduction.

Although there are references in the report to the vastness and complexity of the topic, the major focus of the presented papers is upon "humane literacy, the ability to read with comprehension and judgment the works of the best practitioners of the language." Given presentations by Joseph Gold, Richard Hoggart, Colin Norman, and F.E.L. Priestley, and the presence in the group of eight professors of English, this humanities focus is not surprising. Nor is it surprising that literary criticism receives such prominence. It is a symptom of the failure of the report to maintain the broad perspective which it sought that the chairman could claim that literary criticism, in its relationship with literacy, is "comparable to the "pure" research of the sciences." Only one of C.P. Snow's two cultures seems to be speaking here; the particular and different, but equally demanding, qualities of scientific text are ignored. One would like to have seen an explicit acknowledgement by the group that they realized they were not treating the whole topic.

Four of the authors of papers in the report contributed to an earlier book called "In The Name of Language." (Gold, 1975.) No one who knows this book

would be surprised that a major theme running through "Language and Literacy in Canada" is the claim that there is a national literacy crisis. Gold blames the milk and water liberal curriculum of the 1960s, although he does concede that the 1979 restoration of compulsory English courses in Ontario high schools is a step in the right direction. Hoggart, attributes Britain's literacy problem to a pervasive linguistic relativism. Tovell (a television producer) blames television; Priestley, a low standard of broadcast speech. Audley worries about the viability of the Canadian publishing industry, while Durrant wonders about the language abilities of teachers and professors.

In spite of the reiteration of a prevailing crisis, there was no evidence presented that literacy standards today are lower than they were in the past. Changing patterns of university participation rates can affect the perceptions of English professors that student writing is getting worse; but no one mentioned this. Escalating demands for literacy skills in an increasingly technological society render reading and writing deficiencies more visible than they were in agricultural and industrial settings. Resnick and Resnick (1977) argued that twentieth century society demands a level of literacy in its school leavers that was only attained by elitist European schools in the previous century. Considering the absence of reliable evidence, it is much safer and more intellectually honest to claim that too many citizens, including recent school graduates, do not have the reading and writing skills they need to live life well than it is to assert or imply that the educational system is now failing to do something that in the past it did more successfully. As argued by Kerpneck in his excellent discussion of the functional literacy deficiencies of continuing education students, this is still a serious state of affairs, but without the unhelpful foisting of blame on one sector of the educational system.

Gallivan (another English professor) claimed that much of what has been done about the problem of literacy has been done by "departments of literature." In view of the considerable research activity by education professors into reading, and, more recently, writing, this is an egocentric point of view. Perhaps in discussion the other academic participants reacted to such limited "English" perspectives; but any reactions from the representatives from classics, art, administration, anthropology and educational psychology are not recorded in the report. To the group's credit, five of the recommendations referred to the gathering of normative data on the language performance of various cohorts of the population. If these recommendations result in the necessary research, some data might emerge that would ground such discussions in observable facts rather than assumptions and opinions.

Apart from the papers by Olson and Bibeau, there was little informed attention given in the papers to issues in reading and writing at the public school level. This goes back to the composition of the group. Apart from Olson, who is well known as an educational psychologist carrying out research into children's written language competence, the participants had very little experience or expertise in children's acquisition of literacy. In spite of this paucity, the group

was not diffident about directing recommendations for research to the developmental aspects of their subject. Several of their suggestions called for research into beginning reading and writing, public school curriculum, school text books and teaching methods. The SSHRC would likely recognize that the school-related recommendations reflected unfamiliarity with the field rather than finely tuned perceptions of need. From the wording of two of the recommendations about "teachers colleges" the group did not seem to be aware that there is only one such specialized institution in Canada and that the great majority of teachers are educated at universities like the ones represented at this workshop by their English departments.

Overall "Language and Literacy in Canada" gives an insight into how people of humane letters define and regard literacy. It is a useful model for other groups. Science educators, mother tongue educators, and those who work with adult illiterates could, through similar workshops or through a joint enterprise, provide the Council with a complementary analysis of that slippery word, literacy, in its difficult context, Canada.

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Cline, Hugh et Sinnot, Loraine, *Building Library Collections,* Lexington, Mass., Lexington Books, 1981, 170 p.

Hugh Cline et Loraine Sinnot sont deux sociologues américains rattachés au Educational Testing Service. Leur publication est un compte rendu de leur recherche, une étude de cas auprès de sept (7) institutions universitaires des Etats-Unis. Leur objectif était de comparer les processus d'acquisition et l'organisation du développement des collections documentaires dans les bibliothèques. Le cadre théorique fut emprunté, non pas à la bibliothéconomie, mais à la sociologie, notamment l'approche sociologique traitant de l'organisation.

La méthodologie est typique d'une étude de cas, c'est-à-dire qu'elle est orientée verticalement (en profondeur) plutôt qu'horizontalement (avec un large échantillon). De façon à assurer tout de même une certaine représentativité, les sept (7) institutions-témoins ont été choisies un peu partout sur le territoire américain, et en s'assurant qu'une certaine variation existait entre les bibliothèques retenues, en ce qui concerne l'importance ou l'ordre de grandeur des sept (7) cas examinés. Connaissant peu le domaine des bibliothèques académiques, les auteurs ont choisi