

Audio Transcript of Allan Quigley Recording

Introduction: About the Guide

Hi and welcome.

I want to say right off the top that I hope this Guide gives you some practical help with your work. By this I mean, some practical tools and useable approaches you can use tomorrow and into the future. That is my first hope...that this Guide might give you a chance to experiment with and, maybe, share your thoughts with others on some of the proven methods and research-based approaches that you will find in the first sections of the guide.

But I have a second hope. The title of this Guide is "Building Literacy."

I have had some time to think about what this might mean. I taught my first adult literacy class in Northern Saskatchewan in 1972/73 and have been in and around adult literacy education ever since. And, I can proudly say, over those 50 or so years, I have earned *hundreds of dollars*. Just kidding...

But, for sure, there have been moments of doubt. Literacy isn't the easiest field to have a career in; a point that this Guide takes up in what I would call my second hope for this guide.

As is discussed in the Guide, our field dates back over 200 years. From England to the United States to Canada. We have a past of selfless giving. And, as we will see, we have had heroes and heroines that we should know about, be proud of and, I think, should learn from. Both their successes and their struggles are relevant to building our field of literacy today. And we will look at this largely unknown area in section 2 of this guide.

But what about the future?

To this end, I hope we can think about, talk about, and work towards building our field as a more widely recognized profession. In my view, ours is much more than a job. Much more than an occupation. It is a profession and a vocation to be proud of.

In sections six and seven I discuss why I believe our field is so often on the margins of postsecondary and public education...if not on the margins of society itself. We will see some things we can consider doing to build a better, broader and more resource-stable field in the closing sections of this Guide.

AND, along the way we will meet some of the learners I have worked with. Learners that have influenced and changed me...like Big Bill and his wife Doreen. Like George from Shoal Lake Reserve. Like Tom and his father. And, like Gerard.

Gerard was laughed at by his fellow maintenance workers at the university I taught at. He worked around the campus with the other workers, cleaning classrooms and hallways, moving snow, keeping the lights on...but because he joined the literacy class our local literacy

organization conducted on the campus, his fellow workers—from security to the cooking staff—laughed at him calling him one of the “dumb and dumbers” who had to go to “literacy classes.” Gerard later introduced himself to me and told how literacy had changed his life. He had been promoted and, he had written the first valentine’s card to his wife in his life... which was the real reason he took the class. However, guess what, many of those workers that mocked him joined that same literacy class in year two of the program.

To build our field, we need discuss and address the stigma we have inherited in our society towards low literacy and illiteracy. People like Gerard should not be stigmatized. Should not be laughed at. In fact, many of our heroes are not in our past, they are in our classrooms and tutoring programs today. And I know that many would welcome a chance to build literacy.

Oh, by the way, did I mention I never wanted to teach adult literacy in the first place?

The fact is, back in 1972, I needed a job. I was trying to finish my master’s thesis in English literature. I heard about something called Adult Education. I took the job for a year in Northern Saskatchewan, then on to another year in Northern Alberta, hoping it would give me time to finish that master’s thesis. I did finish it but, because of learners like those I just mentioned and others you will meet along the way, not to mention the countless numbers of practitioners and learners I have met and worked with across Canada, in many U.S. states as well as in Australia, New Zealand and in the U.K, I not only fell into literacy back in the early 1970’s, but I made a conscious choice to stay. I mention this because I know a large number in our field have also fallen into literacy. And, my life experiences in literacy have shown me over and over again that those who work in this field are dedicated, caring, and have more often than not made the same choice I have. They too have fallen into literacy.

We work in a field of very special people. Practitioners and learners alike.

So, again welcome.

Now, let’s get started.