

## Abstract

This research constitutes a phenomenological investigation into the significance of learning for adult literacy students. The research participants comprised five adults who were attending literacy classes. The research aims to develop an understanding of the meaning that learning has for literacy students taking into account the context, or background features, of their everyday lives in the community. Perspectives from both adult education and Gestalt theory and practice are encompassed. Current government initiatives to improve literacy standards for the needs of a global economy are examined critically in relation to the experiences of the learners themselves. The need for institutions to produce evidence of measurable progress by students for funding purposes is looked at in the light of students' personal assessments of the benefits of learning to their lives. From a Gestalt perspective, the concept of field theory is applied to the learning environment as a means of contextualising experience. A holistic approach takes into account the emotional dimensions of learning. The findings suggest that learning has important personal meanings in the lives of literacy students, facilitating greater capacity to relate in the world.