

**What Does Sociocultural Learning and Literacy Look Like
in an Adult Employment Preparation Program?**

by

Christine Pinsent-Johnson

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Abstract

Program delivery for adult literacy students is driven by a skills- and task-based view of literacy, in which literacy is often viewed as a process of decoding and learning to complete paper-based activities, such as filling out an application form. This is exemplified by the predominance of programs that use workbooks and skill-building curriculums, as opposed to materials and activities that are directly connected to the ways in which students learn and use literacy in their daily lives (Beder, H., & Medina, P., 2001; Purcell-Gates, V., Degener, S., Jacobson, E. & Soler, M., 1998). Alternative models of literacy education for adults have turned to critical theories in education, namely participatory literacy, but this approach has not been widely accepted by the field. In order to move beyond a skill-building curriculum entrenched in schooling methods of literacy development that could also garner broader field support, programs need another way of understanding learning and literacy. Evolving sociocultural ideas of both literacy and learning could provide this.

The closely aligned theoretical discussions of situated learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998) and situated literacy (Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Hamilton, 2000) were used to explore literacy and learning activities in an adult literacy program that combined literacy education and employment preparation in three distinct learning settings. The parallel discussions provided a socioculturally-based framework that permitted a detailed analysis of what learning and literacy looked like. Guiding the study was the following question: How do situated views of literacy and learning contribute to an understanding of the employment preparation program and its three settings?

A qualitative case study design was used to shape data collection and analysis. The six data sources were 1) observations, 2) individual and small group interviews with eight

students, 3) a group interview with the students, 4) a group interview with the instructors, 5) an analysis of documents such as planning materials, curriculum and student writing, and 6) a reflective journal. In-depth descriptions of the three settings were derived from a constant comparative method of data analysis.

Using the frameworks of situated learning and literacy to closely examine the employment preparation program revealed disconnects between the work settings (the coffee shop and job placements) and the class setting, and subsequently between the notions of learning literacy and learning about work. This became apparent 1) when the funder's vision of literacy education was not realized through its success measures; 2) when literacy was viewed as "schooling", and learning was considered "doing"; 3) when a new literacy practice emerged from the coffee shop and not the classroom; 4) and when the original intentions of the program were different from its results. In addition, there was an issue that remained outside the ideas of situated learning and literacy, and that is an understanding of the individual and the personal factors that have an effect on his or her learning.

Among the study's contributions is a clearer conceptualization of a broad definition of literacy, in which the development of literacy practices becomes the focus for supporting the development of adult literacy education. In addition, contributions to program development discuss a new role for a classroom setting, and the supports needed to help students develop new literacy practices in that setting. Policy contributions examine the role of the provincial program funder and how it has a structure to support the development of a practice-based approach in adult literacy education. Finally, contributions to research propose the use of an analytical tool to further understand sociocultural learning, and specifically literacy and learning practices, in adult literacy programs.

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Chapter One - Introduction

The purpose of this study was to look at a unique literacy education program for adults, using a sociocultural view of learning, in order to uncover the elements of the program that could contribute to both the development of a social practice theory of literacy learning and the application of a social practice approach in adult literacy programs. The study's focus—an employment preparation program for adults with low literacy skills—provided a rare opportunity to examine literacy learning and other forms of learning (such as learning about employment) in a dynamic environment comprising three distinct learning settings: a traditional classroom, a coffee shop, and a job placement in the community. The dynamic nature of the program and its non-traditional approach to adult literacy education (which included experiential learning, self-reflection, collaboration and modeling) aligned itself with sociocultural ideas of learning. The three different settings helped to shape students' understanding of learning and literacy, the values they assigned to various activities, and their changing views of themselves.

Despite numerous calls (Imel, 1996; Kazemek, 1988; Quigley, 1997; Zieghan, 1992) for adult literacy education to disentangle itself from a skills- and task-based view of literacy, programs continue to emulate a traditional schooling model of literacy program delivery (Beder & Medina, 2001). For the most part, the "...dominant view of literacy as a 'neutral', technical skill" (Street, 1995, p.1), remain entrenched in the field, and programs have not made significant inroads towards "the conceptualization of literacy instead as an ideological practice, implicated in power relations and embedded in specific cultural meanings and practices" (ibid.). Learning in the vast majority of programs continues to be "decontextual" (in which content is not related to the learners' daily lives), and "monologic" (in which the

teacher is in control of decision-making) (Purcell-Gates, Degener & Jacobson, 1998). In only a minority of programs, the same researchers found that learning was both “dialogic” (which indicated shared decision-making amongst students and teachers) and “contextualized” (in which materials and activities were directly related to the lives of the learners). Both of these constructs are elements of participatory education—which has long been an impetus for creating change in adult literacy education—but continue to sit on the sidelines of program development.

More recently, researchers have been gravitating towards views of adult literacy education that are rooted in sociocultural ideas of both literacy and learning in order to encourage a shift from a traditional schooling model of adult literacy education towards a view that acknowledges the individual operating within a complex social system. Sparks (2002) suggested “adult literacy education has not benefited from the debate over authentic literacy activity rooted in the life reality of learners or their context-based interests and expertise” (p. 60). Darville (2001) argued for a need to work towards a “conception of literacy as social practices and relations, always in motion” (p. 2). In addition, Hansman (2001, p. 49) stated “the ideas of learning in context and situated cognition have yet to be fully explored in adult education”. Not only does a sociocultural view of adult literacy education have the potential to guide practice and professional development, Taylor and Blunt (2001) have argued that there is also a need to support the development of “a strong conceptual and theoretical base that incorporates these situated and social processes of learning” (p. 81).

Since the focus of the study is an employment preparation program, it is also important to briefly refer to changing views of literacy in both literacy education programs

and workplace education programs. Searle (2002) has suggested that “workplace practices involve socially constructed literacies” and “the current focus on teaching generic skills is inadequate since these de-contextualized skills are of limited utility” (p. 17). Building on this idea, Belifore, Defoe, Folinsbee, Hunter and Jackson (2003) have stated: “Paperwork is contested terrain in workplaces” (p.183). The authors found numerous examples of workers who did not complete forms the way managers intended. The managers then assumed that this was a literacy skills problem, but the researchers found that the employees’ resistance to participation in the form-filling practices went well beyond a literacy skills issue.

“Participation,” they said, “had to do with social relations, power, risk and blame.” (p. 182). Evolving discussions of workplace literacy within a sociocultural framework can help to support and enhance similar discussions within the broader field of adult literacy education.

Drawing upon developing views of literacy and learning within a sociocultural frame and using these ideas to examine a literacy education program that helps to integrate adults into the workplace, has helped to uncover some of the key theoretical and practical issues that could become starting points for more in-depth discussion and exploration. As the field attempts to move away from schooling models of literacy education, it is important to provide practical (as compared to strictly theoretical) discussions that focus on the complexities of program change. The driving force behind the study is to provide an initial discussion of the application of sociocultural ideas of literacy and learning within an adult literacy program.

WORKING DEFINITIONS

Several key terms and concepts guided this study and need to be defined for clarity and common understanding. Definitions of literacy, low literacy and employment preparation

will be detailed in the following section. In addition, concise explanations of sociocultural learning and literacy will be presented in the following chapter.

Literacy

For the purposes of this study, *literacy* will refer to one's ability to use and derive meaning from written text. Lytle and Wolfe (1989) and Freebody and Luke (1990) have proposed parallel constructs of literacy that were used in the study. Lytle and Wolfe have suggested literacy can be viewed as *skills, tasks, practices* and *critical reflection*. The authors developed their framework based upon existing concepts of literacy in theory and practice. Utilizing a similar organizational structure, Freebody and Luke (1990) have proposed four roles for the reader: 1) reader as code breaker, in which the focus is on phonics, letter knowledge and spelling; 2) reader as text participant, in which the reader uses knowledge and text structures to construct meaning; 3) reader as text user, in which text is used to meet purposes in the class, at home, or at work; and 4) reader as text analyst, in which the reader takes a more critical view of text. These four roles—code breaker, participant, user, and analyst—parallel the four views of literacy as *skills, tasks, practices and critical reflection*, and help to strengthen the idea that literacy is not simply a singular notion but a collection of ideas that are not static. This study has adopted Lytle and Wolf's definition of literacy as skills, tasks, practices, and critical reflection.

Literacy as *skills* refers to the notion that reading and writing is a set of discrete skills that can be learned then applied in a variety of situations. The literacy-as-skills concept is the basis for a traditional schooling model of literacy education. Instruction is focused on skill-building activities that emphasize decoding and encoding, grammar structures, and paragraph

development. “From this perspective, literacy is generally equated with decontextualized skills regarded as stable across texts and contexts” (p. 7).

Literacy can also be viewed as the ability to carry out and complete specific *tasks*, such as form-filling or addressing an envelope. In these kinds of activities, there is some sense of context due to the socially constructed nature of the tasks, but the same tasks are often used to assess literacy achievement for all people. For example, the tasks used in literacy achievement measures, such as the IALS, are purported to be familiar, yet there is no assurance that they are part of the cultural contexts of the individual. In a task-based approach to literacy, instruction would focus on the completion of literacy tasks that require similar levels of difficulty, but the context is generally disregarded. In other words, a student might learn to complete a job application in class but would not learn to complete the application under the conditions required by the employer. “Literacy as skills denies the role of meaning in literacy; literacy as tasks denies the role of social context” (Fingeret & Drennon, 1997, p. 62).

Literacy as *practices* emphasizes “our pluralistic culture and the many different social contexts in which literacy is used” (Lytle & Wolfe, p. 10). Literacy activities are integrally tied to the situation, people, and social practices of a particular setting or activity; it is shaped and reformed depending on the context in which it appears. For example, a literacy activity such as reading a note will be different at home, at school, and at work. The activity is shaped by the note writer and note reader; it is influenced by the meaning and content of the note; and it is affected by the people who may also be involved in the activity.

Intrinsically linked to a literacy-as-practices view is the idea that literacy is *critical reflection* and *action*, in which context becomes the subject of analysis and reflection, and

meanings are problematized. This approach is based upon the seminal work of Paulo Freire who saw literacy as a means to “reflect on the conditions of one’s existence and ultimately to change them” (p. 11). Instruction, guided by participatory approaches in adult literacy education, focuses on the critical and political meanings of text that may in turn become the basis for personal and social action. Lytle and Wolfe emphasize that analysis of the function and purpose of literacy activities within their social context (literacy as practices) without acknowledging and acting upon the inherent power structures (literacy as critical reflection) can lead to an uncritical acceptance of “a normative framework with no agenda for social change” (p. 11).

A broad conceptualization of literacy has been used for two reasons. It was needed to explain the variety of literacy and learning activities that occurred in the employment preparation program. In addition, it acknowledges, without alienating, the predominant view of literacy education, that is, literacy as skills and (to some extent) tasks. In order to suggest a change in emphasis from skills and tasks to practices and critical reflection, it is important to not suggest that one view must be accepted at the cost of eliminating others. This definition acknowledges that there is a place for all views; it may simply be a matter of shifting focus to encourage a broader based shift away from skills- and task-based approaches in adult literacy education.

Low Literacy

Attempting to choose a term to describe an individual’s literacy level is problematic. Stercq (1992) has explained the issue:

These difficulties of ‘name’ (literate, semi-literate, functional illiterate through disuse, uneducated, and so on) and ‘definition’ (and consequently quantification) are not accidental. *This population does not exist as such; it is created by the*

definition of illiteracy chosen, a definition that is always determined by socio-economic and political criteria outside the individual (p. 7).

Recognizing that assigning a term to describe adults whose literacy abilities are not at an 'acceptable' level is an artificial, malleable and dehumanizing construct. Although this will not become a focus of the study, acknowledgement of the issues is necessary.

In Canada, the dominant measure of adult literacy level for the past decade (for better or for worse) has been the International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS). Close to half of all Canadians fall within the first two out of five levels of the IALS, and approximately 22 per cent are at Level One (Statistics Canada, 1996). It is the adults at Level One who are most likely to feel they have a need to improve their literacy skills. Subsequently, it is only the adults at Level One who are likely to participate in an adult literacy education program. Based on descriptions in the IALS, an adult whose skills are within this category might, for example, have difficulty finding the dosage requirement on a medicine label. For the purposes of this study, an adult with low literacy skills would fall into the IALS Level One category. In addition, according to current provincial program guidelines (Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities, 2000), an adult literacy student must be over the age of 19 and fall into either Levels One and Two of the International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS).

Employment Preparation

Descriptions and definitions of employment preparation programs are usually focused on welfare-to-work programs in the United States. Although welfare-to-work programs are not mandated in Ontario, the provincial Ontario Works program stipulates that a welfare recipient must participate in one of three employment or pre-employment activities:

employment training, a community placement, or education, which includes participation in a literacy program. In recent years, Ontario adult literacy programs have seen a 45 percent increase in the number of Ontario Works participants in literacy programs (A. Rachlis, Keynote Speech, LBS Manager's Day, May 7, 2003).

Closely tied to the idea of employment preparation is employability skills development. In a review of the employability skills literature, Cotton (1993) describes employability skills as the non-job specific skills that can be found in all jobs at all levels. Such skills include basic reading, writing, and math; higher-order analytical skills to help problem solve and make decisions; and affective skills and traits that create a dependable and cooperative employee with a positive attitude. Most valued by employers, according to Cotton, is an entry-level employee who possesses "an array of basic, higher-order and affective employability skills" (p.2). In Canada, Human Resources Development Canada (HRDC) has developed Essential Skills Profiles that are used to detail the skills needed in a wide-variety of entry-level positions in order to support the development of these skills in a learning setting, whether that is a formal institution such as high school or an adult literacy program. An entry-level position is one that does not require a post-secondary education or apprenticeship and can be obtained without moving up "an internal ladder of progression" (Mair, 1997, p. 299). Examples of jobs that are considered entry-level include bus drivers, sales clerks, nurse's aides, and labourers in different sectors. As an example, the most important Essential Skills for a bus driver are oral communication and problem solving. Other important skills include document use, decision making, finding information, working with others, and computer use. Literacy programs that offer employment preparation in the

province most often focus on the development of employability skills, such as those outlined in the Essential Skills Profiles.

Although employment preparation and supporting employment goals has always been an inherent part of adult literacy education programs, it is becoming more of a focus in the province. For example, the responsibility for adult literacy services was once within the Education ministry, but is now located in the ministry responsible for training and falls within the department responsible for job skills training. In this way, literacy education is seen primarily as a prerequisite for employment and employment training. In addition, to ensure accountability and return on investment, programs must strive to meet a quota, in which 60% of all students achieve either employment or further training goals when they exit the program. Employment preparation has become a driving force behind literacy program development.

MY BACKGROUND AND PRESUPPOSITIONS

In addition to introducing some of the defining elements of this study, it is also important to position myself in relation to the study by describing my work experience in the field of adult literacy education, accompanied by a brief discussion of my personal views of knowing and the construction of knowledge.

I was a teacher of adult literacy students for ten years and I'm currently in an administrative role at the program in which this study was conducted. I have worked in programs that followed both a school-based model and a community-based model of delivery. (These delivery models will be outlined in the next chapter.) In my current role, I interview, assess, and counsel new students, guide teachers in the ongoing assessment of

students, support teachers' curriculum planning, and work with program managers to plan, develop and modify program delivery.

For the past two years, our program has been immersed in an ongoing process of acknowledging and sorting through tensions between the demands of the funder, the needs and goals of the students, and the views of the instructors. We have begun to recognize and address the needs, experiences, and cultural contexts of our students and not simply their skill with text. Our perceptions of progress are shifting away from an exclusively skills-based measure of literacy to the development of other measures that focus on learning in a variety of different domains. Finally, we are learning that literacy learning must be purposeful to the student and be transparently linked to a context outside the classroom. This research is an opportunity for me to connect our program's struggles and ongoing development to theoretical ideas.

In addition to my work experience, this research has also been shaped by my evolving conceptual ideas about how we come to know and understand what we know. Shaping many of the methodological considerations of the study is my ontological belief that people construct their own view of reality. I believe, as stated by Lincoln and Guba (2000), that the idea of reality is "derived from community consensus regarding what is 'real', what is useful, and what has meaning (especially meaning for action and further steps)" (p. 167). This belief has led me to use a qualitative approach that will place the meaning-making of the research participants at the fore; it is their stories, and their ideas that will be brought to light in order to gain deeper understanding. Working with this overarching belief is my epistemological stance, or the nature of my relationship as researcher with the research and research participants. This study is concerned with understanding learning amongst adult literacy

students, a group that is marginalized not only based on education but also based on ethnicity, disability, social welfare dependence, and race. Being on the fringes of a dominant white, middle-class, educated and able-bodied society has shaped their reality. This has not become a footnote in the research but has been considered and addressed throughout various stages of the research process. The research questions are being used to help guide alternative ways of viewing adult literacy education. The thoughts, opinions, and actions of a marginalized group are being used to gain insights into adult literacy learning. In addition, I have been forced to examine my own assumptions about learning and adult literacy students. Finally, I want to use this research to make changes in our program and the educational lives of our students.

RESEARCH APPLICATIONS

It is my hope that the study's findings can be used by adult literacy educators to gain an understanding of the sociocultural nature of literacy and learning in an adult literacy program. In addition, the findings raise important issues regarding literacy education and employment with regard to adults who have low literacy skills (and fall within the lowest IALS level). Gaining an understanding of the social nature of literacy and learning will help to better serve the needs of the adults who attend programs and the adults who may not feel that the current format of many programs, with their emphasis on literacy skills development only, are able to meet their needs. The study also reveals some of the tensions involved in making a shift away from an exclusively skills- and task-based view of literacy towards a sociocultural view, and provides some suggestions to support this shift. Although the study will be useful to the field, it will also contribute to the development of a socioculturally-based theory of adult literacy learning. I also feel it is my role as both a researcher and

literacy practitioner to help bridge the divide between theory and practice in this area of inquiry. I will use my experience as a teacher and my field-based motivations to clearly state the needs of the field so that the development of a sociocultural theory of adult literacy learning can be informed by a field-based perspective.

Chapter Two - Theoretical and Applied Framework of the Study

This chapter will address both the theoretical and applied literature related to the study. The theoretical literature will highlight related learning and literacy discussions under the following sub-headings: situated cognition, situated learning, situated learning and adult education, literacy as social practice, and situated literacy. Following the theoretical literature will be a section—referred to as applied literature—which briefly presents studies in the field of adult literacy education that are related to this study. The studies will touch on the following areas: students in literacy programs, employment and literacy, adult literacy program models, and the impacts of literacy programs.

A: Theoretical Literature

This study was guided by learning and literacy theories within a sociocultural perspective. Evolving theories of situated cognition (Kirshner & Whitson, 1997) and situated learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998) served as overarching ideas that supported the development of the research questions, the study's discussion, and contributions. A particular interpretation of situated learning in adult education (Stein, 1998) was used in a more strident manner, and drove the development of the research questions and organization of the findings. In addition to these ideas of learning, it is also important to introduce similar sociocultural ideas related to literacy. Barton and Hamilton (2000) note the interconnection between learning and literacy: "Related to the constructed nature of literacy, any theory of literacy implies a theory of learning" (p. 14). The two bodies of theoretical literature have much in common and draw from similar bodies of knowledge. It is also significant to the field of adult literacy education that sociocultural ideas related to both literacy and learning are evolving in such a similar fashion. Drawing on two interrelated theoretical discussions

can only help to support a movement away from an exclusively skills- and task-based view of adult literacy education towards a view that also incorporates social practices.

SITUATED COGNITION

An understanding of learning from a sociocultural perspective can be gained through *situated cognition theory*. Proponents of situated cognition suggest that knowledge is situated in the everyday activities of an individual, and in the product of the activity, context and culture in which it is used (Brown, Collins & Duguid, 1989). The process of acquiring new knowledge, skills, and ideas is integrally linked to the learners' everyday social practices and interactions. These ideas are directly linked to the anthropological and critical theory traditions of Lave, and Vygotskian sociocultural learning theory (Kirshner & Whitson, 1997), and provide the “conceptual and methodological resources for investigating the fundamental processes of cognition as social and situated activity” (p. 3). According to Kirshner and Whitson, the primary and critical key to understanding situated cognition theory is the recognition that it shifts the focus away “from the individual as the unit of analysis toward the sociocultural setting in which activities are embedded” (p. 5).

SITUATED LEARNING AND SOCIAL PRACTICE

Although *situated learning* (Lave & Wenger, 1991) is closely aligned with the ideas of situated cognition, it could be argued that the issue of internalization is the point from which the two ideas depart slightly. Situated cognition, by its very use of the term cognition, suggests that learning, although a situated and social activity, becomes meaningful in the cognition or internalization of the activity. Whereas in situated learning, according to Lave and Wenger, learning becomes meaningful in an external domain, and not through internal

processes. The external domain is described as the legitimate peripheral participation of an individual in a *community of practice*. Learning occurs when an individual is engaged in the social practices of a community, and learning is also “an integral and inseparable aspect of social practice” (p. 31). At its most basic understanding, the concept of *social practices* is the recognition that what we do and who we are is moderated, influenced, silenced, and shaped by our communities and culture. Through an understanding of a culture’s social practices, we can better understand that culture. Social practice theorists, such as Pierre Bourdieu (in Wenger, 1998), use “the concept of practice to counter purely structuralist or functionalist accounts of culture and to emphasize the generative character of structure by which cultural practices embody class relations” (p. 281-282). At the core of any discussion of a culture or community using a sociocultural perspective is an understanding of social practices. This study will use the concept of social practices to focus on the learning and literacy practices apparent in the employment preparation program.

SITUATED LEARNING AND ADULT EDUCATION

The particular theoretical idea used to navigate a situated learning analysis of an adult literacy program was Stein’s (1998) discussion of situated learning as an instructional approach in adult education. Although situated learning theory has not yet produced models of instruction—and its main proponents, Lave and Wenger, would argue that its driving force, legitimate peripheral participation is not an instructional strategy but an analytical viewpoint, Stein’s interpretations were key to the study. It is the only interpretation that links adult learning with situated learning, and it is linked directly to classroom learning. Stein’s interpretations of the elements of situated learning are prescriptive, and were subsequently used to guide the development of data collection tools and preliminary data analysis.

According to Stein, situated learning can be viewed as an instructional process that mirrors as closely as possible the real-life social process of a learning situation. His interpretation rests on four key elements—content, context, community of practice, and participation. The content is directly related to the real-life experiences and goals of the learner. In this way, it is personally meaningful to the learner. It is the knowledge that is generated and the materials used to support new knowledge. *Learning context* refers to the skills and tasks that must be completed in order to engage in the practices of various environments. More importantly, the learning context takes into account the “values, norms and culture of a community, organization or family” (Stein, p. 2), along with power balances and competing priorities. The community of practice—which is the common knowledge of the learners, practitioner, and culture—is the conduit used to understand the content. Then, through active participation with the community of practice, can the learner form a personal and meaningful body of knowledge.

LITERACY AS SOCIAL PRACTICE

Similar to the notion that learning is a product of the learner’s everyday social practices and interactions, is the idea that literacy is also a social practice, and is tied to the people, setting, tools, and actions of culturally-bound activities. Barton and Hamilton (2000) note that an understanding of literacy in real-life situations can be gained through a theory of literacy as social practice. Barton and Hamilton have put forth the following suppositions to support their developing theoretical ideas: literacy is best understood as a set of social practices; there are different literacies associated with different domains of life; literacy practices are patterned by social institutions and power relationships; literacy practices are purposeful and embedded in broader social goals and cultural practices; literacy is

historically situated; and literacy practices change. Both situated learning and literacy as social practice have evolved from a shared notion that human activity is fundamentally social, and subsequently, our ways of knowing, perceiving, and acting are shaped by the people, power balances, tools, relations, and experiences of that social way of being.

SITUATED LITERACY

Further understanding and application of the theory of literacy as social practice can be gained through an exploration of literacy events and practices (Hamilton, 2000), which will be referred to as *situated literacy*. A *literacy event* is defined as observable episodes in which literacy has a role (Barton & Hamilton, 1998). Inherent in the observable event are the hidden literacy practices that actually shape the event. The more abstract notion of literacy practices encompasses the values, attitudes, feelings, and social relationships brought to a literacy activity. Observation of the literacy events that occur in an adult literacy program are an ideal way to gain further insight into both the situated nature of literacy and learning.

Presented below is a table that displays the interconnections of situated learning and situated literacy, referred to specifically as *literacy events and practices*. Although each of the areas of study uses different terminology, the similarity in their descriptions is apparent. One key difference is the division of situated literacy into literacy events (what is seen) and literacy practices (what is unseen); whereas situated learning incorporates the seen and unseen in its descriptions. Parallel ideas are presented alongside each other in order to highlight their similarities. In this way situated learning's description of the term *content* resembles the description of *artifacts* used by situated literacy.

Table 1: Situated Learning Integrated with Situated Literacy

	Situated Learning Based on Stein (1998)	Literacy Events Based on Hamilton (2000)	Literacy Practices
1	<i>Content</i> – the facts and processes of the task from daily experience, or the knowledge and materials	<i>Artifacts</i> – material resources involved in the interaction	Non-Material resources brought to the event such as knowledge and ways of thinking
2	<i>Context</i> – situations, values, and beliefs in the experience; the setting for examining the experience	<i>Settings</i> – immediate physical circumstances	Domain of practice within which the event takes place
3	<i>Community of Practice</i> – interpretation, reflection and meaning-making with each other and the body of knowledge	<i>Participants</i> – the people interacting with the written texts	Hidden participants involved in the social relationships of regulating written text
4	<i>Participation</i> – the active engagement of learners with each other and the materials of instruction	<i>Activities</i> – action performed by the participants	Structured routines that regulate action

SUMMARY

One of the goals of this research was to attempt to tease apart the interconnected ideas of literacy and learning: a task that had its challenges due to their similarities. As stated earlier, both situated learning and literacy as social practice have evolved from a shared notion that human activity is fundamentally social and, subsequently, our ways of knowing, perceiving and acting are shaped by the people, power balances, tools, relations, and experiences of that social way of being. But what is the relationship between literacy and learning? Barton and Hamilton believe that an understanding of how people learn literacy in both formal and informal settings, will “draw upon people’s insights into how they learn” (p.

13). This view places literacy at the fore, and suggests learning is in a supportive role. Could the opposite view also be relevant? Could learning be a driving force that places literacy in a secondary role? Or perhaps the relationship between learning and literacy is more balanced. The discussion in the final chapter will attempt to respond to these questions.

Another goal of this research was to draw upon sociocultural ideas of literacy and learning—which have been underutilized despite encouragement to do so (Darville, 2001; Sparks, 2002; Taylor & Blunt, 2001)—and apply these ideas directly to a program setting. An “analysis of school learning as situated requires a multilayered view of how knowing and learning are part of social practice” (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 40). This study has analysed an innovative program that has attempted to integrate literacy skill development and employment preparation. Only one of its three program components is a formal classroom, incorporating many of the traditional methods and approaches that can be found in a school setting. As students experience all three settings, how do their ideas of learning and literacy change? What are their insights? And what can a multilayered situated analysis tell us about adult literacy education programs?

B: Applied Literature

Very few studies have applied the theoretical ideas presented in the previous section—situated learning and situated literacy—to the field of adult literacy education. Subsequently, the following section will focus for the most part on the literature in a more indirect and generalized manner. Key concepts of this study—the lives of the students, program delivery and development, employment and literacy, and the impacts of literacy and employment preparation programs—have been explored in order to place this study within a context of applied research in the field.

STUDENTS IN ADULT LITERACY PROGRAMS

It is important to describe the kinds of students who attend adult literacy programs in order to understand their needs and goals and to see how the students who are the focus of this study are in many ways typical of the students described in the following section.

Descriptions of the students in programs will be devised using a variety of studies: statistical descriptions based on the IALS, qualitative studies that describe students' values related to education and employment, and survey studies that reveal students' motivations to attend programs. Overall, the studies produce a complex picture of students, their strengths, and their challenges in meeting their educational and employment goals.

Based on provincial guidelines (MTCU, 1999) for LBS programs in Ontario, literacy education can be designed to meet the needs of adults at IALS Level One (19 percent) and Level Two (28 percent). Added together, an astounding 47 percent of Ontarians, based on the IALS measures and interpretations, have literacy difficulties and need to address these if they are (according to the IALS) to participate fully in an increasingly knowledge-based economy. This statistic, although commonly used by policy makers and the literacy community, is beginning to undergo careful scrutiny (Sussman, 2003). One of the inherent problems with the IALS measures is that the overwhelming majority of people at Level Two don't feel they have any difficulties coping with day-to-day literacy demands. Adults at this level are therefore unlikely to participate in a literacy program. The discrepancy between perceived ability and prescribed deficit raises many issues according to Sticht (2001). Just what does IALS measure? Who determines and how does one determine a level of literacy that is good enough? Finally, can these measurements be useful to the people they are attempting to describe without doing harm by marginalizing them? Although these questions are outside

the realm of this study, they need to be considered in order to question the assumptions of the IALS data.

The people most likely to participate in some sort of literacy education are those at Level One, but less than 10 percent actually do (OLC, 2003). This makes some sense considering that only 5% of people actually feel their reading is poor based on the IALS self-assessment measures (Sticht, 2001). Sussman (2003) did further statistical analysis of the IALS data, with a particular focus on the students at Level One, in an attempt to use demographic information in order to increase participation in literacy programs. She found that over half of the adults at Level One were over the age of 56; there was a fairly even distribution of Anglophone, Francophone and Allophone (first language is neither French or English) adults; and 81 percent never completed high school (more than half of these adults didn't even start high school). Among her many recommendations, she suggested that programs address the particular literacy needs of older adults, and adults who have neither English or French as their mother tongue. She also recommended that future literacy statistics account for the number of adults with disabilities. She estimated that once older adults (54 percent) and Allophones (33 percent) are removed from the Level One category, the remainder (13 percent) are adults with some sort of learning, developmental, or physical disability.

Gottesman, Bennett, Nathan, and Kelly (1996) described students in a literacy program who could possibly be part of the 13 percent that Sussman made reference to. Based on formal test measures, students were described as sometimes having a developmental disorder or below average cognitive functioning, living in poverty, having few skills, unemployed, and experiencing health-related problems, especially substance abuse. Malicky

and Norman (1996), on the other hand, created profiles based on in-depth interviews that were markedly different. Their findings could help to understand the 33 percent of Allophones who are at IALS Level One. Over half of the 94 students in the study were born in a country other than Canada and did not speak English or French as a first language. These students lived in poverty but only a minority mentioned financial problems; and nearly half of the students belonged to at least one community or cultural group, suggesting they were connected to their communities.

With regards to their opinions about education, Quigley (1993) found that adults with low literacy skills who chose not to participate in a program valued education and learning but resisted attending literacy programs because they were aligned with schooling. In other words, they wanted to learn but didn't feel a school-based literacy program could meet their learning goals. In addition, adults with low literacy skills thought learning was distinct from literacy, and that the greatest deterrence to participation related to literacy program education, rather than the desire to learn. Zieghan (1992) also found that practical application, understanding, and challenge motivated adults with low literacy skills to learn. Both of the studies suggested that adults who chose not to participate in literacy programs viewed literacy within a school-based learning paradigm, whereas learning was viewed separately.

For the adults with low literacy skills who did want to enroll in a program, Long and Middleton (2001) found that over half of all 338 callers to literacy information lines were motivated to participate in a literacy program because of intrinsic goals, such as personal, social, or general education; whereas, the remainder were motivated by more extrinsic goals such as employment or retraining. Malicky and Norman (1994) found that learners entered a

program with job-related (functional) goals but viewed literacy learning in a much more skills-based and academic (fundamental) way. This could suggest, similar to Quigley's and Zieghan's findings, that they viewed learning separate from literacy. Further complicating these findings, Fagan (1988) found that 52 low literate adults (26 prison inmates and 26 learners in programs) "possessed a very restrictive view of literacy, viewing reading mainly as a decoding task and writing as a hand-writing and spelling activity" (p. 47). The distinction between learning and literacy will be explored in depth in the final chapter.

In a recent study, 34 learners from different literacy programs in Eastern Ontario were asked what they hoped to gain from a program, and what they thought the main role of a program should be (Pinsent-Johnson, Shefler & Hagedorn, 2002). These questions were shaped using a guide that described the philosophical purposes for literacy education, such as liberal, vocational, humanist, and liberatory (Quigley, 1997). It was found that certain kinds of answers were attributed to certain kinds of program settings. For example, students attending the college literacy program focused on obtaining skills for entry into a post-secondary diploma program. These students also had significantly higher levels of formal education (10 years or more). In comparison, students in a school board program were often focused on more personal goals, such as greater independence with day-to-day literacy demands and assisting children at home. Compared to the college students, these students had minimal levels of formal education (eight years or less). One of the main conclusions drawn from the study was that there is a need to describe students' literacy education goals and expectations on a continuum that takes into account the students' own learning development and other societal factors that shape their needs.

An important addition to this brief examination of students is Blunt and Richards' (1998) study on the work values and life roles of marginalized adult learners in ABE programs in Saskatchewan. It is one of the few studies that linked employment issues with students in literacy programs. Using two different inventories, they found that both work values and life roles differ slightly amongst ethnic groups (status and non-status Indians, Metis, nonnative Canadian born and landed immigrants) and gender. Overall, the 136 adult learners ranked personal development, economics, and achievement as their top three work values; whereas risk, physical prowess, and cultural identity were ranked the lowest. When the data from ethnic sub-groups was analysed "large differences between groups were observed on several items" (p. 170). There were few gender-related differences on the work values scale, and subtle differences on the life roles scale. Conclusions focused on the need to consider ethnic differences in ABE programs that are geared to employment.

Based on the above studies, a very complex picture of students and their challenges has been created. It is also important to note that only a fraction of those identified as having literacy challenges (according to the IALS) actually attend a literacy program. Those who do participate in programs face a multitude of societal labels and issues, in addition to low literacy skills. The students who are the focus of this study share many of these realities. In addition, the studies pointed to a divide between perceptions of learning and literacy, in which literacy was aligned with schooling and skill building. The study will explore this divide.

EMPLOYMENT AND LITERACY

Discussions of employment and literacy are dominated by the ideas of human capital, and related assumptions and thinking. The term *human capital* tries to capture the idea that a

nation's economic well-being is intricately tied to the abilities and capabilities of its workforce. Subsequently, education and literacy has become a key way to enhance workers' abilities. "Human capital is enhanced through increased literacy functioning of individuals; therefore, literacy serves as an occupational skill" (Blunt, 2001, p. 90). In this view of literacy, one that Blunt labels a "technical-rational view", literacy skills are those which lead to increased production and greater returns. Literacy, then, becomes a set of occupational or employability skills that include not only basic skills in reading, writing and math, but have been expanded to include such skills as technology, critical thinking, and lifelong learning.

Contrasting the technical-rational view of literacy is an emancipatory view, in which literacy is viewed to be "essential to social development, the maintenance of democratic institutions and the achievement of social equity and justice" (p. 89). Where the technical-rational view talks of essential skills and measures employment and literacy issues with numbers and more quantitative tools, the emancipatory view speaks of empowerment, self-confidence, and change, relying more on qualitative and often ethnographic measures of success. "Basic literacy skills by themselves are simply not enough. What is needed are the social skills as well, and if not explicitly taught or addressed, their lack will cause the best intended initiatives of policy to founder" (Falk, p. 13). *Social capital* is a term that is used to counter the focus on human capital, and is "concerned with restructuring identities so people can see themselves as learners, and in roles that they previously were unprepared to undertake" (p. 12). The following examples will highlight these two very different views of literacy and its relationship to employment.

In a statistical study that used data from the 1994 IALS, Kapsalis (1998) found that literacy skills were a strong predictor of employability amongst adults who received social

assistance. He found that annual earnings' levels were correlated more with literacy level than education level. Social assistance recipients had lower levels of education and literacy than non- social assistance recipients. In addition, social assistance recipients had lower literacy levels than non-social assistance recipients, even though both groups had the same level of education. Finally, higher literacy levels were associated with work that required daily literacy activities. He also suggested that social assistance recipients who were working were more likely to engage in literacy activities at home than those who were not. The study concluded that there may be a "virtuous cycle between work and literacy, whereby higher literacy leads to more employment, while more employment improves literacy skills" (p. 2).

When the IALS data were used to determine the impacts that literacy skills had on earnings amongst the general population, Green and Riddell (2001) found that literacy had a large impact on earnings, and each additional year of education increased earnings by 8.3%. Contradicting the findings of the above study, the authors suggested that education level—and not work experience—had a greater impact on literacy. They suggested that work experience had little effect on literacy. They also found that literacy skills "seriously impact" how well immigrants adjusted to the labour market, and parents' education level did not impact their children's earnings as adults. The authors emphasized how the combination of literacy and education had the greatest impact on earnings, further supporting the ideas of human capital.

Although Smith (1999) acknowledged that low levels of literacy are directly related to employment and self-sufficiency (e.g., IALS found that people with lower levels of literacy tended to be unemployed for longer periods of time and received lower wages), literacy levels alone cannot be targeted as the only reason these adults were unable to sustain

supportive employment without depending on social assistance. She suggested that the labour market and its lack of permanent, full-time jobs that can provide a salary above minimum wage (currently \$6.85 in Ontario which equates to \$14, 248 per year) played a significant role. The real question is, what has more of an influence on an adult's ability to find a job that can sustain his or her family: the types of jobs available or literacy levels? Most often it is "single parents (mostly women), persons with disabilities, older workers, Aboriginal people, youth, and undereducated workers" (p. 15) who are trapped by a labour market that offers few opportunities that will enable them to support themselves and their families. "Teaching people to read and write won't create jobs that don't exist, make it easier to get by on the minimum wage, or get rid of discrimination" (National Anti-Poverty Organization, 1992).

Supporting the above was a U.S. study that found greater earnings disparities *within* similar literacy skill groups than *between* skill groups (Devroye & Freeman, 2001). In other words, workers with the same literacy scores experienced greater wage differences when compared to workers from various score groups. Using the National Adult Literacy Survey data, Raudenbush and Kasim (1998) confirmed findings that the majority of wage disparities were found within occupations and not between them. They suggested that discrimination and occupational segregation may explain earnings differences experienced by women and ethnic minorities in the US.

Clearly, there is more than one way of looking at the relationship between literacy, employment, and earnings. It is not always safe to assume that low literacy levels are the only predictor of lower wages. Compounding the relationship between low literacy and earnings are societal structures such as discrimination, job segregation, and a growing

number of low-paying, non-unionized and insecure jobs—all of which had an impact on the participants in this study.

ADULT LITERACY PROGRAM MODELS

A variety of delivery models are used in adult literacy programs. Taylor (2001) suggested there are four key organizing frameworks in adult literacy education: community-based, workplace, school-based, and family literacy. Issues related to community-based literacy, school-based literacy and workplace literacy (as it relates to employment preparation, compared to on-the-job literacy education) will be examined because of their connection to the three settings of the employment preparation program. It should be noted that the employment preparation program cannot be neatly aligned with only one of the main organizing frameworks, but, in fact, borrows from three of the four.

School-Based Programs

In Ontario, most of the 46,000 adults who participate in programs attend a school-based program (A. Rachlis, Keynote Speech, LBS Manager's Day, May, 2003), such as one run by a community college or a school board. These school-based programs are also referred to as classroom programs. It is important to examine these kinds of programs because they relate directly to the classroom setting of the study. The classes most often consist of a medium to large group of students (12-25) and are often taught by a paid instructor who has at least a post-secondary degree. Although the programs may be housed in a college or school board setting, they access a separate body of funding and are not usually integrated into the school board or community college structure. For example, literacy programs run by a school board are most often part of adult continuing education

departments and not elementary or secondary school education. School-based programs most often focus on the improvement of literacy skills in order to help students acquire academic credentials—to enter a high school credit program, to pass a community college entry test, or to acquire a GED. Subsequently, the curriculum is most often based on a schooling model, and the accumulation of academic literacy skills is emphasized over literacy uses in other contexts such as home, community and work.

Recent research from Beder and Medina (2001) claimed to be “the first major study since 1975 to investigate classroom behaviour in adult literacy education” (p. ii). Guided by grounded theory in order to develop a “broad, panoramic, macro picture” of classroom behaviours (p. 8), data were collected from two 90-minute classroom observations of 20 classrooms in eight states, and three 45-minute teacher interviews. Findings were organized into three categories: the content and structure of instruction, social processes in the classroom, and factors that shaped the dynamics of the class. The authors found that the dominant mode of instruction in a class concentrated on the accumulation of factual and discrete skills, whereas meaning-making instruction—characterized by collaboration, authentic materials, the teacher taking on the role of facilitator, and the development of higher-level abilities—was found in only 20 percent of the classes. The seven social processes that occurred in the class were sanctioning, engagement, directing, correcting, helping, expressing values and opinions, and community. These social processes were also described in greater detail in Taylor, King and Pinsent-Johnson (2002). The final broad category in the Beder and Medina study was shaping factors. These were the forces that influenced the classroom outside of the actions and behaviours of the people in the class, such as enrollment turbulence, classroom composition, and funding pressures. This study

directed attention to many of the same ideas that will be explored in the present study through situated learning, such as the content and structure of instruction, social processes in the classroom, and factors that shaped the dynamics of the class.

The following two studies did not explore the class or groups of students as a whole, rather, they addressed features of the adult literacy classroom, namely, meaning-making and collaborative practices. Kegan, Broderick, Drago-Severson, Helsing, Popp and Portnow (2001) researched groups of learners in settings other than a class, but directed their discussion towards the sociocultural and meaning-making system of the adult literacy classroom. The study was guided by a sociocultural view of adult development, and specifically “the development of individuals’ ways of making sense of their inner and outer experience” (Kegan et al., p. 3). They referred to their perspective as constructive-developmental to suggest that a person constructs reality based on changing and developing belief systems. They identified three ways of knowing—instrumental, socializing, and self-authoring—that they used to help guide their exploration of students’ roles, learning goals, expectations, definitions of success, and educational practices.

Using a variety of data collection methods—such as open-ended interviews, structured exercises, classroom observations, group interviews and quantitative survey measures—over a one-year period, the authors presented three major findings. Uniting their findings was their assertion that there is another form of diversity—besides culture, age, race, and gender—that adults brought to the classroom, and that was the different meaning systems or ways of knowing held by each student. They found that adults experienced significant change in the classroom; the cohort or student peer group was important to adult learning; and, adult learners had a variety of meaning-making systems. These findings were referred to

collectively as *a new pluralism*. Kegan et al. suggested that there is a need for educators to understand and take into account the diversity of students' systems of understanding and meaning-making. This will then lead to more appropriate and various program designs and outcomes to accommodate the different systems of meaning and students' developmental growth from instrumental to socializing and ultimately self-authoring learners. The authors also stressed the need for more learner-centred, qualitative explorations of the adult basic education experience.

In the third classroom study, Taylor, King, Pinsent-Johnson, and Lothian (2003) explored collaborative practices in adult literacy classrooms. Their view was guided by a Vygotskian sociocultural theory of learning with a specific focus on the role that collaborative learning had in moving learners towards the Zone of Proximal Development or independence of learning. Using a qualitative case study methodology, the authors collected data from five sources: 1) observations, 2) in-depth interviews of learners and 3) instructors, 4) a learner group interview, and 5) documents. In their findings, they developed an organizing framework that presented four types of collaborative practices used amongst the students—social learning behaviours: negotiation behaviours, feedback behaviours, and patterns of directionality. Influencing these practices were factors such as the nature of the literacy task, the classroom socialization process, and the instructor's role and teaching style. The findings focused on three areas: 1) the relationship between learners reaching the Zone of Proximal Development and current MTCU program guidelines that fostered the development of self-direction and lifelong learning; 2) the developmental needs of both students and teachers in fostering a collaborative environment; 3) and theoretical support for

an understanding of formal adult literacy learning through the ideas of cognitive apprenticeships and communities of practice.

Community-Based Programs

Although there is no one definition or description of community-based programs (Norton, 2001) there are several defining features that distinguish them. Community-based programs relate to the coffee shop setting in the employment preparation program. This setting draws more from the philosophies inherent in community-based literacy than school-based.

One of the main philosophical underpinnings of community-based programs is based on the ideas of Paulo Freire who used the economic, social, political, and power issues of Brazilian labourers as a context for literacy education in the 1950s. He urged students to think critically about issues and to act in ways that would promote change. Drawing on these ideas, community-based programs are “shaped around critical awareness, reflection and action about power and power relations, inside and outside programs” (Norton, 2001, p. 5). Community-based programs usually rely on volunteer tutors, including students, but some also have paid instructors; they are often located in the communities they serve, and work with other agencies in the community; and they are learner-centred in that they focus on the literacy concerns of students as they relate to personal and community issues.

In a qualitative case study of an inner-city community-based program, the nature of literacy learning for five students was investigated. Malicky, Katz, Norton and Norman (1997) discussed three dominant themes that arose from their data: reproduction and resistance, social networks, and empowerment. Guiding their study was Gaber-Katz and

Watson's (1991) interpretation of community-based literacy programs that were seen to be learner-centred, focused on critical literacy, and promoted community-building.

Malicky et al. found that adults in the community-based program accepted society's view of themselves as outsiders and identified themselves as "illiterate" despite their literacy skills; yet, they also rejected society's interpretations of their lives with regard to other issues. In relation to their schooling, the adults blamed themselves for their low literacy skills; yet, they also said that the schools had been at fault. The adult learners in the program, particularly the women, were part of a social network inside the program, which provided an opportunity for social interactions. In relation to the final theme of empowerment, the research revealed that learners moved from "silence to speech", barriers between staff and students diminished, learners began to take more control of their learning and other aspects of their lives, and learners engaged in political activities. Most of these instances of empowerment were seen on an individual level rather than a social level. In addition, their engagement in political and public activities seemed to be done "more to meet the expectations of others than to bring about social change" (p. 101).

In her 8-month study of five community-based literacy programs, Campbell (1996) explored participatory literacy practices with a specific focus on power relationships. Based on the work of Fingeret and Jurmo (1989), Campbell defined participatory literacy programs as those which "share the power equally among learners and staff" (p.1). She found that "identity politics play a pivotal role in the transformation or reproduction of power relationships between and among literacy workers and students" (p. 127). In other words, the role of a student (as perceived by both students and staff) at times became a barrier to full

participation in the decision-making process of the programs, despite the programs' efforts and desires to subscribe to a participatory approach.

Drawing from the same data, Campbell (2001) focused on the actual participatory literacy practices of the literacy staff. She found that two of the three literacy workers, whose role was to support the learners and not instruct them, placed a greater emphasis on "doing" rather than "being". All three staff members experienced difficulty implementing a "bottom-up" approach to encourage and allow student decision-making: they were uncomfortable with the power shift; they were uncertain about their evolving role from instructor to "therapist"; and they recognized that students were not comfortable listening to the personal stories or narratives of others. Campbell also found that students were willing to take on leadership roles but needed more support from the literacy staff.

Employment Preparation Programs

Although programs address literacy issues related to employment, very few studies discussed literacy programs that focused only on employment and, conversely, very few studies looked at employment preparation programs that included a literacy component. St. Clair (2001) noted "program administrators and government funders considered the combination of basic skills along with trade preparation unusual in Canada" (p. 132). This finding underscores the uniqueness of the employment preparation program that is the focus of this study, particularly the job placement component, in which students enhance their learning outside the program in a supported job placement.

One of the few examples of an employment preparation program for adults with low literacy skills was an analysis of the program from an intellectual capital and critical education perspective. In his case study of the Cooking and Basic Skills (CABS) program, St

Clair (2001) found that literacy was taught in the same way despite students' diverse employment goals; literacy instruction was separated from vocational instruction; literacy instructors had a lower status compared to vocational instructors; and at times there was animosity between the trades and literacy instructors. Based on Bourdieu's intellectual capital perspective and related concepts of social and cultural capital, St. Clair argued that the work of the literacy instructors was viewed as less important and valuable for several reasons compared to the work of the vocational instructors. To address the tensions between the two groups, the author suggested there should be a collaborative approach in which literacy and vocational skills are delivered simultaneously. In addition, instructors should work together to develop a curriculum that also addressed the "demands of the workplace and the needs of the worker", and broader measures of success needed to be developed. Although not stated specifically, St. Clair's findings may hint at the distinction between literacy and learning, similar to Zieghan and Quigley's findings. In addition, the need to have a collaborative approach between literacy and vocational skills that is directly connected to the needs of the workplace, fits into a sociocultural approach that will be fully explored in this study.

In her study of the language and literacy challenges experienced by adult learners in a pre-apprenticeship job-training program, Bell (2000) analysed literacy competency amongst both native and non-native speakers on English. Using the Luke and Freebody (1997) four-tier model of literate competency, Bell found that native speakers of English took longer to complete the program than non-native speakers and this may have been related to literacy challenges. More specifically, students experienced difficulties with three of the four literacy competencies: text-meaning practices (such as vocabulary); pragmatic practices (such as understanding the purpose of written text); and critical practices (such as critical analysis and

questioning the content of text). She also found that those who learned initial literacy in a second language had lower success rates. For example, a student born in Canada who learned to speak Italian or Greek at home, then went to school and learned English was weaker than a student who had strong literacy skills in a first language before learning a second language. Bell suggested that job-training programs should better address the needs of changing workplaces, and teach literacy skills that go beyond the initial level of decoding.

Martin (1999) proposed that literacy programs incorporate a continuum of models, which could meet the different employment needs of students. Although he has modeled the creation of a continuum of programs based on United States welfare reform, his ideas could be easily translated to Canadian and Ontario programs. Nearly half of the literacy students who enrolled in Canadian programs were on some form of social assistance (Long & Middleton, 2001). A continuum of program models that matched students based on their employment needs would include the following: 1) academic programs, such as GED programs, and competency-based programs; 2) literacy integrated with soft skills, such as job readiness, and family literacy; 3) literacy integrated with occupational skills, such as machine training and Personal Support Worker; and 4) situated context and cognition, which could be geared to workplace programs.

Each of the above studies supports an integrated model of literacy skills with employment skills. Imel (1998) pushes the idea further and states: “Increasingly, evidence demonstrates that the emphasis on just getting people into employment will not result in employment for self-sufficiency” (p. 2). A synthesis of research on welfare-to-work programs (Strawn, 1997 in Imel) revealed that neither programs emphasizing job-search strategies nor those focusing on adult education alone had long-term effectiveness in

increasing participants' earnings and job tenure. Instead, stated Imel, "the most effective welfare-to-work programs share a balanced approach that mixes job search, education, job training, and paid and unpaid work experience"(p. 2). The employment preparation program follows such a model. This study will be an opportunity to explore some of the issues and tensions that may arise in such an integrated approach.

IMPACT OF LITERACY PROGRAMS

The impacts of literacy programs, in relation to both gains in employment and the four broad areas of literacy introduced in the previous chapter—skills, tasks, practices, and critical reflection—will be briefly discussed. The literacy definition will be used to highlight impacts on skills and tasks, which are usually measured using tests; practices or the active use of literacy in real-life (outside the school setting); and critical reflection or the use of literacy to affect personal and/or social change.

Based on the literature, improvements in literacy skill development are minimal. Although participation in a program has a positive influence on continuing education, and students perceive an improvement in their skills, test measures indicate little or no change in students' literacy skills (Beder, 1999; Smith & Sheehan-Holt, 1999, Brooks, Davies, Duckett, Hutchison, Kendall, & Wilkin, 2000). In one example, Brooks et al. (2000) found "undramatic but worthwhile" progress in reading and writing skills (the length of the text and hand-writing improved but there was not a reduction in errors and complexity). They also found that regular attendance, qualified tutors, and tutors with classroom help are factors associated with higher reading scores.

An area that seems to show more consistent positive impacts is the use of literacy in daily life. Purcell-Gates, Degener, Jacobson, and Soler (2000) found that literacy related to

daily life or literacy practices increased when authentic materials and activities were used in the literacy program. “The degree of authenticity in the activities and materials used in adult literacy instruction was significantly related to the likelihood that adult literacy students in those classes will report change in frequency and/or type of out-of-school literacy practices” (p. 56). Affecting this was the amount of time the student spent in the program (more time in the program led to greater use of literacy), and the level at which the student entered the program (lower level students incorporated more practices in their daily lives). Bingham et al. described increased use in three of the eight literacy practices they analysed: paying bills, working with numbers on the job, and greater use of memorization skills. Supporting these findings, Moulton (1997) described how literacy learners began to see progress only after they made a conscious effort to use their new skills, particularly writing, in a context other than the classroom. She referred to this process as *overt literacy action*.

Related to the active use of literacy are the positive changes that students experienced on a personal level. Using self-reports, numerous studies have found that participation in a literacy program led to increased self-confidence, self-esteem, and self-image. Beder found that learners were able to achieve their personal goals through participation in a literacy program. In addition, their self-image improved and self-report data suggested parents increased their involvement in their children’s education. Other studies have shown an increase in self-esteem (Bingham et al, 1999) and an increase in community involvement (Ebert and Bingham, 2000).

In the final literacy domain, the area of critical reflection, the literature does not produce consistent examples of positive impacts. In general, students did not “accept the emancipation myth of literacy” (Millar, 1998) but did demonstrate an awareness of and

resistance to many of the power structures that affected their lives. Related to this, Malicky, Katz, Norton and Norman (1997) found that students discussed issues of empowerment, not on a societal level, but on a more individual level. Finally, Campbell (1996) found that social roles had an impact on the reproduction of power balances within the literacy program and suggested there was a need to recreate new roles and identities for both students and staff in order to address power imbalances.

There is some contradiction as to whether or not participation in a literacy program leads to employment gains. In general, Beder (1999) found that participation in a program resulted in increased earnings and led to a reduction in welfare dependence, but how this occurred in relation to the literacy program was unclear. Other studies have found that students experienced an increased rate of employment (Bingham, Ebert & Smith, 1999) and programs that focused on basic skills and work place preparation supported employment outcomes (Ebert & Bingham, 2000). Contradicting these findings is Malicky and Norman's (1994) study that literacy students returned to the same kinds of low-paying jobs they had before participating in the program. The authors concluded that participation in a literacy program had no "direct, causal" relationship with employment. A key issue from the findings would be to determine the reasons for employment gains where they were noted. Were gains related to programs that had an integrated approach to employment preparation? And, conversely, did people see fewer gains in programs that focused only on literacy skill development?

SUMMARY

Only a fraction of adults who have low literacy skills based on the IALS measures actually participate in adult literacy education programs. Those at IALS Level One who are

most likely to seek out a program are over the age of 56 (54%), have neither English or French as a first language (33%), and may have a disability (13%). How should the literacy needs of these adults be met? Could a literacy-as-practices approach be a better way to meet their needs than a skills and tasks approach? In addition, if adults with low literacy are resistant to schooling models, could an approach based on sociocultural ideas be more appealing?

According to Long and Middleton (2001), adults similar to the ones described above are motivated to attend a literacy program by both intrinsically based goals (they want to be more independent) and extrinsic goals (they want to find a better job). Those who hope that improved literacy skills will equate to greater earnings are faced with contradictory messages. Initial statistical analysis of the IALS data supports the notion that higher literacy and education levels equate to higher wages and more stable employment. But a closer examination of these statistics reveals that greater wage discrepancies exist within occupations than amongst people with the same literacy level between occupations. This suggests that discriminatory practices may play a greater role in wage disparities than literacy levels. What does this mean for the students at IALS Level One who hope a literacy program may help them achieve their employment goals?

Students who enter programs with employment goals often learn only the skills and tasks related to employment that are generic and transferable. Rarely, are students able to learn skills that are actually used in employment while participating in programs that are predominantly school-based. In other words, students might learn to write a resume, practice an interview, and learn about the taxes taken off a pay cheque, without actually applying for a job or being in a work setting during this learning period. As an alternative, community

based programs, which subscribe to a participatory approach, might focus on diversity issues or labour rights but, again, without the direct link to a work setting. Neither approach would actually support the development of specific job skills, such as enhancing math development while learning to use a cash register. If school-based programs have a skills and tasks approach, and community programs use a critical approach, which programs, if any, support the development of employment-related literacy practices, and if any do, what does this look like?

Clearly, participation in a literacy program has substantial impacts on the lives of students, but these impacts may not be the ones policy makers and funders are hoping for. Most of the positive impacts of literacy program participation are related to the enhanced self-esteem and confidence of the individual, and not a significant improvement in literacy skill level. If mostly what is taught is skills and mostly what is gained is confidence, there is a very large disconnect between a program's intention and results. Could a literacy-as-practices approach help to bridge this?

Research Questions

The employment preparation program, which is the focus of this study, is a unique opportunity to explore some of these issues. It is one of the few programs that has integrated literacy development with learning about employment. There is a potential in this program to explore many of the questions raised above. The intent of this study is to determine how situated perspectives of literacy and learning can help to inform program development in adult literacy education. How do situated views of literacy and learning contribute to an understanding of the employment preparation program and its three settings? a) What is the material and knowledge *content* in each of the settings? b) What are the physical and non-

physical aspects of the settings that shape the *context* for literacy and learning? c) Who are the people and what are the activities that comprise the literacy and learning *community of practice* in each setting? d) And, how do people *participate* with each other and the activities in each setting?

Chapter Three - Methodology

This study was guided by the methodological approach associated with a qualitative case study design. It was also shaped and influenced by my own presuppositions and the theoretical framework. According to Merriam (2001), the case study is suited to the examination of complex social units in real-life situations that can lead to insights and illuminated meanings. In this case study, the social unit was the adult literacy employment preparation program, comprising three distinct settings—a classroom, coffee shop, and job placement in the community. A case study lent itself to the situation because it permitted a wide focus that could incorporate different data sources, such as interviews with students and instructors, documents, and the reflections of the researcher. In addition, a case study matched the intent of this study, in that it could help to focus on particular signposts that could guide continued analysis of adult literacy development within a theoretical sociocultural framework.

Specific interpretations and definitions of case study research were also used to build the methodological design of this study. Based on Merriam's interpretation, a defining characteristic of case study research is the notion that it is a bounded system. In this case, the students who participated in each of the three distinct settings within the program became the bounded system. This system was not bounded by walls, but by membership and participation in each of the settings. An analysis of this membership and participation was guided by the ideas of situated learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Stein, 1998), which had a direct influence on data collection and data analysis.

Stake (2000) suggested a case study can be further identified by its overall intent or purpose. An instrumental case study can be used to examine a particular issue, setting, event,

or person “in order to provide insight into an issue or to redraw a generalization” (p. 437). The case is used to help facilitate understanding of something else. In this research, the employment preparation program was used to help facilitate an understanding of learning, literacy, and work within a sociocultural frame.

SITE AND PARTICIPANTS

A final defining feature of this case study was that it was *particularistic*. This refers to the “focus on a particular situation, event, program, or phenomenon” (Merriam, 2001, p. 29). The employment preparation program provided a unique approach to literacy education in that it combined distinct learning settings: a traditional classroom, on-site employment training, and an off-site employment placement. In the classroom setting, students were primarily engaged in activities about literacy; they did spelling, grammar, math, and writing to help them develop the literacy skills that they used in the program, in the community, and at home. The on-site employment training was a coffee shop, operated by the staff and students. The coffee shop was open three mornings per week for about 90 minutes, and drew its customers from the other programs in the building, such as ESL classes and other training programs. The third learning setting experienced by the students in the employment preparation program was an employment placement located in the community. (Greater details of each of the three settings will be presented in the next chapter.) This combined approach was unique and permitted an analysis of the students’ perceptions of learning and literacy as they were engaged in activities in each of the three settings.

There were also reasons based on the conceptual framework of the study that this particular program was chosen. The underlying premise of situated learning is that human learning is social and occurs when the learner engages in the social practices of daily life. It

was important to find a program that helped students bring learning *out* of the classroom and *into* real-life situations. The employment preparation program had the coffee shop, in which students had an opportunity to develop skills in a controlled real-life setting, and the job placements, which were real-life settings. It was also important to choose a program that did not have structures, such as a prescribed curriculum, that could unduly suppress the social nature of learning. The program needed to be an environment that encouraged interaction and group learning as opposed to individualized instruction and independent learning in order to fully explore the sociocultural nature of learning and literacy.

Finally, the site was also chosen for personal reasons. I have worked with the school board that runs the program for over ten years, and participated in the initial development of the employment preparation program. I knew the instructors and students in the program, and thought this would ease data collection. I also continued to work at the same site as the program during the study, and this choice, although not always easy, helped to strengthen the study. The day-to-day reality of program development informed my theoretical thinking and, in turn, theoretical ideas helped to move along the development of the employment preparation program and the general literacy program.

The participants were drawn from the program according to one main criterion: they had to be currently participating—or had recently participated in—each of the three program settings. The reason behind the criterion was to ensure that the participants could discuss each of the settings in some detail. This kind of selection, although not thought about initially, also ensured that only the students who felt positively about the program participated in the study. The students who may not have shared this outlook would have expressed their dissatisfaction by refusing to participate in one of the three settings, and

would have left the program. Subsequently, the participants in the study are those who had positive experiences and felt the program met their needs.

Although the eight student participants were enrolled in a unique literacy education program, they shared many of the same socioeconomic characteristics with students in other daytime literacy classes in large urban centres. The students attended the program during the day for 15 hours per week. Most were unemployed and received social assistance (general welfare, and disability), but wanted to find part-time or full-time employment. None of the students had attended a regular high school program in Canada, and all were learning literacy skills below a high school level. Some of the students were born in Canada and English was their native language; others were born in English-speaking countries and had later emigrated. The majority had immigrated to Canada from non-English speaking countries. These students were not considered to be English as a Second Language (ESL) students, and were often referred from ESL classes to the literacy program. For a non-native English speaker to participate in the class, they had to meet the following criteria: a proficient level of spoken English, an incomplete high school education in their native countries, and very little or no paid work experience in Canada and/or their native countries. There were also students enrolled in the program who had a developmental disability. Besides the eight student participants, each of the three program instructors also participated in the study. Biographies of the participants appear in the following chapter as part of the study's findings.

Access to the Site

I followed both informal and formal procedures to gain access to the program for research purposes. Informal procedures meant I had conversations with both managers and instructors to discuss the study and the roles of both the program and the people in it. During

these discussions, the instructors and managers were encouraged to give their opinions about the study and suggestions regarding data collection (which will be detailed later). Formalized procedures were then followed, but only after I had received verbal approval from the program manager and instructors whose classes I would be entering during the study. Formal site access approval consisted of an email correspondence with the principal of continuing education and written approval from the school board's ethics committee ([Appendix A](#)).

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Similar to site access, both procedural and personal ethical approvals were considered. First of all, procedural approval was gained from the school board's ethics committee as referred to above, and the university's ethics board ([Appendix B](#)). As part of the university's ethics procedures, and in keeping with the anonymity, confidentiality, respect, and rights of the participants, letters of consent were explained to and signed by each of the participants. Written consent was obtained from the students on two different occasions: for their participation in the observation sessions ([Appendix C](#)), and for their participation in the individual and group interviews ([Appendix D](#)). The students who participated in the observation session were not necessarily the same students who were interviewed. The letters for students followed plain language guidelines (Multiculturalism and Citizenship Canada, 1991). In addition, the letters were read aloud to the students. Formal consent was also obtained from each of the three instructors ([Appendix E](#)). Accompanying these matters of procedure, I also considered how I would 'be' towards the participants, as Schwandt (2000) poses, particularly when addressing the issues of reciprocity and signing consent letters.

Consent Letters

The presentation of the consent letters to the instructors and students raised interesting ethical considerations that impacted the relationships I had with both the students and instructors. Presentation of the consent letter to colleagues who I worked with as an instructor and administrator, and to the students who I had either taught in the past or assessed and counseled, signified a change in our relationships. For colleagues, the letter clarified that the study was transparently connected to my personal work as a student at a university, rather than my work as a program administrator. This was helpful because I did not want colleagues to perceive the research as an evaluation of their work, their classes, or their students. The letter confirmed that the research was not being conducted by and for the program; I was not directly accountable to the program manager, but to a university-based supervisor. The instructors also recognized that the letter was a procedural matter that was more of an obligatory bureaucratic requirement than a symbol of power and authority.

The consent letters played a different role with the students; a role that was perhaps more of a barrier than a clarification, as in the situation with the instructors. Informed consent is not a simple procedural activity and “requires analysis as much as what are routinely and easily considered as ‘data’ ” (Fine, Weis, Wessen & Wong, 2000, p. 113). The first letter altered the relationship of support, trust, and collegiality that existed between the students and me. I am under no misconception that I am seen as one of the students; I am fully aware that I am seen in a position of power, and in a vastly different socioeconomic group. But our occasional jokes and conversations about shared events helped to connect us a little. The consent letter then seemed to distance us. Even more worrisome, was the perception that the letter suggested I mistrusted a simple verbal agreement. It signified that verbal consent between people who are familiar with each other was not adequate in this

situation. When the second letter was presented, instead of compounding their original perceptions, it may have served to alleviate and change their initial perceptions. The second letter was signed quickly by the students. In addition, they didn't want me to read it to them and had no questions about it, unlike the first letter. With the second letter, they may have viewed it as yet another procedural matter. The issue of informed consent and the presentation of the consent form became more of an issue (mostly for me) than I had anticipated.

Reciprocity

As a researcher, I took from the participants: I took their actions, their words, and private thoughts, and re-presented them in a format that I now claim to be mine. What was appropriate to return to them? For some, the opportunity to participate in a study was novel and possibly considered worthwhile in its own right; I listened attentively to their opinions and gave voice to ideas that are rarely heard. I had considered paying the participants for their time, but this seemed inappropriate and could have caused offence. I knew all of the participants and saw them regularly. I had the feeling that they were willing to participate simply because I had asked, and because they wanted to help me. A financial transaction may have belittled their genuine willingness to offer assistance. True reciprocity in this case would be returning my time and myself because that is what I took. At the end of the study, I hosted a luncheon for all of the participants. In addition, I have begun developing a resource, based on the study's findings and discussion, that instructors can use with their students to help them reflect on their learning, their goals, and the personal changes that they are striving to achieve.

DATA COLLECTION

Six data sources were collected: field notes from class observations; individual interviews with the instructors; individual interviews with the students; a group interview with the students; documents such as curriculum guides, teaching materials and student writing; and my notes from a reflective journal. The data collection was “a recursive, interactive process” (Merriam, 2001, p. 134), in which one source influenced and led to other sources. For example, the observation checklist and field notes helped to shape interview questions, the individual interview data guided the group interview, and both of these data sources directed the document analysis. The reflective journal was not only used to organize thoughts, reflect on the process, and examine assumptions, but it was also a way to organize, capture, and process my own experiences related to the research questions.

Observation

During six 90-minute observation sessions in the classroom and coffee shop I focused on the observable elements of situated learning as described by Stein (1998). I looked and listened for the following: the ways in which students’ and instructors’ knowledge and experiences influenced learning; the physical setting, including the tools and activities; the community of people engaging in literacy, learning and work practices; and the ways in which these people engaged in literacy, learning and work practices ([Appendix F](#)). I took on the role of *observer as participant*, based on Merriam. This meant that my role as researcher was known to the students and instructors, and I participated in the group on occasion but this role was secondary. While in the classroom and coffee shop, I was sometimes asked to help with an activity or I sometimes talked to students while they were engaged in an activity in order to understand what they were doing and why. After observing for short periods or

witnessing an interaction that I wanted to capture in detail, I would slip quietly into a small office or into the hallway in order to write field notes. I would then return to the coffee shop or classroom and continue the observation session. I purposely avoided writing notes in front of the students and instructors in order not to create discomfort and unease. The observation notes were key to creating a detailed description of the physical settings, in addition to the interactions and activities in the settings that formed four vignettes in the next chapter.

Initially, I thought I would be able to observe students in their job placements but this proved to be unrealistic. Students were very nervous about being observed and having me enter their job placement settings. The instructor who visited the students at their placements also felt my observation would not be easily facilitated: she expressed concern about getting permission for me to go into placements sites, and worried that the sites may think they were part of the study. For these reasons, I decided not to accompany students to their placement sites, but instead asked them to describe their work at their placements during the individual interview sessions.

Student Interviews

The same students who were observed in the coffee shop and classroom were also interviewed. In addition, each of the three program instructors was interviewed. The elements of situated learning were used to design the interview questions ([Appendix G](#)) and the questions focused more on the unseen elements of learning, such as motivations, personal learning values and goals, ideal learning conditions, and the impacts of learning in their lives. I also asked students to describe what they did and who they worked with on their job placements, in order to make up for not observing this setting.

During the interviews, it was equally important to not only focus on the *whats* of the interview process, but to also focus on the *hows* of the process, which included paying attention to the interview context, body language of the participants, and possible silences (Fontana & Frey, 2000). After each of the recorded 45 minute to one-hour sessions, I transcribed all of the tapes. Then, after reading through the transcriptions, I wrote a narrative of the interview to capture the essential elements of the conversations. The narratives focused on the key ideas expressed in the interviews and included extensive quotations from the transcripts. The narratives were then returned to all of the participants (and read if desired to the students) as part of a member-checking process.

I was aware of my position of power with the students, and came to the conclusion that there was very little I could do to close the gap between who I was (program instructor, white, middle-class, educated), and who they were (multi-ethnic, visible minority, social assistance dependent, and disabled). We had very different life experiences that could not and should not be disregarded, and I was in a position of power that could not be ignored. All I could do was listen to their stories with all of my mental, physical, and emotional attention. This meant I had to listen with an open heart. This was not simply a matter of being respectful nor passing judgment in an attempt to mentally understand; but it was more about opening the self up to their described experiences. It was about feeling their words and not just thinking about them.

Instructor Interviews

The instructors were asked very similar questions as the students about the settings and the overall program ([Appendix H](#)). It was the instructor interviews—which turned out to be a group interview with individual email follow-up—that were most influenced by my

beliefs, my role as researcher, and my background. I was constantly aware of my dual roles as program administrator and researcher, and these roles changed in different situations. Stake (1995) suggested that one role may work better for certain people and certain situations. At times, I found myself being *the researcher* when it was important not to be the program administrator in order to distance myself from the program and my perceived leadership role in the program. For example, when asked about the research, I would talk about ideas around literacy and learning and how I saw these fitting into and shaping the program, as opposed to the opinions of instructors and students and how these might influence the program. I also postponed staff evaluations, initiated by the program's managers, which were to be implemented during the data collection phase. This was done so my research would not be confused with my role as a program administrator. Another role I slipped into was that of graduate student when it was important to shift power imbalances that were weighted towards me in my roles as researcher and as program administrator. For example, I changed the structure of the instructor interviews. Instead of having individual interviews, I asked them to establish the interview format. After a casual discussion during coffee break, the instructors decided that they would prefer to participate in a group interview with individual email follow-up. After an hour-long group interview with the three instructors, I transcribed their data then wrote narratives with key quotations. These narratives were sent back to each instructor in an email attachment. Within the narrative, I posed questions to individual instructors to get more detailed information, clarifications, and elaborations on various points. They then returned the attachment with their responses. This procedure worked very well, and I would repeat it in similar circumstances. It shifted the balance of power in the interview session; it permitted instructors to build on each other's

ideas; yet, it also allowed for individual reflection and feedback in the follow-up email exchange.

Group Interview

After the individual student interviews, seven of the eight students participated in a group interview. One student was absent from school the day of the interview. The group interview, along with all other interviews, including the instructor's group interview, were conducted in a private office in the school that hosted the program. This was a convenient and neutral site that was not used as part of the program's regular activities. Before beginning the interview, the students had read their narratives from their individual interviews. The group interview was an opportunity to bring the students together in order to share their views about issues that emerged from both the individual interviews and previous observation sessions. The group interview also helped to shift the balance of power towards the students and away from me. In a one-on-one interview, power is shifted towards the interviewer, but in a group, in which the interviewer is outnumbered, power can be more evenly distributed. This power shift helped to "foster free expression of ideas, encouraging the members of the group to speak up" (Frey & Fontana, 1993 cited in Madriz, 2000, p. 838).

As with the other interviews, the group interview was transcribed, but a narrative was not done. My reason for doing narratives in the individual interviews did not align with the group interview. In the individual interviews, the narratives were completed for two reasons: to allow a more readable document to be given to students and instructors for member-checking; and to begin to reduce data and focus on key issues. The group interview was not reviewed by the participating students, and it was used, not to illuminate new issues, but to

build on previous data sources, such as the observations and individual interviews. For these reasons, I felt a narrative was not useful.

Document Analysis

Documents that included planning and curriculum guides, teaching materials and student work were analyzed for two reasons: to complement the words of the instructors and students, and to assess how they could be used within a sociocultural learning environment. The following questions were used to guide analysis: How are the documents and materials connected to the students' daily experiences? How do they reflect the situations, values, and beliefs of the students and teachers? How do the materials shape interactions? And, how do the students and instructors use the documents? As I went through the collected documents, I made notes to answer the three guiding questions. These notes were then used to shape the findings.

Reflective Journal

I kept a journal throughout the study. It was used to reflect on theoretical issues, ethical issues, issues of interpretation and analysis, and practical considerations. The journal also provided a source of data as I analysed my own experiences as a literacy educator in relation to the research questions. Below is a sample journal entry that was written during the data collection phase of the study:

Today I went into the class to explain the research and ask students for their permission to observe them. I had been thinking about how to simplify my explanations of the research process and reduced the ideas to the following points that I quickly scribbled on a piece of paper: I will join your class to learn about what you do in the program; I will talk to you and ask a lot of questions about what you are learning; and I will talk to your teachers about you and ask them questions about how they help you learn. This helped me to work out the

essential elements of the research questions, which are really based on the 5W's. *What* are you learning in the program, in this activity, in this class, etc.? *How* are you learning this? *Who* is helping you? *Why* is this important to you? *What* does it mean for you? Now I need to ensure that these kinds of questions fit my theoretical framework. I knew I had to simplify my questions, and for this initial discussion with the students, I thought I would ask questions based more on my instinctual ideas of what I'm doing rather than the theory. I must now ensure they match and make sure that I can filter my theoretically developed questions through my instinctual interpretations.

DATA MANAGEMENT AND ANALYSIS

Field notes, digital pictures of the physical settings (not the people), transcriptions and accompanying narratives, documents, and my journal comprised the data. Once the data were in paper form, it was sorted into labeled folders according to source (student interviews, instructor interview and follow-up, documents, observation, and journal) and stored in a cabinet in my home. It was important not to leave any of the data in my office, the site of the study, in order to maintain privacy and to serve as another reminder that this data were not part of the program. Pseudonyms were used in all of the data and real names were covered if they appeared on the student's documents. There were approximately 200 pages of student transcripts and narratives, 100 pages of instructors' transcripts, narratives, and follow-up comments, 10 pages of document notes, 40 pages of observation notes and collected documents, and 60 pages in a journal. The tapes totaled approximately nine hours of recorded conversation.

Most of the data were collected before doing any formal analysis, although ongoing informal analysis began the first day in the field, and continued until the final draft of the

thesis was complete. Bogdan and Bilken (1992) recognize that novice researchers may not be able to engage in concurrent data analysis and data collection to the extent that data are fully analysed by the time data collection is finished. Instead, first-time researchers should “borrow strategies from the analysis-in-the-field mode, but leave more formal analysis until most of the data are in” (p. 154). This was the approach taken in this study. Data were reflected upon and informally analysed during data collection in my journal, but formal analysis didn’t begin until all interviews were complete. This may have been a necessary approach considering my lack of experience as a researcher, but it was not an ideal approach. During the formal analysis, I wished I could have returned to the participants to ask for clarifications or elaborations on insights revealed during this process.

Once formal analysis began, I followed Creswell’s (1998) stages: reading and note-taking, describing, classifying, interpreting, and representing or visualizing the data. I read through all the narratives, the original transcripts, and field notes. As I read, I tried to capture the particular words or phrases that could signify commonalities. I used a pre-assigned coding system (Bogdan & Bilken, 1992) based on the four elements of situated learning: content, context, community of practice, and participation. The pages of data were cut and placed in piles according to the four elements. Data were then read through several times and reassigned until the four elements could be represented in a discrete manner. At times, this seemed to be a very artificial task because the elements often overlapped, and I was forced to capture the people, activities, and relationships in a categorical and unnatural way. Once four discrete data piles were developed, I began writing the analysis and continued to interpret and analyse the data as I wrote the findings chapter of the thesis.

TRUSTWORTHINESS

The key to establishing the trustworthiness of this study was the presentation of thick descriptions that were triangulated, and underwent a process of member-checking. The thick descriptions ensured that the findings were “transferable between the researcher and those being studied” (Creswell, 1998, p. 197). I would also add that it ensured transferability between the researcher and the reader. Based on the description, can the reader see what I have seen? In addition to the notion of transferability, trustworthiness includes credibility, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln and Guba, 1985 in Creswell). The credibility of the findings was established through the triangulation of the six data sources. This was done when the resulting data from the six sources were compiled and coded. At this point, data that didn’t contribute to the pre-assigned codes, and didn’t create a new category that fit into the parameters of the study, were set aside. The data that were not included dealt with student requests and my role as a program administrator, and were not related to the study. Triangulation helped to clarify meanings from multiple perspectives, verified the repeatability of an observation or process, and identified different ways that the phenomenon or process can be seen (Stake, 2000). Emerging issues or themes from one data source were confirmed with other data sources. The dependability and confirmability of the data were established through a member-checking process, in which students and instructors read narratives of their interviews.

Chapter Four - Findings and Interpretation

The intent of this study was to examine an employment preparation and literacy program using ideas of situated learning and literacy in order to explore the dynamics of literacy and learning within the three distinct settings of the program. Guiding the exploration were the following questions: What does literacy and learning look like in each of the three settings? a) What is the material and knowledge *content* in each of the settings? b) What are the physical and non-physical aspects of the settings that shape the *context* for literacy and learning? c) Who are the people and what are the activities that comprise the literacy and learning *community of practice* in each setting? d) And, how do people *participate* with each other and the activities in each setting? To answer these questions, an in-depth picture of each of the three settings, guided by the four elements of situated learning—content, context, community of practice, and participation—are presented in this chapter. The backbone of the chapter is the sections that describe each of the program’s settings: the classroom, the coffee shop, and the job placements. Within the three major sections are sub-sections that will explore the ways in which *content*, *context*, *community of practice* and *participation* shape literacy and learning. Following each of the three primary sections is a summary and introductory interpretation of the dynamics that shape literacy and learning within each setting.

Before beginning the in-depth descriptions of the three settings, the students who participated in the study will be introduced through individual profiles. These are followed by a brief history of the development of the employment preparation program. An understanding of the students’ educational and employment background, coupled with a brief description of the program, builds a basis from which to connect a situated learning analysis

of the program. The past experiences of the students deepen the analysis of the findings. In addition, it is important to trace the employment preparation program's transition from a traditional skills-based literacy education program to a program that incorporates hands-on learning related to employment in order to provide a basis of understanding from which to further develop issues for discussion in the final chapter.

A. Student Profiles

The following profiles focus on how the past educational and employment experiences of the eight student participants have shaped their goals, motivations to attend the program, and expectations of the program. A brief demographic description of each student will also be included. During the student interviews, when most of the profile information was collected, it became apparent that similar stories (by no means were these the same stories) were being told by the students who were newest to the program (Hannah, Marion and Maritza), the students who had been in literacy programs for four years or more (Nadine, Stacey and Rouda) and the students with a mild developmental disability (Tom and Martha). Subsequently, the similar stories have been presented together to better understand both the shared and distinct experiences of the students.

NEW STUDENTS TO THE PROGRAM

Hannah

Hannah was 38 years old at the time of the study and the mother of three children. She is separated from her husband and depends on social assistance. She came to Canada in 1990 from Somalia and is now a Canadian Citizen. When she first arrived in Canada she

attended ESL classes, then stopped when she became pregnant with her third child. While growing up in Somalia, she attended school regularly and even finished her high school education, which is not usual for the majority students in the program. Most students in the employment preparation program have incomplete or modified (special education) formal education backgrounds.

Hannah is a gentle and deeply spiritual woman who has an innate ability to deal with daily struggles, anxieties, and tensions that can often become overwhelming for people. She is able to step back from these day-to-day stressors without appearing distant or arrogant, and can then quickly assess the intentions of people and the dynamics of a situation. She is very connected to the world around her, and views her world with clarity and honesty.

During our interview, Hannah shared many fond memories of her father who helped her regularly and spent precious time with her as a child. She said her father was unique because he encouraged her to do well in school just as much as he encouraged her brothers. She recalled that he walked her to school the first day she attended at the age of six. He also taught her to write her name, which she proudly did on her first day of school. He taught her to add and subtract, and then created tests to help her practice these skills. Hannah described how her father was also involved in her education in a less direct but equally influential way. "I learned from my father," she said. "Always he was reading, to show us how to read, [and] to encourage us to read. So I always became one like that. I like reading."

Hannah not only learned reading, writing and math skills from her father but she also learned a way to model reading behaviours and methods to encourage her own children's reading habits. As a single mother, she has sole responsibility for the education of her children and it is a parenting task that she has embraced. "I always encourage them. I take

them [to the] library and stuff like that. We go to the library every Saturday. In spare time, when they finish their homework, we all read because I always like to show them I am reading something.”

Hannah described in detail the “quiet time” routine she has established with her three children.

We open the book. Quiet time. My little son we colour or something like that. Always we have quiet time for reading—everybody. At night, I read a story for them before bedtime. My son, four years old, he has some books, Barney or something like that. Every night when he go[es] to bed, he takes his books and then I read for him, but the others, they read by themselves.

Hannah left Somalia immediately after high school and lived in Italy with a friend of her family’s who helped her find a job as a caregiver with an Italian family. This was Hannah’s only paid work experience. She considered returning to school once her oldest child was old enough to attend daycare. She initially attempted to register in an ESL class, thinking this was the only way available to continue her education. The ESL assessors then referred her to the employment preparation program based on the length of time she had been in Canada, her high oral language abilities, and her desire to find part-time work.

Marion

Marion was much more reticent than Hannah during her interview and did not share any recollections of her childhood education in Somalia. She did say she had to leave school at the age of 12 when civil war forced the closure of her school. She and her husband immigrated to Canada in 1995 and both of their children were born after their arrival. She

also attended ESL classes when she first arrived in Ottawa. Similar to Hannah, she stopped attending when her youngest child was born.

Marion is very shy and soft-spoken. She gave only brief responses to the interview questions and never provided more information or details to help illustrate a point. Despite her reluctance to talk at any length, it is apparent that she is very thoughtful and has a strong desire to learn. It was her husband who encouraged her to return to school. He seems to value education, based on Marion's description of his encouragement and willingness to share childcare responsibilities. Marion explained how he helps her at home with her English reading and writing. He has also taught her to use their home computer and navigate the Internet. She and her husband do not rely on social assistance and do not have subsidized daycare for their children. In order to accommodate Marion's return to school, her husband cared for their children in the morning while Marion attended the employment preparation program. He then went to work each afternoon and evening while Marion stayed home with their children. Marion, like Hannah, has never had paid work in Canada. In addition, she never worked outside the home before coming to Canada.

When Marion first entered the employment preparation program, after also being referred from the ESL program, she said she wanted to overcome her shyness and to learn what to say to people in different situations. Although she had a high level of oral language skills, she felt her shyness prevented her from expressing herself and fitting into the community. She was also motivated to find part-time work in order to supplement her husband's income.

Maritza

Maritza is a single mother of two sons who were 10 and 19 at the time of the study. She relies on social assistance and the small amount of money her oldest son makes at a part-time job. Maritza had completed nine years of education before leaving El Salvador in 1988 and coming to Canada. When she arrived in Ottawa she went to work immediately and never attended ESL classes. Maritza said she learned to speak English in the community and at work. Her sister-in-law also helped her with more practical matters, such as taking the bus, opening a bank account, writing cheques, and paying bills.

Maritza spoke in a rapid-fire, almost frenetic manner, and didn't appear to be listening to others during the group interview. She waited for opportunities to speak only to tell a story about her situation, but she never commented or added to the words of another student. Near the end of the group interview, a couple of students began to show their impatience with her lengthy, self-focused comments.

Maritza vividly recalled her past education experiences in El Salvador. She talked about the pride her mother felt when she received an award for Spanish dictation. Maritza said her mother was so proud of her accomplishment at school that she cried. Her memory of this occasion is pierced by the poverty her family endured.

My mother, she was crying. She was very, very poor, my mother. This day I no have a pencil and I say to my friend, 'Can I borrow your pencil?' And then my mother was crying. She said, 'Oh, you got a certificate.' Oh I loved to stay in the school when I was young.

Maritza had to leave school soon after she received the certificate in order to work and help support her family. School was an added expense that her family simply couldn't bare.

Although Maritza never said she complained about leaving school early, she wished

circumstances could have allowed her to continue. She is now working to ensure that her youngest son, Juan, learns to recognize the value of education. To do this, she is directly involved in his school. In addition, Maritza and her 10-year-old son visit the library regularly.

Maritza, unlike Hannah and Marion, has been working since she left school at the age of 14 and continued to work full-time as soon as she came to Canada. She has held a variety of jobs that have included work as sewer in a factory, an attendant in a dry cleaner's, and a hotel housekeeper. Her work history has also included periods of unemployment. She was laid off from her job as a sewer when the lingerie company that she worked for shut down; she had to leave her job at the dry cleaner's when she experienced an allergic reaction to the chemicals; and she left her most recent job as a hotel housekeeper when her social assistance benefits were threatened. While on assistance, she was able to top up her income with her wages but then ran into problems if she earned too much money. She explained the predicament she was in while working at the hotel.

My day off, Monday, my boss call me. He say, 'Maritza, come. I give you some rooms because someone is sick.' I go there. I want to get more money but no, no, no if I got more money, more cuts. But I did it because my social worker say, 'Work Maritza?' Yes, yes, yes. I explain to her everything. Too much problem. After the welfare, I went to my boss and say he [must] give me lay off because [of] my medication.

Maritza explained that she needed to retain her benefits in order to continue to receive drug coverage, but she also wanted to earn more money. As soon as she earned more than an allotted amount of money to supplement her monthly social assistance payments, she began to see decreases in her cheques. A year before participating in this study, she lost her benefits, including her drug coverage and subsidized apartment, and lived in a shelter for one

year. Eventually, she secured a subsidized home, resumed her social assistance benefits and had her drug costs covered. Now, after her rent is paid, she has only \$200 a month to pay bills, buy clothes, food, and other essentials for her and her two sons.

Maritza needed to wait until her home life was predictable and her son was secure in his new school before she felt ready to pursue her own education. When she first came to register in the program, she wasn't sure what was available and said she simply wanted to go to school to learn to read and write better. During her intake interview, she then added that she wanted to attend the program to find a job other than cleaning, a job that required a skill, such as using a cash register.

When Marion, Hannah and Maritza Entered the Program

Each of the three students experienced different levels of confusion when they first entered the employment preparation program. Although the program was explained to all three and they could choose to enter it or one of the other programs offered by the school board, each one expressed surprise when they found themselves in the coffee shop. Hannah recalled her first day in the program.

The first day I started [I was in] the class, and the next day I went to the kitchen. It was my first day to cook. When you explained to me the program, I didn't know exactly what we are doing...I was a little nervous because I was not expecting the kitchen. I didn't know exactly what we are doing here.

Marion also remembered feeling confused. She thought the program was at a higher level than she was able to achieve. "I think it's like university or something," she said. She was aware of the kitchen setting but didn't think the program was for her. Both Marion and Hannah withheld their initial feelings and participated fully in the program. Hannah said, "I

wait and then when we finish I understand. Also, my first day I start the cash...the first 10-15 minutes I was a little nervous, but after I became normal.”

Maritza’s transition was not so simple and it turned out that the program was not the right fit for her. It was only during her interview for this study that Maritza revealed her primary reason for returning to school was not to find part-time work, as she had initially stated, but to help her son who was in danger of failing Grade 4.

I can’t write too much. Sometimes, well every night, I have to help my son for homework so it’s a big problem. Sometimes I don’t understand [and] he don’t understand. The problem is he don’t do the homework. He have to go to the school, go to the teacher [and] explain everything. Oh my goodness, it’s a big problem I have. I explain to [the teacher] I go to school, this one, because sometimes I need to write the letter for the teacher or something, but I can’t.

Her son’s teacher suggested she arrange private tutoring to help Juan pass the fourth grade. Maritza explained this nervously and repeated the phrase, “You have to pay.” Another reason that she wanted to improve her writing was to be able to write letters to her son’s teacher when he didn’t complete his homework. The teacher requested this method of communication instead of a phone call, which Maritza used to do with other teachers. She explained that she is not able to write a letter on her own. To solve this problem, she and Juan work together. Juan writes a first draft of the letter for Maritza. She then checks the words using her English-Spanish dictionary, makes corrections, copies the letter, and finally signs it. She was visibly relieved when I began to recognize the full impact of her problems with Juan and his teacher.

You see? Now you see the problem. The problem is because sometimes my son put ‘m’ and ‘b’, he not put ‘n’ and ‘p’. And me, I can’t do too much. [The teacher] told me, ‘Juan, if he continue down, he can’t go to Grade 5.’ He can’t. He can’t. Oh my goodness. They explain not too much, but I try. I try.

STUDENTS PREVIOUSLY ENROLLED IN LITERACY PROGRAMS

Nadine

Nadine is a single, 27 year old woman who lived with her sister and helped to care for her niece and nephew at the time of the study. She was only 18 when she immigrated to Canada from Jamaica. While growing up in Jamaica, she had attended school sporadically until the age of 12. Her only paid employment was in Canada working for a few months as an office cleaner. A few years after her arrival in Canada she enrolled in a general literacy program at the school board. After attending the program for three years and making steady improvements, she was forced to leave when her sister needed her to care for her children. In addition to babysitting her niece and nephew while her sister worked, Nadine also cared for her grandmother. Although she left the program unwillingly, she had achieved a level of reading that allowed her to read picture books to her niece and nephew. While she was away from the program, she said she used her newly acquired reading ability regularly.

Nadine is painfully shy and before participating in the study, rarely spoke more than one or two words at a time. She often only smiled nervously in response to a question. She is also a very gentle and caring person who was placed in the role of family caregiver. She never complained about this role but told Carrie, one of the program's instructors, that she had recently applied for a subsidized apartment so she could begin to build a life of her own. During the interviews for this study, Nadine began to show a side of herself that her instructors had rarely seen. She answered questions in a careful and thoughtful manner, and even gave advice to other students in the group interview regarding the need to use literacy at home and not just in the classroom.

Nadine's main motivation for participating in the employment preparation program was to learn new skills and gain work experience so she wouldn't have to return to cleaning jobs. "I don't want to do that anymore. I want to try something else. That's what I know alone so I want to go do different things, get more experience." Besides wanting to gain employment experience, Nadine also wanted to continue to improve her literacy ability.

You need to learn to read because I [don't] want to go out there and see things I can't read. I don't want to be embarrassed. For most of the jobs you have to learn to read too, and you need to spell. If they give you things to do, you have to learn.

Nadine also discussed the kinds of literacy skills, tasks, and practices that she wanted to learn to do: "I can say the word but I just can't spell it. I want to write, to fill out forms, how to look for a job. When I go to the supermarket, I want to make a list for the things I buy there." Ideally, she would like to work part-time and continue to attend the literacy program. "It's important to get a job too. But I want a job in the afternoon and I go to school in the morning." A couple of years after leaving the general literacy program, Nadine returned, was told about the newly established employment preparation program, and decided to register.

Stacey

Stacey is a single mom with an older teenage daughter. She came to Canada in 1979 when she was 24, after living in a refugee camp on the Thai Cambodian border. While growing up in Cambodia, she had never attended school. Her literacy struggles are further compounded by her ethnicity and first language. Although raised in Cambodia, she is ethnically Thai, which is also her first language. She explained that she does not have literacy skills in either Thai or Khmer, a Cambodian language. The only language she has learned to read and write is English, her fourth language (she also speaks Vietnamese).

Stacey is a petite woman with a very pleasant round face and sparkling brown eyes. She giggles easily and often, and appears to be an easy-going and happy person. But her frequent laughter hides a tension and anxiety that bubbles beneath the surface. This tension has been known to well up and has been directed at meeker students when Stacey becomes impatient and feels the need to assert her control in a situation.

Stacey, like Nadine, didn't talk about childhood education experiences, but instead focused on her experiences as an adult. Also like Nadine, Stacey had attended the general literacy program for a few years before enrolling in the employment preparation program. She compared the two programs and said she missed doing some of the literacy skill activities she used to do in the general literacy program.

I miss, like Nadine said, to write letter, computer and comma...the end and dot. I miss that. I want to learn that again you know. Now we don't have much, like writing and reading. We don't have much now. I need that very much. But now we have coffee shop. We don't learn much English.

She readily agreed with Nadine's suggestion that it would be an ideal situation to work part-time and continue to attend the literacy program part-time.

Stacey had held a few different jobs in the past 20 years, but none of these lasted more than three years. She has had to depend on social assistance most of the time. She had worked for a cleaning company, at a small grocery store in Chinatown, and in a hotel laundry facility. She worked for cash at the grocery store and said the experience was "more like hell."

They treat me like, they use too much. No lunch. No break. Just tell you to do something. Just do it. You do one job...you not done yet and they just tell you, 'Pick up that bag of rice to bring to the customer.' Big bag of rice and I cannot do it, you know. I do it slow. Sometimes he told me to go and pick up the order food

at the restaurant and I waiting and they not done yet. Then I come back and I do the same job, and they say, 'Why you do this all day. Why you do so long?' You feel like, oh this job, I don't need it. It was cash, you know, \$5.00 an hour.

Criminal people work like [that]—no lunch, no break.

It was work and literacy experiences like Stacey's that the employment preparation program hoped to address, although when the program began she was no longer enrolled. She was called by the program to register, but waited another year to actually enroll.

Rouda

Rouda is a recently divorced single mother of six children. Before her divorce she had been separated for a number of years and had been raising the children on her own. She was 36 years old during the study, and had immigrated to Canada from Somalia in 1992. She became a Canadian Citizen, and like Marion and Hannah, had attended ESL classes when she first arrived in Canada but quit after a few months to care for her children. Rouda went to school until she was 10 years old in her native Somalia, but was forced to leave due to the civil conflict. After her youngest child was in daycare, Rouda returned to school and registered in the general literacy program. The ESL program was no longer suitable for her because she had gained strong oral abilities after six years in Canada. Like Stacey and Nadine, Rouda didn't talk about past educational experiences. Even in her adult years, no one encouraged her to attend school. In fact, she was discouraged by her former husband who thought she should be at home with their children full-time.

Rouda's only paid work experience was occasional employment in childcare facilities. But without recognized credentials, she could obtain only part-time or occasional work. Her reason for entering the employment preparation program was to obtain a job placement in one of the school board's childcare sites. She explained that she also wanted to

find a job in order to be a positive role model for her children. She said she didn't want her children to see her at home everyday and not working.

If the mother sit at home, not doing anything, you know, she don't care about nothing, about work. So the children, they don't focus on nothing at all. They think it is the same, like normal, when mommy she is sitting so she is not doing nothing. When they grow up, maybe they take bad example for you. Children, they learn from you, but if you're very, very careful, your children take good example of you and also you get respect even.

Rouda is an honest, direct and sometimes outspoken woman who talks and acts as if she doesn't care what people think of her, but can be very hurt by the criticism of others. Although she is Somali and Muslim, she has chosen not to wear the traditional hijab or head scarf. This choice once made her the focus of comment and rebuke when she was in the general literacy program. She continued not to wear a hijab but was visibly hurt and upset by the comments of her Somali classmates.

STUDENTS WITH MILD DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES

Tom

Tom was 33 years old during the study. He has a mild developmental disability and lives at home with his parents. He also receives a monthly disability pension. He is a very easy-going and handsome man who readily smiles and is always offering to help others. In the past, his parents have been very protective of him and he has had to struggle to become more independent, to travel on buses alone, to visit friends, and to attend school alone. His two sisters have supported him with his gradual but steady progress towards a life that he alone controls.

After completing his education in classes and schools for students with developmental disabilities at the age of 21, Tom worked part-time in a grocery store as a packer. He got the job after completing a placement organized by his school. Tom worked for five years and would have continued working, but lost his job when the grocery store eliminated the packers' positions. Tom then returned to a school setting and the literacy program for adults with a developmental disability. Although he said he would have preferred to find another job, Tom willingly participated in the school program. He said his goal was to find a full-time job in a grocery store.

Tom said he was excited when an instructor in the literacy program for developmentally delayed adults suggested he transfer to the employment preparation program. He wanted to do this because it would bring him closer to his goal of finding a job. He also wanted to take on new challenges; he said he was feeling bored in the literacy program. Tom proudly explained that he was the first student from the literacy program for developmentally delayed adults to make the transition into the employment preparation program.

Martha

Martha, who was 46 during the study, shared many of the same educational experiences as Tom. She also attended schools and classes for students with developmental disabilities, participated in placements, and even worked for a period of time after completing a placement. She too returned to an adult literacy program for students with developmental disabilities when she was no longer working. Her personal life, on the other hand, is vastly different than Tom's. She lives on her own and had been raising her son by herself. Although she received support from a social worker and one of her sisters, she was

the primary caregiver for her son. The responsibilities became overwhelming as her son grew older, and when he was 12 he was placed in foster care. Martha continues to visit him regularly and proudly showed his picture, but became very emotional when talking about him.

Martha once worked at a school for disabled children. While at the school, she helped feed the children during lunch and snack times. She worked each day and was paid \$10.00. She said she quit this job when she witnessed a teaching assistant hitting one of the children. She had requested that the assistant be fired but when this didn't happen she felt too frustrated and upset to continue working at the school. She has also been employed in positions that were created specifically for adults with developmental disabilities, such as working in a sheltered workshop and watering plants in government buildings. Her goal is to find a job in a childcare setting with children who may or may not have disabilities.

Martha was in the literacy program for adults with a developmental disability when she saw Tom transfer to the employment preparation program. She was motivated by his transition into the program and one year later asked if she too could try the program.

PROFILE SUMMARY

The profiles illuminate a key issue that needs to be highlighted before examining the program because of its impact on both the students and the extent to which the employment preparation program can affect any real change in their lives. A socioeconomic reality that all but one of the eight students face is their struggle to obtain employment that will allow them to support themselves. They all want to find work, but without credentials or work experience, with minimal levels of literacy and formal education, with children and childcare challenges, and with visible minority status and disabilities, they face multiple challenges and

barriers, and are unlikely to be able to support themselves through employment. The only jobs they will likely be able to obtain are low-wage service industry jobs that have no security, no benefits, and little status.

Only Marion, who is married and living with her husband, does not depend on some form of social assistance; Rouda, Stacey, Maritza, and Hannah are single mothers and receive general welfare; Martha and Tom have a developmental disability and receive a disability pension; and Nadine, who is single, also receives general welfare. It is the single mothers along with Tom and Martha whose employment goals must be carefully considered and weighed against their current incomes. Rouda wants nothing more than to find full-time employment in order to not be dependent on welfare, but she has six children to support, lives in a subsidized home, does not have to pay the full cost of prescription drugs, has access to subsidized daycare, and receives minimal dental benefits. The likelihood of finding a job without credentials, and recognized training that could cover her monthly expenses, is poor. Even full-time work at one of the school board's childcare centres would not be enough to independently support her and her family. Only Nadine, who is single, could possibly hope to earn enough from full-time employment to support herself. She is also on a waiting list to live in a subsidized apartment, and would have to measure potential income with the value of assistance that she received.

Both Tom and Martha would prefer to work full-time, but they too are in a position in which full-time employment could jeopardize their ability to support themselves. Tom continues to live with his family, and can depend on them for support, but Martha lives on her own. If she found full-time work, she would see decreases in her disability pension, which could be withdrawn if she continued to work. Then, if she lost her job, she would have

to reapply for a disability pension, a cumbersome bureaucratic process that could take time and leave her without any income. Employment income could also jeopardize the support of a social worker that Martha is eligible to receive as long as she receives disability payments.

Each of the students will have to weigh any potential employment income with the value of the social assistance benefits that they receive. Carrie, one of the program's instructors, explained her role in this area, "We can't have them trade a dollar for four quarters and think they are further ahead." The students will have to carefully calculate the value of the benefits they receive and how much they would have to earn in order to maintain what little they do have. Carrie emphasized the importance of ensuring students didn't get into situations in which they jeopardized the well-being of themselves and their families. "The ideal situation," she said, "is to help the students find part-time employment so they can maintain their benefits and supplement their income." The socioeconomic conditions highlighted in the profiles will be discussed in relation to the program findings in greater detail in the next chapter.

From Academic Upgrading to Employment Preparation

It was students like Nadine, Stacey and Rouda that the employment preparation program wanted to focus on when it was first developed. They, and many other students with similar educational and employment experiences, had been in the general literacy program year after year with little progress in literacy skills. For students whose first language was not English and/or whose formal education level was less than Grade 8, progress in English literacy skills seemed to stall at the LBS 2 level (equivalent to approximately a Grade 2-4 reading and writing level). With such low literacy skills, they were not able to access many

existing job training programs and would most likely never gain a level of literacy that was high enough to enter adult high school credit programs.

Besides meeting the needs of students, other factors combined to spur the program to move away from an exclusively academic program towards a program that offered employment training linked to literacy development. These factors were lowered entry requirements for the adult high school, changing demographics, and the development of government training programs designed to help students become less dependent on social assistance. The local high school program began to offer credit courses to help students prepare for entry. Many students, whose only previous option was to upgrade in a non-credit program, like the literacy program, opted to upgrade at the high school instead. At the same time, the literacy program began to see an increase in the number of students who had immigrated to Canada, became citizens, had obtained a proficiency in oral skills, but demonstrated a significant gap between their oral abilities and literacy skills. Finally, the provincial Ontario Works (OW) program, run by the city's social services department, initiated a variety of training programs to help social service recipients become employed. Students who once attended literacy programs because there were few educational options available, opted instead to attend OW sponsored training. Simultaneous to the program's demographic changes and the changes in the community related to education and training, were changes in literacy education funding and delivery. A greater emphasis was being placed on the development of literacy related to employment, and more rigorous accountability measures were being implemented. Instructors and program managers quickly recognized an ever-widening gap between the funders' expectations of the program and the learning realities of the students.

For nearly two years before March 2000, when the employment preparation program was initiated, ideas were discussed and attempts to secure extra funding were made to help establish a literacy and employment program for students. The goal was to provide hands-on learning in three different work environments—the coffee shop, a greenhouse, and an office. At first, the main stumbling block was funding. Regular funding for the literacy program could not be used to purchase the non-literacy related materials and equipment that were needed to set up these work environments. The program searched for additional funding outside the traditional literacy budget and obtained a one-time grant of \$25,000 from the city’s social services department. This money had been earmarked for programs in the community that could help social assistance recipients enter the job market. The money was used to purchase some of the tools, supplies, and equipment for each of the three work environments¹ in the program. In addition, instructors received funding to write curriculum materials for the program. Once the coffee shop was operational, it began to sustain itself by using the money from sales to replenish baking and coffee supplies. Provincial literacy funding was obtained two years in a row to help support the development of the program through research, materials development, and the establishment of job placements for the students.

After the one-time provincial funding was used to establish the placement sites, the program recognized that it would need to pay an instructor to develop and maintain links with employers, to establish students at their placement sites, and to provide ongoing support to students at their placement sites. This kind of work would require an instructor who did not have her own class. Such a position became a problem with the program’s funder because

¹ The simulated office was disbanded after only three months. There was no employment potential for the students since most jobs required a high school diploma. The greenhouse ran for over a year but ended when the program moved to a new location.

it meant the instructor did not have direct contact with students in a class setting, a primary condition of program funding. Despite this, the position was eventually built into the program's budget on a trial basis, but continues to be scrutinized each year by the funder. Another concern for the program was the erosion of contact hours when students were in their job placements. Although the students were still involved in the program, the hours they spent in a job placement could not be counted as contact hours because they were not physically in the program with an instructor.

The employment preparation program is part of the larger literacy program offered by the school board. The complete program is situated in a former vocational high school near the centre of the city. It shares a small portion of the available space in the school with second language programs and general interest continuing education classes. All of the programs in the school are for adults. The remaining space in the school was unused at the time of the study, except for the occasional rental of the gymnasium or auditorium by other schools and community groups. The general literacy program has moved locations four times in ten years. Finding secure space within the school board is an ongoing issue.

The three instructors in the program are women, as are all but one of the 14 instructors in the general literacy program. They work on a contractual basis, receive an hourly wage with only the minimum legislated benefits (vacation time), and renew their contracts every three to four months. During the 16 weeks of the year that aren't covered by contract, the instructors are unpaid; a common practice is to apply for employment benefits during the summer months, the longest stretch of non-teaching time. Instructors, with the exception of Carrie, are paid only for direct 'contact hours' or the time spent actively delivering instruction; they are not paid for preparation, assessment, curriculum

development, or marking. One of the employment preparation instructors is a recently retired elementary school teacher. Another instructor spent the majority of her career working with adults who had developmental disabilities. The third had a varied career as a tutor for children (K-12), a high school French teacher, and an educational assessor. Their experience working with adult literacy students varies from one year to four years.

B. Learning Settings

The three distinct settings that comprise the employment preparation program—the coffee shop, the classroom and the job placements—will each be examined based on Stein’s (1998) four elements of situated learning in adult education: *content*, *context*, *community of practice*, and *participation*. Stein’s interpretation is directly connected to Lave and Wenger’s (1991) description of situated learning and both are used to guide the findings. In addition, ideas connected to situated literacy have also been used, particularly in relation to analyzing literacy activities as they occur within the three settings. These interrelated ideas of situated learning and literacy will be used to analyse the employment preparation program in order to answer the guiding research question: What does literacy and learning look like in each of the three settings? Each of the three settings will be described separately, and within each description, each of the study’s sub-questions will be addressed. These sub-questions focus on the following: the material and knowledge *content* in each of the settings; the physical and non-physical aspects of the settings that shape the *context* for learning; the people and activities that comprise a *community of practice* in each setting; and the ways in which people *participate* with each other and the activities in each setting.

To understand each of these elements and how they will be described in the next sections of this chapter, a brief definition of each will be reviewed first. The *content*

description will capture the facts and process of the materials and knowledge in each setting (Stein, 1998). Materials refers to the printed materials and visual materials that are used. Knowledge or the non-material resources refers to the ways in which people think and the understanding that is connected to the daily lives of the students. In addition, the ways in which the materials and knowledge are meaningful to the students will also be analysed. Based on Stein, *context* comprises both the physical and non-physical environments of the three learning settings. Physical aspects include a description of the décor, furnishings, and tools of the settings. Non-physical aspects are the values, norms, and culture that are made apparent in each setting. In addition, it is important to uncover *whose* values, norms, and culture comprise the context in order to discuss individual and institutional power balances. Elements that define a *community of practice*, according to Lave and Wenger (1991), are a focus on learning, compared to teaching; strong goals for learning because learners understand what needs to be learned and the purpose for learning; an ability for learners to see and understand the whole, and not simply discrete and unrelated pieces of knowledge; the idea that learning is improvised practice; and viewing the curriculum as opportunities for engaging in practice, and not a set of “dictates for proper practice” (p. 92). Finally, *participation* is the process of becoming, state Lave and Wenger (1991), becoming a legitimate member of a community of practice. It “involves the construction of identities” (p. 53) in that a person who participates in a community of practitioners in a productive activity, is developing a new way of seeing him or herself. Each of these elements will come to life as they are seen in the program’s three distinct settings.

Throughout the in-depth description of the program, literacy will continue to be defined as *skills, tasks, practices, and critical reflection* (Lytle and Wolfe, 1989). To review,

literacy as skills is seen as the accumulation of technical reading and writing processes, such as decoding, spelling, and grammar that are acquired sequentially and applied in a variety of literacy activities. For example, a student might learn and study the construction of complete sentences in order to write for work-related or home purposes. Literacy as tasks is the application and use of literacy in day-to-day literacy activities, such as form filling and letter writing. As an example, a student might learn to complete a variety of different kinds of job applications in order to help prepare him or her to seek employment. Literacy as practices would take the job application activity one step further and into a setting in which the activity is to be carried out. Instead of simply completing application forms in a class setting, a literacy-as-practices view would also include applying for the job under the conditions required by the employer. The literacy activity is developed and supported in a situation that is a real activity, or mimics as closely as possible real-life uses of literacy in specific settings that incorporate the people, pressures, actions, and tools of that setting. Finally, literacy as critical reflection is an understanding of literacy activities and their impact on both a personal and public level. For example, the issues that may arise from the job application activity, as it is carried out in a specific setting, may become the focus of critical and personal reflection. Literacy as critical reflection can become a vehicle for personal and social change. If, for example, the student applying for the job encountered uncomfortable issues during the application process—he had to complete the form in front of the supervisor, she was asked if she had children and who would care for them, or he was asked his age—these issues could become the focus for reflection on a personal and political level, and subsequent action. As students and instructors share their ideas about literacy, one of these four terms will be used to help give a shape to the notion of literacy in the employment preparation program.

THE CLASSROOM

To begin to develop a picture of the first of three settings in the employment preparation program, two brief glimpses of the day-to-day routines of the classroom have been created. These take the form of vignettes: the first is focused on a vocabulary development activity; and the other is focused on a numeracy activity. Following the vignettes, is an analysis of the content, context, community of practice, and participation elements of the classroom setting.

Classroom Vignette One - Learning About Vocabulary

Hannah, Nadine and Marion, are working with five other students in the higher-level group. They are focused on a vocabulary exercise, an activity that the instructor, Suzanne, said is a highlight of their weekly schedule. The activity has been photocopied from a commercially produced vocabulary development workbook. Suzanne explained that her goal is to do one activity per week but often a single lesson can last up to two weeks. The students have been studying words such as *exaggerate*, *mediocre*, *valid*, and *prominent* for the past week and are now preparing for a spelling dictation. Before the dictation though, the instructor leads a variety of exercises to help them review and practice the words.

The group has gathered at the end of the cafeteria, behind a set of movable partitions, and is clustered around two of the cafeteria tables that have been pulled together. They are in the cafeteria because there isn't enough space in their classroom for both instructors to work with the higher and lower level groups at the same time. In the first part of the activity, Suzanne points out the tricky parts in each word that make them difficult to spell. She then tries to have the students connect the word to their daily lives by having one of the students explain how they might use the word. Next, the students are given the dictation. The dictation

is done like a test and the students work alone. A couple of students use their forearms to cover their pages to ensure no one can take a peek. In the final part of the lesson, the students use their dictation words to complete a fill-in-the-blank exercise developed by the instructor. The sentences are related to the work the students do in the coffee shop. For example, one sentence reads “Mrs. Jones remarked that her muffins were only _____ and that she would try to make them better next time.” The students are permitted to discuss the vocabulary with each other but not the spelling of each word. The dictation and the fill-in-the-blank exercise are then handed to the instructor for marking.

Nadine summarizes the vocabulary lesson: “[The teacher] told us them [the words], then we go back there, like if we do spelling, we learn them there. We go home with them, then we come back to review. She review with us.” She said that this process was helpful but sometimes she gets frustrated with herself because she forgets the meanings of the words that are discussed in class. “Sometimes you don’t know the meaning of it. Like she told me what it is then I forgot what it means so I can put it in a sentence.”

Classroom Vignette Two – Learning About Fractions

The lower level group, including Tom, Martha, and Stacey (Rouda and Maritza are absent) are engaged in a math lesson on fractions and measurement. Fran, their instructor, has decided to focus on this because the students are dealing with fraction measurements when baking each week in the coffee shop. Assembled at the front of the class is a muffin tray, glass measuring beakers, a container of water, and measuring cups. The first part of the lesson is focused on completing a meticulously hand-written worksheet, filled with careful printing, divided circles and divided measuring beakers. A total of 15 questions and directions covers the page. One of the directions requests the students to “Colour in $\frac{2}{4}$ ’s of

the circle.” Other questions ask “How many equal parts are there?” and “Which is bigger... $1/4$ or $3/4$?” Led by the instructor, the students complete the worksheet as a group. Fran asks different students to read a question, the same student then provides an answer, and the other students express their agreement or disagreement. The most common problem seems to be naming the fractions. Is $3/4$ read as three over four, three quarters, three fourths, or simply three-four? The instructor leads the students through each of the 15 questions. At the end, she compliments the students on their abilities to “concentrate” and “follow along”.

After the worksheet has been completed by most (the slower students are to complete any remaining questions on their own) Fran asks Stacey to measure two cups of water into the large glass beaker. Another student is asked if the two small measuring cups were equal to the amount of water in the large beaker. This student is then asked to measure $2/4$ into the beaker. Although this is not a fraction seen in their recipes, the student is able to do this without difficulty and recognizes that it is the same as $1/2$. Prompted by the instructor, the student then refers to a recipe that is used in the coffee shop to read some of the measurements.

Tom then volunteers to measure $2/3$ in a beaker. He has some difficulty and self-corrects a couple of times. The instructor then adds enough water to get to the $2/3$ line. Stacey is able to identify $3/4$ as a larger amount than $2/3$ when asked. Fran then holds up the 12-hole muffin tray and asks questions such as, “What is $1/2$?” and “What fraction is one line of holes?” The students understand that 6 holes represents $1/2$, but have difficulty representing a single line of muffin holes (four) as $1/3$.

Content

In the classroom setting of the employment preparation program, content comprises the materials and knowledge of the setting. Knowledge is often related to the students' experiences, as in the vocabulary and fractions activities, but there is a dictated structure and approach to the activities that is rooted more in schooling experiences than life experiences. Three mornings per week were devoted to subject-based, academic skills, such as spelling, vocabulary, grammar, reading, math, and computers. The fourth morning focused on employability skills, such as health and safety issues, employee rights, and applying for a job. The students were divided into two groups based on their reading and writing levels, which were defined by their competencies in reading and writing skills, such as writing complete sentences, using a dictionary to edit, and reading for understanding and comprehension (Ontario Literacy Coalition, 2000). The lower level group encompassed LBS levels 1+ and 2, and the higher-level group was defined by literacy skills at LBS 2+ and 3. LBS levels 1-5 parallel literacy skill requirements in Grades 1-10; therefore, LBS level 2 is parallel to Grades 3-4, and LBS level 3 is parallel to Grades 5-6, etc. Tom, Martha, Nadine, Rouda, and Maritza were in the lower level group along with three other students. Hannah, Marion, and Nadine were three of the eight students in the higher-level group.

Both classroom instructors relied on a variety of instructional materials that focused mostly on the development of literacy skills and tasks. These materials included commercial workbooks (like the vocabulary development activity) and reading books, their own hand-printed or computer-printed worksheets (like the fractions activity), the coffee shop curriculum that was developed by program instructors, and authentic materials like forms, newspapers, and flyers. Occasionally, materials or tools that were not print-based were also

used. For example, Fran used a variety of kitchen tools to help explain her lesson on fractions.

Context

The context of the classroom comprises both physical and non-physical elements. The physical elements can be found in a description of the class space, its furnishings, décor, books, and tools. The non-physical elements are the values, norms, and culture that are apparent in the setting. These are described based on the level of importance that students and instructors assign to various classroom activities.

Before moving into their current location, program managers were able to request minor renovations to the building to better accommodate the program. As a result, prefabricated walls were installed at the end of the existing cafeteria to create a classroom space for the employment preparation program. Despite the fact that the students are split into two learning groups, only one classroom was provided. A second classroom area was created with moveable partitions that were assembled to demarcate space in the cafeteria. This was where the higher-level group had gathered for their vocabulary lesson. This space has worked fairly well for short periods of time, but becomes noisy during the morning break and just before lunch when students from other programs go to the cafeteria. As a result, class-based sessions were often shortened. The two instructors arranged a schedule that allowed them to use the walled classroom space as much as possible.

There were many elements in the main classroom that reflected classrooms found in older elementary schools. Most of the furniture was obtained from the board's surplus supply depot. This meant that furniture was often older, not in demand, and mismatched. There were a variety of desk and table sizes, and an assortment of chairs. The haphazard desk and table

heights made it difficult to assemble the desks together so students could work in small groups. Instead, the desks were set up in three horizontal rows, facing a moveable blackboard. In this configuration, the students faced the blackboard and instructor who often stood at the front of the room. Two instructor desks were placed at the side of the classroom. Other desks were placed along the back wall and four computers were set-up on these. The classroom computers were not often used; instead, students went upstairs each week to a computer lab used by both the general literacy and employment preparation programs.

The bookshelf contained a few copies of two or three different dictionaries and a few math workbooks. Books were borrowed by the instructors from a teaching resource library in the building. Students could use the books in the classroom but couldn't take them home. Decorating the classroom were a few houseplants that sat on a deep window sill and a variety of posters were on the walls. Most of the posters were not directly related to employment preparation but were more inspirational and related to personal aspirations. The largest poster read "Today is a good day to learn something new." Other motivational posters read, "Attitude is the mind's paintbrush; it can colour any situation" and "Success is yours; start with A..." followed by several sentences outlining steps to take to be successful. A map of Canada was on the wall beside the blackboard. The instructors had hung calendars by their desks: one was from a Chinese restaurant; the other was an emergency services calendar, one of many copies left after a recent guest speaker visited from the fire department. The only direct links to the coffee shop were two posters taped to the classroom door. Both posters were from the city's health department. One explained proper hand washing, and the other explained safe food storage and cooking temperatures.

Values, norms and culture

For the most part, the students placed a tremendous value on the learning that occurred in the classroom. When they discussed their learning, they focused on the development of their literacy skills, and to some extent literacy tasks, rather than literacy practices. Most of the students discussed literacy development in relation to the improvement of spelling, grammar, and vocabulary skills. Only Nadine focused on the ways in which she would use literacy outside the classroom. Although she did emphasize the importance of learning skills, she also talked about actively using literacy outside the classroom and the personal feelings she experienced when doing so.

Both Hannah and Marion said that going to school and finding a job were equally important in their lives, but continued to focus on the value of learning grammar, spelling, and vocabulary. Hannah said,

I love grammar. I like to learn more language, more English, how to talk. I believe if I don't learn grammar, I will talk broken English. My writing and reading I am comfortable. What I need is more vocabulary and grammar.

Nadine, whose first language is English, also emphasized the importance of learning grammar: "You learn grammar and to make a sentence, to understand which to go where, and to put [on] the first one a capital. I didn't know this." Like Hannah, she also said she felt comfortable with her reading abilities: "It feel good because if you go outside at least you have to know to read something." But Nadine, unlike Hannah, frequently mentioned the importance of literacy in relation to its public uses. She said she wanted to improve the way she did various literacy tasks outside the classroom, such as completing job applications, reading forms and understanding difficult words on signs. She also alluded to her active use

of literacy, her practice of literacy, and commented that she no longer felt embarrassed in public situations that require her to engage in literacy activities.

Suzanne, the instructor with the higher-level group that included Marion, Hannah, and Nadine explained why students placed a greater value on traditional literacy skills, and why this has become the norm for the class.

I think they are wrapped up in that traditional way because that's what they knew first, and that's what they've been taught, that you should be able to learn to read. You should be able to do this fairly easily, like most other people. And when they can't it sets them up for failure. Perhaps many students view 'pen and paper' tasks as having more importance because of the concrete results. It's more tangible and bears evidence that learning, in their eyes, has taken place. For some students who have had several or more years of schooling in their own countries, pen and paper tasks represent the familiar or known. They are a constant between the cultures.

Suzanne is fully aware of the literacy activities that the students enjoy and value. She is perceptive to their needs and has also received direct feedback from them.

They like the traditional things. They love the vocabulary program. That one they ask for. They say, 'We haven't done that. Where is it this week? We would do this four days a week.' They told me this yesterday, and I thought really? This is really great feedback. Not only do I like teaching it, but it's very good for me to hear that this is something they want. 'We see these words all the time now. I'm seeing them in the newspaper. I'm hearing them, now I understand them.' Wow. I thought that was really good.

Fran, on the other hand, recognized that her group, which was at a lower literacy skills level, didn't share the same strengths as Suzanne's group. With this in mind, she has placed a greater emphasis on the development of self-esteem, rather than more academic topics.

I would say probably [the most important thing is] that they feel good about themselves in some way. Obviously, part of my job is to try to nurture that or bring that out... as I think about it more and more, that personal component is really important. I guess the thing that I've learned over the term is that my students don't have the ability to remember "academic facts" for a long period of time. It's not that you're adding all that information on and that it will be a building block. It's probably not going to happen that way. So I just have to accept the fact that as long as they feel good and comfortable in the teaching setting, that they feel this is their place and they have a spot, then that probably is a success.

Fran acknowledged that her students value writing skills and want to be better writers, but at the same time, she has seen her students struggle without showing significant progress or improvement in the development of their literacy skills. She recalled a student who identified her strengths as a learner only with her ability to do well on a weekly spelling dictation.

She just kills herself with her attempt to learn spelling and dictation. She kind of goes bananas over it. She focuses on that endlessly. That's come to represent her failure completely.

In this student's view of herself, her ability as a good speller was synonymous with her perception of her overall intelligence. Fran explained how she attempted to untangle this damaging relationship by pointing out the student's numerous strengths, which were demonstrated regularly in the coffee shop. She admitted that she faced an uphill battle in trying to convince the student that her achievements in other areas of learning outweighed her ability to spell correctly.

Stacey, like the above student, also identified herself and her self-worth with her literacy skill achievements. Despite being in the program for many years, Stacey felt she

would never reach a point at which she could feel satisfied with her literacy abilities. She explained how she saw herself as a literacy learner for life.

Nobody try like me. I'm the best trying, but it's still hard you know. It's hard...
I'm [too] old to learn. That's why I have to say I have to keep learning, keep trying. Keep active, do lots [of] things until the end.

More than the other students, Stacey placed a strong emphasis on the value of the learning that occurred in the classroom above all other settings. She explained that she felt she was missing important classroom learning time while on her placement. She said, "I missing like English words, like the reading is important for me. I learn to spell the word that I need very much." She went on to explain that she needed to learn to read food labels and ingredient lists so she could know if there were ingredients in the product that could cause an allergic reaction. This task is important, she added, for her own knowledge and her placement in the bakery department at a grocery store. She explained that the only way she felt that she could learn this information was in the classroom, and not on her job placement where she was surrounded by food labels.

One student, Maritza, expressed dissatisfaction with her learning in the classroom because she felt she wasn't being challenged enough and wanted to transfer to the higher level group. She never approached her instructor about her concerns. When I suggested that she could talk to her instructor about her frustrations, she was silent, and did not want to discuss the idea further. She may have thought I would interpret her frustrations as a complaint against her instructor.

Tom and Martha were the only students who thought that the learning that occurred in the classroom was far less important than the learning that occurred in their job placements. Both wanted to see themselves as employees and were no longer as interested in being

students. While they said they enjoyed being students and recognized that they were able to learn new skills in the classroom, such as handling money, they seemed to place a greater value on their job placements and their desire to be working.

The classroom context, like its content, emphasized a traditional skills approach to literacy development. The space looked like any classroom found in an elementary school, and may have looked worse than many rooms because it used castoff furnishings and relied on temporary spaces. In relation to the non-physical learning context, students placed a tremendous value on the development of literacy skills compared to the development of literacy tasks, practices, and critical reflection. Some of these values may have been brought into the class, based on the students' past experiences, but they were then engrained as the norm by the physical setting, the skills-based materials and knowledge, and the teaching approach of the instructors, which will be examined next.

Community of Practice

Overall, the activities that were done in the classroom were fueled by a teaching approach rather than a learning approach, one of the key elements that defines a community of practice. In addition, students and instructors did not share the same ideas about what the learning purpose was. Instructors saw the classroom as preparation for the activities that occurred in the coffee shop, but students did not see this connection.

Activities for both groups were scheduled into time slots, and there were usually two main activity periods in the morning: one before break and one after. Students carried a copy of the schedule in their binders and a copy was also posted on the wall of the classroom behind one of the instructor's desks. Included in the weekly schedule was a time slot for the computer lab, spelling/vocabulary, reading/writing, and math. In both classes, the instructor

(Fran for the lower level and Suzanne for the higher level) had set the schedule, but it was not strictly adhered to. The instructors were more than willing to address other issues on both a private and public level. For example, if a student needed help reading an official document, the instructor offered individual assistance during the break, after class or during class time. In addition, if a more common or public issue, such as a news event, was brought into the class, the instructors had on occasion disregarded all or part of the morning's schedule to focus on the issue.

Fran said her class was predominantly teacher led, as illustrated in the fraction lesson, but she encouraged students to work together, and strives to enhance this dynamic. Compared to her class, Suzanne thought that her students were more interactive and contributed more to learning decisions. She attributed this to “the nature of the group”.

There is a global feeling there. Something that is solid, something has gelled—the identity with the group, the way that they work together—it all plays together, and I think it enhances each thing so both of them [the classroom and coffee shop] are positive experiences. They love the coffee shop. They are getting a lot out of that, and it's the same as the classroom as well. There is usually a good feeling. It just feels as if it is working and I don't know what that is. It is a combination of things. Last year was spotty. We had some people in there who kind of dragged down the dynamic a bit. This year it's working really well. They have common goals. They're supportive.

A clear purpose for learning in the classroom—an element of a community of practice —was viewed differently by the students and instructors. The instructors thought of the classroom activities as a learning base for the coffee shop activities. The students, on the other hand, did not see this link and viewed the two settings separately. Fran said that the strong link between the classroom and coffee shop provided the students with a more meaningful experience.

I think it is much more meaningful for the students if they see it as a support because, except for some of the students who are much more higher-functioning, most of these students aren't going to go on to higher level academic stuff. For them, they want to feel successful in this program and eventually in getting a job. They want to see that blend, I would think, between the two areas. That would make more sense to them rather than just taking a body of information and literacy material that they can't really relate to.

Carrie also emphasized the importance of using the classroom to prepare students for the activities they did in the coffee shop. "It is such a high pressure situation that you cannot just have a teaching moment all of a sudden. It is ongoing. There's pressure. There are expectations." She felt that once the students had control over the literacy portions of an activity, they could then learn all the other aspects of a specific job in the coffee shop. Carrie said,

With each job there are multiple tasks and organizational skills—those are huge. If they are going to bake muffins, they have to compile all the tools [and] the ingredients. Then they have to read the recipe and then go through all the steps. There's a timeline. There is also the hygiene aspect. There's working together, the measurement, the reading. There are many, many different skill sets in there.

The instructors felt that the groundwork that is needed to successfully complete these activities was laid in the classroom. An example of this approach was the way in which Fran created the fraction lesson to help students when they were reading the recipes in the coffee shop. It was in the classroom that students also reviewed the vocabulary in the recipes; learned the subtle meanings of verbs, such as blend, fold, and mix; and learned to read expiration dates, food labels, and measurements. Fran said she made a concerted effort to connect activities such as numeracy, which she said the students may not value as much, to the activities in the coffee shop. She explained that this connection helped the students to

recognize the significance of numeracy in their daily lives. In addition to learning the literacy and numeracy skills that were needed to support activities in the coffee shop, incidents that occurred in the coffee shop were examined in the classroom. Suzanne wrote,

The classroom also provides a forum for discussion about coffee shop incidents or issues. There is often little time to discuss these on coffee shop days. The classroom, in this way, becomes an outlet for opinions, feelings, and suggestions.

A couple of the students, on the other hand, didn't see the same connection between the learning in the classroom and the learning in the coffee shop. Marion thought that her learning in each setting was different and said, "The kitchen work, we work together like group, like real work. [In] the class, we learn the reading and writing." Hannah agreed, then suggested that the employability work they did once a week was more connected to the coffee shop than the literacy skills work. During the time set aside for employability, students discussed topics such as fire safety, personal safety at work, and health regulations related to the handling and storage of food. Suzanne also commented on the employability class.

Getting input from the students and using their input as much as possible, really facilitates learning. This worked very well, for example, in employability class where students had lots of real-life examples and situations to relate to the rest of the class (food safety, fire safety, hazardous products, etc.) This made the information so much more meaningful, and when information is meaningful, it is more easily retained.

Overall, the classroom did not contain consistent elements that could be described as a community of practice. The focus was on teaching, and the students and instructors had contradictory ideas of the learning purpose. One of the instructors, Fran, acknowledged that her group was predominantly teacher-led. Suzanne, in comparison, said her group contributed more to the class but this occurred within a structure set by the instructor.

Examples of this structure include the subject-based schedule, the types of materials used to support learning, and the physical set-up of the class. With regards to identifying the learning purpose, the instructors felt that the class activities were directly related to the activities that occurred in the coffee shop, and became a preparation for the coffee shop activities. The students viewed the two settings separately. Classroom activities did not support or connect to coffee shop activities; the only exception to this understanding was the time spent in the class doing employment activities, such as learning about fire and employee safety.

Participation

Students were engaged in a variety of activities in the classroom that emphasized the development of literacy skills, as illustrated by both the vocabulary lesson and the lesson devoted to learning fractions. But to see participation in a learning setting, as described by Lave and Wenger (1991), a student would have to be involved in a productive activity that leads to a new way of seeing herself. In other words, the literacy activities of the classroom would have to be seen to be an integral part of a broader activity that was meaningful to the students and helped them to think of themselves in new ways. One way to look at participation in the classroom is to focus on how students might integrate the classroom activities with the way in which they feel about themselves. Are the classroom activities helping them to see themselves in new ways?

Fran thought that participation in the classroom and to some extent the employment preparation program led her students to see themselves only as students. They were engaged in activities that helped them to identify themselves as adult students who attended school, not necessarily as adults who were preparing for employment.

I would say that, for many of the students, the class is a primary activity for them and, therefore, a primary way that they identify themselves. Having said that, I also see that most of the students certainly hope that the coffee shop training, and eventual placement, is their route to some type of employment eventually.

The higher level students, Marion, Hannah, and Nadine, also identified themselves as students, but this identity had a less dominant role in their lives. Their participation in the classroom and the program was seen as an opportunity to gain knowledge, apply this knowledge, and move on. It was not a primary activity as Fran described. Suzanne explained the difference:

It doesn't have to be an end itself. It's a stepping-stone. For now it's good for them, for their family situation, for where they are at. For some of them it's employment related; they would like a job out of this and that's their goal. But for many of the people in my class, I know it isn't [the end]. They'll do other things after that.

Suzanne was referring to their desire to continue their education and possibly enter a credit program or achieve a recognized credential in an educational setting.

Another way to look at participation in the classroom is to determine whether or not the students are engaged in a productive activity. In other words, do the literacy activities of the classroom lead to a purposeful and meaningful product? And, how do the students know when they've achieved that end? Nadine was able to describe the difference between the activities she did in the classroom and those she did outside the classroom. The classroom was the setting where she learned about literacy, and where she gained confidence. But it was outside the classroom that she engaged in meaningful and productive literacy activities. She recalled being in the general literacy program, learning the skills that she needed to read. But the key to her learning, she explained, actually occurred outside the classroom. "You have to

learn to help yourself too. You got to learn at school, then you have to [go] home to read or you'll never learn. You have to learn to help yourself.”

Fran noted the difference she had seen in students' attitudes when trying a new task in the coffee shop compared to the classroom. She said she didn't see the same enthusiasm or willingness in the classroom as she saw in the coffee shop. In the classroom, students might express a need to focus on an area of weakness, she explained, but they lacked the desire to learn new things. Fran explained,

I don't think it's quite so immediate, practical, or refined as getting in there [the coffee shop] with the hands-on stuff. They do verbalize those things, but it's probably much more real for them, I think, in a real setting.

In other words, the coffee shop activities were more practical, concrete, and meaningful for the students compared to the more nebulous classroom activities.

In order to judge their success in the classroom, most of the students said they depended on the teacher to tell them if their work had been done well. Nadine explained that she knew she had done well “when the teacher told you, like you're working and someone says, ‘Oh, you're doing a very good job.’ Often, she wasn't sure how she was doing with her classroom work and explained how she depended on the teacher's judgment, even when it contradicted her own.

At least you have confidence. It probably doesn't look good to you, but it look good to them, and I say okay. If they say I do a good job, at least I have more confidence to push myself, to go far, and far more.

The key to understanding participation is to be engaged in a productive activity with a community of practitioners to the extent that the learner begins to see him or herself as a full member of that community. In the classroom, the instructor felt that lower level students

identified themselves primarily as students. For some, this may be a new way of seeing themselves, particularly for Stacey, who had never attended school before. But these same students didn't necessarily see themselves as employees or potential employees, despite the fact that the classroom was an integral part of the employment preparation program. The higher level students, on the other hand, seemed to have a more flexible and broader vision of themselves. In addition, the classroom did not provide many opportunities for the students to be engaged in productive and meaningful activities.

Summary and Interpretation of the Classroom Setting

Literacy and learning in the classroom setting focused on the accumulation of literacy skills. Although these skills were intended to support the two other settings in the employment preparation program—the coffee shop and the job placements—the classroom, for the most part, supported literacy skill development for the sake of its use within the classroom. In other words, students learned to spell in order to do well on a spelling test, not to write words for a meaningful activity rooted in their daily lives. Most often, the content of the classroom was predetermined by guidelines, workbooks, schedules, and progress levels that approach literacy development as a set of hierarchical skills that can be accumulated then transferred to situations in the lives of the students. In other words, the grammar exercise or spelling dictation done in the classroom is viewed as a precursor to doing a letter writing activity at home.

The physical context of the classroom also reflected a skills-based approach that is grounded in traditional schooling models of education. The classroom resembled an elementary class for children, and the students valued the schooling activities that are associated with literacy development. They may have been exposed to similar activities

during their own formal education experiences, or they may have become familiar with literacy skill-building activities through the work of their own children in elementary schools. The classroom setting mimicked the culture of traditional elementary classes and activities, and the students came to expect these norms from their adult literacy classroom. The values and norms of an elementary school setting are also most familiar to the classroom instructors, Fran and Suzanne, who worked in elementary schools. In addition, an elementary school curriculum is the basis from which the provincial funder has developed a set of guidelines to describe progress in adult literacy programs (Literacy and Basic Skills Section, Workplace Preparation Branch, MTCU, 1998).

In the classroom setting, there was an emphasis on teaching rather than learning, which is a key element in a community of practice. In addition, the learning purpose was unclear. There was a discrepancy between the instructors and the students regarding the purpose for learning and the role of the classroom in the program. The instructors viewed the classroom activities as a basis for learning in the coffee shop, whereas the students did not see this connection. Compounding the competing notions of the classroom's learning purpose was a content and context that emphasized skills as opposed to practices. An emphasis on skills did not permit the students—or the instructors for that matter—to see and understand the whole. Instead, they focused only on building discrete pieces of knowledge.

In a community of practice students would be engaged in literacy practices; they would be doing the practice of literacy as it relates to their daily lives with people who are engaged in the same kinds of practices. In the classroom though, students were engaged in practices *about* literacy that were often disconnected from its use in their lives (as in the example of the fractions exercise that was developed to help students double recipes in the

coffee shop). The students' instructor devised an activity, incorporating a variety of tools—a worksheet, measuring cups, and measuring spoons—for use in the classroom. Although students had opportunities to use the same tools that they used in the coffee shop, the handling of the tools was isolated from their real use (they weren't actually preparing muffins), and the worksheet, rather than facilitating understanding, added an additional level of learning (students had to discern the meaning of written questions and representational diagrams, and then figure out how to represent an amount, then record that amount in an acceptable manner). In this way, they were engaged in practices about literacy as opposed to actively doing literacy practice.

As stated earlier, the key to understanding participation is to be engaged in a productive activity with a community of practitioners to the extent that the learner begins to see him or herself as a full member of that community. Students who entered the classroom were accepted as members of the group despite striking differences in culture, abilities, and lifestyle. (It was a testament to the instructors and students who strove to support one another, reserved judgment, and learned about each other that such a supportive and cohesive group formed.) But without realizing the learning purpose of an activity (a vocabulary exercise will help students expand their vocabulary, but for what purpose?), it was difficult to perform the integral tasks and to engage in the improvised practices that are part of participation in a community of practice. In addition, students in the classroom identified themselves more as students than employees or potential employees, which is contrary to the program's goals.

THE COFFEE SHOP

Similar to the previous section, the description of the coffee shop setting will begin with two vignettes to sketch a picture of the daily activities that occur in the coffee shop.

Coffee Shop Vignette 1 - Doubling the Recipe for Blueberry Orange Muffins

According to the job chart, Marion and another student, Leila, who is in the lower level group, have signed up to bake muffins. Although they have both baked muffins before, this is the first time either has attempted to double the ingredients in a recipe. Neither seems particularly concerned about this new challenge when Fran briefly explains what doubling means.

The students are each responsible for their own batch of muffins but work along side each other to share tools and ingredients. Leila collects all the food ingredients while Marion assembles the tools such as bowls, pans, spoons, and measuring equipment. Leila said that she no longer reads the posted job list to remind her what to do when baking. She referred to it only once, the first time she did the job, and now she says she can remember all the steps to prepare for baking.

Fran stands to the side of the two students and makes her presence known only when the students face a problem that they can't solve on their own or with each other's help. Her interventions are most often related to doubling the ingredients and the reading of abbreviations in the recipe. She will remind a student to double the amount or asks how they plan to double. To solve the doubling problem, the students simply fill their measuring cup or spoon twice for each ingredient. Although with a whole number amount, such as one cup, they double mentally and fill their measuring beakers to the two-cup mark.

Leila has difficulty distinguishing the meaning of tsp. and tbsp. She knows one is bigger than the other but isn't sure which abbreviation matches which spoon. She looks at me, then Marion, while holding the teaspoon measure in her hand (she actually needs a tablespoon). Marion quickly points out which one to use, and then tells her that a tablespoon is always bigger. As they work their way through the recipe they often confer with each other. Fran stays in the background and intervenes only when asked or if she spots a problem.

Coffee Shop Vignette 2 - Supervising the Counter Set-Up/Server

Stacey has been assigned the role of supervisor for the front counter position. This role demonstrates significant progress in her willingness to try new jobs in the coffee shop. When she first entered the coffee shop she was content to remain in the kitchen baking muffins, the job she felt most comfortable doing. Carrie said she had to encourage Stacey to try other jobs, but when that didn't work, she had to sit down with her privately to talk about the goals of the program and the need for her to attempt all jobs before going out on a job placement.

Carrie explained how she looks for a student's willingness to try new jobs and activities, and their ability to take on challenges independently in order to assess a student's readiness for a job placement.

There's this little spark [that] you usually see when they say, 'Okay, I haven't had a chance to make muffins yet.' or 'You haven't put me on cash yet.' So they come and tell us. Those are the ones that you know are going to go on. The ones who just do the dishes or just want to be on the counter all the time or make the muffins all the time, they don't want to get out of their comfort zone.

Initially, Stacey's training strategies are limited. She points to the posted job description, and says to Farah, a student who recently entered the program, "We do this."

Stacey continues to do the activities for her job without saying a word and Farah watches. Carrie, who is standing at the doorway to the serving area, suggests Stacey describe what she is doing as she does each activity. Stacey accepts this comment without reaction and begins to narrate her work. “After this (she points to the coffee that she has measured into the filter basket) then the sugar and milk.” Stacey walks to the counter where customers add milk, then pick up napkins and lids. Farah follows, stands beside the counter and watches quietly as Stacey prepares the counter area.

Below the counter is a cupboard that contains napkins, stir sticks, lids, utensils, and sugar dispensers. The items are listed on the door of the cupboard. I interrupt their work and ask each if they read the labels on the cupboard while they are working. Stacey interprets my question as a request to read the labels and begins reciting the words. She has some difficulty decoding the words. Farah then decides to also read the words, and has trouble with “stir stix”, “creamers”, “cutlery”, and “dispenser”. Stacey explains that she never reads the list, but knows where everything is and what needs to be set-up.

Farah then asks, “What’s cut-rey and dis-pens?” She looks at me but I remain silent and look at Stacey.

Stacey points out the sugar dispenser and Farah is surprised. “This is dis-pens?”

“No, not dis-pens, dissenser, no...” Stacey giggles at her own mistake. “It’s dis-penser.” From the pass-through window between the serving area and kitchen, Carrie asks Stacey if she remembered to take the frozen cookies out of the freezer.

“I’ll do later,” says Stacey.

Carrie hesitates, then asks, “Will there be enough time for them to thaw?”

“What’s thaw?” interrupts Farah.

Carrie explains the meaning of the word, then she and Farah go to the freezer to take out a container of frozen cookies. Carrie continues to work with Farah while Stacey finishes setting up the counter. Carrie tells Farah to use the tongs to assemble the cookies on the pedestal. Farah looks confused and says nothing for a moment. She then goes to the shelf and brings over a silver serving tray on a stand. “This is a pedestal?” she asks hesitantly. She had remembered how the cookies and muffins were displayed, but never knew the name of the tray.

During a quiet moment, as Stacey and Farah wait for their first customer, I ask Farah if she remembers what was in the cupboards. Not once did she look at the list, but names six out of seven items that are stored in the cupboard and assembled each day on the counter, including items such as stir stix, a word she had just learned. Farah then approaches Carrie to ask her what time the coffee machines should be turned on. Carrie suggests she ask Stacey, and she does.

Content

The learning content of the coffee shop was determined by its function. In other words, students were learning the procedures to operate a small coffee shop that was open to the public. The materials for learning were the tools, equipment, instructions, and supplies that were needed to prepare baked goods and coffee, serve customers, make money transactions, and maintain supplies. The knowledge they were gaining, including literacy and numeracy, was directly related to the functioning of the coffee shop. They were reading instructions to bake, reading labels to assemble ingredients, deciphering numbers, fractions and abbreviations related to measurements, counting money to set up a float, making change

for customers, placing orders, tracking inventory, etc. This knowledge was directly related to the real-life experiences and activities of operating a coffee shop or similar small business.

While in the coffee shop, the students were split into two groups (not based on LBS level) and each group operated the coffee shop one morning per week. Sometimes students had two mornings in the coffee shop if there were not enough in attendance to allow the split group. The coffee shop was only open two mornings each week.² Although there was demand from the customers and some students to open the coffee shop five mornings each week, the instructors were reluctant because of past experiences. When the program was first developed, students spent two and sometimes three mornings in the coffee shop, but many complained that they were missing too much classroom time and a couple of students left the program because of this.

From 9:00 am until opening at 10:15 am the students prepared baked goods, set up the counter and serving areas, made coffee, labeled and displayed the day's baked goods, and prepared a float for the cash register. During the 85 minutes that the coffee shop was open, they served customers, operated the cash register, finished baking, replenished the coffee, began washing dishes, prepared for the following day, and kept the serving area clean. They also arranged to take a break at some point in the morning. When the coffee shop closed, the following activities were undertaken: the cash was counted and recorded; leftover baked goods were stored; expiration dates were checked and old food was discarded; serving trays were cleaned; the counter where customers added milk and sugar to their coffees was cleaned and items were put away; ingredients that were used or nearly used were added to a shopping list; aprons, tea towels, and dish rags were washed; all ingredients and baking tools were put

² A third day was added during the study in order to provide a job placement experience for students who were not able to go into a placement site in the community. There is no instructor presence on this third day.

away; dishes were washed and left to air dry; and finally floors were swept and the counters were wiped and disinfected.

The activities of the coffee shop were derived from the performance of six different jobs: Baker, Cashier, Counter Set-Up/Server, Coffee Maker, Cleaner, and Dishwasher. Each job was accompanied by a job description that was posted close to the area in which the job was performed. The goal for each student was to learn every job well enough to perform it independently. The students demonstrated this mastery by teaching a new student how to do the same job. The role of Student Supervisor was also one of the jobs and it had its own description and evaluation checklists.

In addition to learning the procedures of the coffee shop, students also learned about work culture. The concrete and very real activities of the coffee shop have become “building blocks”, according to Carrie, from which less tangible skills were developed. Carrie referred to these as soft skills. The soft skills included problem-solving, prioritizing, taking risks, solving conflicts, supporting others, asking questions, taking initiative, working together, dealing with change, learning to be dependable and depend on others, pushing the boundaries of personal complacency, learning that mistakes are a part of learning, and learning that they have many valuable skills. These soft skills, explained Carrie, evolved from the real-life activities of the coffee shop; and it was the students themselves who set the content for learning these. For example, if a student was late or absent, then the others had to do his/her work. They may then criticize the late student, and in this way, the student realizes the impact of his/her actions on others. Carrie described other ways in which the students learned the more affective skills in the coffee shop. If two students worked together, sharing tools and space, they had to work out a way to do this so the job got done. Or if a student planned

to bake a certain type of muffin but someone else forgot to record an item on the shopping list, then, again, the students were the ones who called attention to the problem and not the instructors.

Finally, students were engaged in a variety of activities that required them to use literacy and numeracy. These activities were reading the recipes, reading abbreviations, signing up for a specific job, reading food labels, reading various dry and wet measures, counting money, making change, completing a cash tally sheet, labeling the day's baked goods for sale, reading expiration dates, and making lists of items to be bought. Students rarely talked about these separately. Rather, they were seen simply as part of the overall operation of the coffee shop.

To conclude, the learning content evolved from the activities and processes that needed to be performed to operate a small food-service business. Students learned one of six jobs, including the literacy activities associated with each job. They then demonstrated their mastery of the job by teaching another the same job. All of the learning materials in the coffee shop were directly related to the functioning of the business, and, in turn, were materials found in other similar settings. In addition to learning about the operation of the coffee shop, students also developed personal knowledge about themselves as they learned to work together towards a common goal. This knowledge, or the soft skills, was in fact generated mostly by the students, and not the instructors.

Context

A description of the learning context in the coffee shop, like the classroom, comprises both physical and non-physical elements. The physical elements can be found in a description of the coffee shop space, which is a former commercial kitchen in a vocational

school. The non-physical elements are the values, norms, and culture that are apparent in the setting, and are described based on the activities that the students and instructors feel are most important to learn.

The coffee shop was located in a former institutional cafeteria. The cafeteria, typical of many in a high school setting, was equipped to prepare and serve a wide range of lunch-time foods for staff and students. By the time the employment preparation program took over the space, some of the existing appliances had been removed or were in disrepair. In the food preparation area, the walk-in fridge no longer worked and was used for dry storage, and the commercial dishwasher was broken. The original skillet and stoves had been removed, and although a warming stove was left, it was not used. Permanent fixtures such as stainless steel cupboards, butcher block counters, an island with pot racks, large double sinks, shelving, range hood, and drying counters were left intact. In the serving area all permanent fixtures, such as the cupboards, counter, food warmers, and glass cooler for self-serve items were intact. The cash register had been removed, and the cooler along with the warming trays were not functioning. Start-up money from the city's social assistance department was used to purchase two stoves, a fridge, a washer and dryer, and a variety of baking tools and equipment.

Values, norms and culture

The coffee shop had two distinct learning areas: the front counter area and the kitchen, which seemed to generate different but equally valuable kinds of learning. In addition, it was in the coffee shop, and specifically the kitchen area, that students learned a new literacy practice, which was integrated into their daily lives. When students were working at the counter, they were interacting regularly with customers as they operated the

cash register, and served coffee and baked goods. The kitchen jobs, on the other hand, were more isolated from customers. Although the jobs were quite different, students talked with equal enthusiasm about the meaningfulness of their learning while working at the counter and in the kitchen. All of the students enthusiastically shared stories about their newly acquired baking skills and the success they experienced when trying out these new skills at home. When talking about her children's reaction to her baking, Hannah said, "Oh they love it. They love it for snacks." Marion, Rouda, and Stacey agreed that they had all experienced the same positive reception at home when they tried out their new skills. Although all of the women were accustomed to preparing food for their families, they had never baked cakes, cookies, and muffins, and they had never used a recipe while preparing food in the past.

While the kitchen jobs were valued for the skills the students could use at home, the counter jobs were valued for the skills that could be used in the workplace. Hannah clearly made this distinction. Although learning to read recipes to bake and use the cash register were equally valuable to her, they were valued for different reasons. "The muffins, the cookies I learn because before I didn't know how to cook...also I cook for my children." Learning to use the cash register, on the other hand, has led her to think of herself as someone with a marketable skill. She explained,

Before, when I see some of my friends when they are working in the stores or doing something like that, I believe it is a hard job. But right now, I know I can do it like them. It makes me feel very nice because I believe it was something hard. I can't do it. But right now I know it's easy for me. I can do it.

Stacey valued her new skills working at the counter and serving customers. When she first entered the program, she chose to do jobs in the kitchen only, and was nervous about working at the counter where she would have to interact with customers. After Carrie

encouraged her to work at the counter, this became her most valued learning experience in the coffee shop. “I never done that before...I surprise myself. Oh, I can do anything I want...” Like Stacey, Maritza also valued her newly learned customer-service skills. Before entering the program, she said she felt very nervous and shy around people. It was very difficult to initiate a conversation with someone she didn’t know. She recalled her first day working at the counter, serving customers.

The first time I say, ‘No. I don’t like it.’ But I say I have to. I’ve got to try. It’s true. I no like it. ‘Yes. Can I help you?’ No, no, no. I feel very bad. When I go home on the bus I say, ‘Why I have to say that?’ But the next time I feel more comfortable, you know. Then I say, ‘Hi. Hello.’ You know, go to another step.

Other students connected with Maritza’s story and said they also learned to overcome their nervousness while in the program. Rouda said, “You know wherever you go, whatever place you go, just like that, you make friends. Just like that, you talk.” Hannah, Stacey, Tom, and Nadine agreed that one of the most significant changes that the employment preparation program helped them to make was to become more confident when interacting with others in both positive and negative situations. Rouda said, “No matter what, you can get along. You can see the person. You can tell that person what they like [and] what they no like...if friendly or not friendly.” Hannah and Tom also learned to handle the occasional rude customer without feeling flustered.

The intent of the coffee shop was to create a context of work. It drew upon the procedures of a workplace as opposed to a classroom or a home kitchen. For many students, their experience in the coffee shop was the first time they were exposed to the culture of work in Canada. Trying to create a work setting in a school program has had its challenges. Other students, many of whom ultimately rejected the program, viewed the coffee shop in

one of two ways: it was a kitchen and not a work setting that they wanted to learn about, or they saw it only as a work setting and not a setting in which to learn literacy. Despite this, the students who did enter the program and participated in all aspects, have accomplished key “firsts” in their lives: some acquired their first employment experience; others obtained their first job; and many realized that they could fit into a work setting.

The instructors were aware that the employment preparation program did not suit the needs of all students and quickly recognized when this occurred. Usually, they said, this became apparent in the coffee shop setting, and the student might become uncommunicative, aloof, and generally uncomfortable. The instructors recognized that students had many reasons for not wanting to join the program: the majority of students enrolled in the employment preparation program were women, and men may have felt uncomfortable; working in a kitchen is considered women’s work; the program may not look like a student’s idea of school; the student may not want to work, even if this was a stated goal; and the student may experience pressures from family and friends to be in a class setting and not ‘waste their time’ in the coffee shop. “I’ve learned that my expectations are not always their expectations. Fair enough. Why should they be?” said Carrie. The coffee shop setting has a context that many students from the general literacy program reject. Those who do accept it though, value the learning experiences that help them at home, with each other, and in the workplace.

Community of Practice

A community of practice was more apparent in the coffee shop setting than the classroom. Unlike the classroom, there was more of a learning focus in the coffee shop. In fact, the classroom instructors’ role diminished and students often became supervisors, as in

the vignette with Stacey. In addition, there were strong goals and a clear purpose for learning; students could see and understand the whole of their learning as opposed to small pieces of knowledge; the coffee shop was designed as an opportunity to engage in improvised practice in a supportive setting; and the learning curriculum—in other words, the process of learning each of the jobs in the coffee shop—was an opportunity to engage in practice.

While in the coffee shop, Carrie was the primary instructor, Fran became more of an assistant instructor, and Suzanne remained with one group of students to teach employability. Carrie explained her instructional approach.

It's ongoing teaching, demonstrating, and modeling. That's what we do, and no one just stands around observing. It's hands on."

Fran and Suzanne occasionally switched roles to allow Suzanne to be in the coffee shop while Fran led the employability group. Suzanne spent the least amount of time in the coffee shop overall, and found herself being taught by the students when she was in the coffee shop. She wrote,

The student/teacher line tended to blur a lot for me in the kitchen. Because I was not there very often, I was not as familiar with the location of supplies, procedures, etc. The students were delighted to help me and seemed to take great pride in their knowledge and expertise. This was a very 'neat' thing to witness and really demonstrated to me how far they had come.

The coffee shop is viewed as a vehicle to move beyond learning *about* employment practices, and allowed students to learn to *do* employment practices. Students were not simply reading, discussing, and role-playing about employment preparation; they were engaging, deciding, and actively doing activities that are employment preparation. As Rouda said, "If I can do it in the cafeteria [coffee shop], I can do it outside." Even if a student's

placement or job was unrelated to operating a coffee shop, students learned to be an employee. Rouda stressed that it didn't matter to her that the coffee shop activities were not the same activities she did at her job placement. She said she learned to "become stronger" and that was most important to her. Nadine and Stacey agreed. They both said that the coffee shop helped them to gain confidence in themselves and helped them to realize that they could be a good employee. Nadine explained further,

When you're there [in the coffee shop] you never know anything before, but at least when you're there they teach you. If you go out in the world, at least what they will ask you, you will understand exactly what they're talking about. Before, you wouldn't know anything. You have to ask, 'What are you saying? I don't understand.' Here they teach you things.

Rouda described how the improvised practice of the coffee shop with its clear learning purpose helped her in her job placement. The most important learning for her she said was to learn to understand people and "the culture" of work. She compared her brief work experience in the past with her current placement experience. "That time I didn't know. I was working but I didn't know the people. Now I can understand people like this [she snaps her fingers]." She continued to explain what she learned in the coffee shop from the instructors and students. It's important, she said to...

...be friendly, to understand other people and to work—how it's important and how they do it, how they teach you. You have to follow that. That is very important because if you go to another job on your own, something that is a little tiny that you must understand...god knows that you might get fired [if you don't understand]. So they learn here [in the coffee shop] a little bit what you are supposed to do [and] what you are not supposed to do.

Carrie also emphasized the importance of helping students learn how to be an employee. Although the coffee shop was a different environment than most of the job

placements, the students were actively engaged in experiences that allowed them to develop skills for a variety of placement sites. Carrie said, “They are able to draw on their skills from the coffee shop, obviously, or else they wouldn’t be successful in their placement.” For most students in the program, the employment placement is their first job experience. Carrie summarized her focus as an instructor in the coffee shop.

The focus is teaching a specific task, teaching a job, following directions, working together, asking questions. Then the softer skills are the judgments, making judgments, problem-solving, and critical thinking. But in order to run a business, you have to have the bricks, you have to lay the groundwork.

Students expressed a variety of ways of understanding the learning that occurred in the coffee shop. On a direct and concrete level, they gave animated details about the way they ran the coffee shop, such as the way they baked, what they baked, who did what, their problems, successes, and many more details about the coffee shop’s day-to-day operation. They also discussed the practical skills they acquired (such as operating the cash register or using a commercial coffee maker), and the numeracy and literacy abilities they acquired (such as reading recipes and abbreviations), and using measuring cups. They also discussed their employment readiness skills, such as preparing for an interview and workplace safety. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, they talked about how their experience in the coffee shop has made them feel more confident.

Hannah said the most important thing she learned in the coffee shop was to use the cash register independently. This will be the skill, she explained, that she will depend on to help her find a part-time job. The other things she learned included baking muffins and cookies, reading recipes, and learning to read carefully. She explained, “A lot of stuff looks alike, like teaspoon and tablespoon. It’s tsp, then b, something like that. Little differences.

Baking powder and baking soda, something like that. We have to be careful.” In addition, she said she has learned about workplace safety. “I knew some but I also learn about something new. This morning I learn about hearing. When something is very loud, it can affect you. You can lose your hearing. I didn’t know that before.”

Learning about safety and procedures also stood out in Rouda’s mind “The most important thing is safety. I remember the safety.” Rouda then quickly added that she learned more than safety procedures in the coffee shop. “I remember the muffins, [and] reading.” She then added that she also learned how to prepare for a job interview: “How to talk, not to be nervous, [and] calm down.” She learned to use the coffee machine and to serve customers “the polite way”. She also talked about the importance of learning to be “particular”, and compared the way she approached a task at home with the way she has learned to do a similar task in the coffee shop. “At home,” she said, “your mind knows everything. Everyday, what you are doing, you know.” The coffee shop, in contrast is very different.

Sugar we know, flour we know. It’s important, You have to be particular [about] how you use [them]. You have to know [and be] careful because you never know if you get the job and you have to know metric. [At home] everything you know. When you [are] making something, cooking something. [at] home, it’s not important.

She said the activities that are done in the coffee shop, such as metric measurement, and careful reading, may be similar to the activities that are done at a job. She felt it was important to learn these things in order to prepare for work.

If you know or not, they [will] tell you, ‘Follow that paper.’ If you don’t know, you [are] lost. You don’t know nothing. You cannot ask people [who are] working; they are concentrating on something else. ‘Excuse me, can you help me?’ That means you don’t know. You [have to] be ready.

Stacey expressed similar opinions as Rouda. “When you are going on [a] job, you have to know everything they teach or you [are] lost. Otherwise, you need help or something.” Like Hannah and Rouda, Stacey said she learned to read and use recipes. Even though she enjoyed cooking and learned to prepare different cultural foods, she said she didn’t understand how to use recipes before she participated in the coffee shop. She explained that she used to read them but did not actually use them when preparing food. Now she explained, “I like to read the recipe—how to measure, what to put, and how many. I’m glad that now I understand.” She also talked about learning to be more organized and methodical when she prepared food. She then added that it has helped her to understand text better when she is actually using the text, like reading the recipe or following directions for making coffee. Fran aptly described the learning in the coffee shop: “[The students] are very eager to be in [the coffee shop] and certainly seem to know what they are doing. They have a clear sense of direction that they brought with themselves.”

The coffee shop, more than any other setting demonstrated a community of practice. It had a learning focus as opposed to a teaching focus, one of the key elements that defines a community of practice. The classroom instructors switched roles with the coffee shop instructor and took on more of a supportive role. While the coffee shop instructor, Carrie, focused on modeling and coaching in her approach to teaching, the students were expected to take on the role of supervisor. In addition, the learning purpose was clear (the students had to run a small food service business); they understood the whole and not simply discrete pieces of knowledge (they had opportunities to see and experience each of the jobs and activities that were necessary in a small business); the coffee shop was set up as an improvised practice

opportunity to prepare students for work; and the curriculum, based on the six coffee shop jobs, was an opportunity to engage directly in practice and not dictates for practice.

Participation and Legitimate Peripheral Participation

It was in the coffee shop setting that participation could be described in the greatest detail compared to the other two settings. To help with this description, Wenger's (1998) interpretation of legitimate peripheral participation will also be used. Building on the notion that participation involves the construction of identities as an individual engages in a productive activity in a community of practice is the idea of legitimate peripheral participation. In legitimate peripheral participation, an individual is fully *accepted* into a community of practice, is considered a *newcomer* and is trained by *oldtimers*, is immediately engaged in activities that are *integral* to the learning process, receives *monitoring and support*, and is given *room to make errors*. All of which leads to the students' *changing identity* and new ways to see themselves as employees and learners.

Acceptance

New students were accepted into the coffee shop environment despite cultural, age, gender, and personality differences. Instructors explained how they purposefully set a tone of mutual respect, openness, and non-judgmental attitudes. In addition, students have learned to trust that their instructors will not permit anyone to jeopardize the environment that was created in the coffee shop. They have witnessed their instructors address issues with students whose words, attitude, or habits may be detrimental to the group. For example, one instructor worked closely with a student whose lack of hygiene was preventing his acceptance in the group. Instructors said that they quickly address students who are overly sharp, critical, or rude to one another in order to maintain a supportive and inclusive environment. Another

example of the kind of open and accepting environment that a new student entered was the way in which students shared their breaks. In other classes, in the general literacy program, students usually took breaks with others who shared a dominant cultural similarity, such as ethnicity, gender, or age. This did not seem to occur as often with students in the employment preparation program. Rouda commented on the feeling of acceptance that existed in the coffee shop.

At the start of the cafeteria, a lot of students help because they know they can do it. They get strong. They are not thinking [that] this is another culture so you cannot do it or be shy or be ashamed or something like that.

Rouda, Stacey, and Nadine explained that the students and instructors in the coffee shop have “open minds”. This means that there was a feeling of equality that enabled the students to work together in groups and to help each other. In addition, explained Rouda, “Group work is more friendly and happy; you can laugh, you can talk, you can do whatever you want.”

Newcomers Are Trained by Oldtimers

The coffee shop established a routine in which oldtimers, students who have worked in the coffee shop and are able to independently perform a job, train newcomers. The program has continuous intake of new students so a newcomer can join at any time during the term or school year, as in the example of Stacey training Farah to set up the counter, make the coffee, and serve customers. Hannah described how she worked with new students one day when Carrie was absent.

I can teach a lot of things that I learned. Like last Tuesday, I was supervising them. Carrie was not feeling well, so for those who have a little difficulty reading, I was supervising. I was helping them when they see the recipe. I was

helping them when they are not sure. I was helping them and telling them which one is exactly the one they are using. Most people, they have a little difficulty measuring. Most of them, I was telling them and pointing [for] them.

In addition to helping newcomers learn to do the tasks and jobs in the coffee shop, oldtimers pass on a way of communicating. Fran said that she learned about this from Carrie when she first began working in the coffee shop, and has since passed on her knowledge to new students. During the group interview, she told Carrie how this occurred.

You were really great at providing those guidelines for me, without telling me. So I was trying to observe Carrie at the beginning for those first two or three months really. You really taught that well, and you're demonstrating that to me so I'm pretty sure that is what they are picking up. So that's really great. You have to take full credit for that because that is the way that you present yourself to them and so when they have to make a decision, they've heard how you've said, 'Can I help you with this?' or 'Do you want help with that?' Rather than someone simply coming down on them. So you can really see how they pick that up, that mannerism.

Integral Tasks

While in the coffee shop, students were engaged in activities for a clear purpose; that is, they contributed to the operation of the coffee shop through the completion of integral tasks, such as preparing baked goods, serving customers, and operating the cash register. Their active involvement in these integral tasks impacted them in two ways: it helped students to work together, and it gave students a taste of the realities and pressures of an actual employment setting. Hannah and Marion described how the activities of the coffee shop supported and in fact demanded collaboration and interaction amongst the students. "In the coffee shop we are all... How can I explain? But we are, we have more time to do things,

talking because everything... We are looking at recipes. We are..." Marion finished her sentence and added, "...asking questions." Hannah then continued and explained, "If we work together to make the muffins, you have to ask the question: 'I think that's not right' or something like that [or] 'What does that mean?'" In this way, she said, the students must get to know each, work together, and overcome their apprehensions.

Hannah then explained how this kind of communication occurred only in the coffee shop and not the classroom.

[The coffee shop] is different from other classes because when you are in class, when we are in the class, or other students are in the class, there's not a lot of time to talk. Everybody is busy for learning. But our class, we go to the kitchen, we work together. We talk. We help each other.

Rouda who was actively involved in her placement at the time of her interview, saw the link between the integral activities she did in the coffee shop and the activities she did in her placement. Despite the fact that they were two very different settings, she felt that she was prepared to work in the childcare after being in the coffee shop.

The cafeteria [coffee shop], is like a real job because you are doing everything as work. You are not thinking about doing it for nothing. You are thinking this is your job and you have to do it.

Monitoring and Support

In the coffee shop there was a distinct difference between the classroom regarding how students monitored each other and offered support or feedback. In the classroom, explained Suzanne, students who were focused on an activity might say something like, 'Oh, you got that one.' But the high level of personal feedback, in which one student once told

another that she's "amazing", didn't occur in the classroom. Suzanne felt that this kind of personally affirming feedback from a peer was more influential than anything an instructor might say. Suzanne described an exchange she once witnessed in the coffee shop.

Hannah had just come in and she was talking to Stacey who was a busy bee working around there, just doing everything. Hannah didn't know I was there and she said, 'I saw you the last time.' She said, 'Yesterday when everyone was gone you were just doing everything. You worked so hard. You did this job and this job. You're just amazing.' Stacey was just beaming and she said, 'Yep I was doing all of that.' That was a really nice thing initiated by Hannah towards Stacey, and I thought wow—this is good. It made me feel very good to hear that.

Fran suggested that the coffee shop might be one of the only settings outside of family in which students received positive feedback and affirmation from peers.

Students not only supported each other's learning through feedback but they also analysed their own work and learned to self-correct. Fran said they pushed themselves to do well and wanted to determine where and how an error had been made. She said,

They're really great at that actually. You see how sincerely interested they are in looking at that cookie, and seeing and realizing why it didn't work. They go back many extra steps, evaluating the results.

This ability may be related to Carrie's instructional approach, suggested Fran. She explained how Carrie set clear expectations and modeled the behaviours that she wanted to encourage in the coffee shop.

Students not only tried to meet the expectations with regard to the ways of doing the coffee shop activities, such as preparing for baking by assembling all the ingredients, but they also began to meet expectations that the instructor set regarding their personal growth and abilities. Rouda said,

They teach you how to be okay, like yourself...They teach you how...Like example. [I'm at the placement] 8:30 until 3:00. It's long hours. I can do it if I get the job. I can do it. That is what they teach you. 'Go ahead Rouda, you can do it. You can do it.' Something like that. To be what you have to be. Do it, and how to be better, you know. Something like that.

Room for Error

One of the reasons that students were willing to push their learning, and to analyse their learning, may be because they knew mistakes were simply a part of their learning. They were not penalized in any way if a mistake was made, and were pushed to think about mistakes as an important part of learning. Nadine described how she gained more confidence in herself because she was encouraged by Carrie to try new tasks and work through her initial confusion, apprehension, and errors. She said Carrie taught her "to do things like, you don't know what to do and she say, 'It's okay if you don't understand, you do it the next day and you get a handle on it.'" In addition, said Nadine, Carrie helped her to feel differently about herself, and she needed Carrie to push her to try new activities. Through this process, she was able to gain new confidence in herself. "If you have no confidence, like me, by myself, I won't push me to do anything."

Rouda said that she always knew that the coffee shop was a safe place to make mistakes, but at the same time, she recognized that she wouldn't have the same flexibility once she was working at her job placement.

When you are in school or [the employment preparation program] sometimes, as a human, you make a mistake, and you think, 'Okay, I have to depend on my teacher; she will be telling me.' Now by yourself, at a placement, no teacher [is] telling you something. You have to be smart yourself, to do it, everything by yourself.

Nadine also recognized a difference between the coffee shop and a workplace setting. She explained that she understood she could make a mistake in the coffee shop without fear of criticism. “It doesn’t seem bad because we know each other, but if we’re somewhere else, we feel really bad.” Tom said that he was nervous when operating the cash register but knew the instructors were there to help him. He also stressed “people have to understand that we’re learning,” and admitted he felt more relaxed and assured if the instructor stood next to him.

At times, Fran has wondered if the environment they’ve created in the coffee shop is too supportive.

The thing that I worry about is the fact that our coffee shop is so supportive and so, not protected in a negative sense, but nicely protected. We all know that when we go into the work world, people are encountering people that are going to be a bit difficult or there’s going to be challenges all around for them.

Changing Identities

Fran said that the greatest impact of the employment preparation program was on the student’s changed identity, and this change occurred in the coffee shop. She said the students began to recognize that they have skills, which could lead to a job or a better job. Carol agreed and suggested that one of the factors that helped to precipitate this change was the set of well-defined and challenging expectations that the program had.

For some, this is the first time that anyone has expected anything of them. They just come in and see this busy place and everybody doing their job. They just kind of come into the flow. The expectations are high and they’re specific. It seems to be a happening place.

Rouda said that the instructors, students, and her work in the coffee shop helped her to become “stronger”. By working with other students, she learned to overcome her apprehension and nervousness. She said the instructors, “show you that you can do that.”

They encouraged her and taught her to be self-reliant. Rouda referred to this as “responsibility yourself”. She said that the instructors and program in general taught her to...

...[have] responsibility yourself. You don't need every time [to have somebody say], ‘Okay do that.’ You have to learn quickly, you know to be responsible yourself. I am learning by myself. First time in the placement, if they tell you something, they not keep repeating, you know, you have to do it yourself.

She said she could see and feel her confidence growing: “I see it. I am growing myself. I am more confidence in myself.” She added that her children have also seen a change. “My children, they see now that I am very, very serious about [getting] a job.” She felt that the program had changed her and given her both the practical skills and self-confidence she would need in a job.

Now I am better. I am better to stand up myself, to do something they teach me here. If I try to get [a] job in [a] restaurant or cafeteria, Tim Horton's or something like that, I know everything about the rules, [like] safety. I know everything about it. Before I didn't know about Canada culture, you know, they have to do it about this safety. I didn't know about that before. So now I know about it, everything. So I can try to get a job that will support me.

Not only could participation be described in the coffee shop based on its fundamental notion that identities are constructed as an individual engages in a productive activity in a community of practice, but it also contained elements of the more complex idea of legitimate peripheral participation. Legitimate peripheral participation was apparent as new students were fully accepted into the coffee shop. These new students or newcomers were usually paired with a more experienced student or oldtimer to learn a specific job. The job that had to be completed was an integral part of their learning and the functioning of the coffee shop. In other words, if the job was not completed, it affected the operation of the coffee shop and left a gap in the student's learning and understanding. The instructors and other students provided

monitoring, support, and direct feedback. In addition, students learned to self-correct. Feedback was often related to an activity, such as successful baking or missing a step in a recipe. It could also be more personal in nature, in that students were complimented on their overall abilities and personal characteristics. The coffee shop environment, although filled with pressures, was also an environment that was supportive and maintained a focus on learning, as opposed to simply running a coffee shop. When errors were made, they were discussed and used as learning opportunities. Finally, students experienced changes in the way they viewed themselves. As their confidence grew, they began to think of themselves as employees.

Summary and Interpretation of the Coffee Shop Setting

When students were in the coffee shop they were engaged in activities for a clear and real purpose, but the overall tone was learning and not production. The coffee shop was a created setting, more like a simulated lab. It was a setting where mistakes were expected and then dissected, where risks were encouraged and supported, and where expectations were set and met. In addition, a continuous process of trial and error, attempts, adjustments, and discoveries was fostered. In this way, learning the practice of running the coffee shop became a way to prepare for employment.

The main learning goal in the coffee shop was independent mastery of each of the coffee shop jobs. Mastery of the jobs, such as Baker, Server, or Cashier, did not necessarily lead to the students obtaining these jobs outside the coffee shop setting. Rather, they applied different aspects of their learning and new knowledge outside the coffee shop setting, both in their homes and job placements. Most of the placements did not involve food preparation and

even the placement in the bakery used such different methods of preparation that Stacey, who was in that setting, felt she had to learn a completely new set of bakery skills.

One setting where many of the students did use their new knowledge about baking with recipes was at home. In fact, the students incorporated a new literacy practice into their lives when they began to use recipes at home. All the students, except Martha, said they had tried baking at home with a recipe, something they had never done before. In addition, most had integrated this new knowledge into their daily lives. Hannah said she now bakes regularly for her children using recipes. Before working in the coffee shop, she said she had never used recipes and wasn't even interested in learning to use them.

I was always cooking what I knew. [Recipes] are a good idea because it's easy. I put the papers there and then I put everything together. It's very easy, a very nice idea. I like it because now I believe that without recipes, we can't cook. Some days I try the recipe that I have from the coffee shop.

In addition to introducing a new literacy practice in their lives, students also gained new ways of seeing themselves from their experiences in the coffee shop. They began to see themselves as employees who had practical abilities, such as using a cash register; affective abilities, such as communication with customers; and personal abilities, such as confidence. It's difficult to say which elements in the coffee shop most helped the students see themselves as employees. Was it the mastery of a task; the instructional approach; or perhaps the support of other students? In addition to gaining new knowledge about themselves as employees, students also learned about the culture of work. They learned that work safety and being "particular" were valued in many workplaces. They also learned, as Rouda did, to take initiative and not to interfere in personal disagreements with other staff. Whether these

were some or all of the outcomes that the program wanted to foster is unknown. Also, are these the kinds of knowledge students need to learn about workplace culture?

JOB PLACEMENTS

The descriptions of the job placements relied upon the student and instructor interviews as a main data source. Subsequently, the format of the next section is slightly different than the descriptions of the classroom and coffee shop settings. I was not able to actually observe students in their job placements and relied on their stories about their experiences. As a result, the content and context sections, which drew from observation data, are not as detailed as the descriptions of the previous settings, and have been combined. Separate sections remain for the descriptions of a community of practice and participation. In addition to these differences, the way in which the job placements are described will change within each of the three major sections. An overview of the placements will be described in the content and context section. Then, in the community of practice section, each of the job placements sites will be described. Focus will then shift to each of the students in the participation section.

Content and Context

This section will analyse what students are learning (content) and the learning environments (context) of the job placements. Most of the information about the job placements came from the student and instructor interviews, particularly an interview with Carrie, the instructor who supported the students in their job placements. The focus of this combined section is not on each site but on the overall role of the placements within the program.

The program did not have set times for students to move into a job placement. Rather, Carrie said she looked at each student's performance in the coffee shop and their job readiness, which was gauged by the student's ability to master the coffee shop jobs. But it didn't seem to be the practical skills that were being measured as much as the students' soft skills. Carrie said she wanted to see the students demonstrate an ability to solve problems independently, ask questions when clarification was needed, and prioritize tasks. In addition, the students had to be able to make accommodations in their home schedule in order to participate in a placement. Normally, students were in a placement two or three mornings each week, and missed the coffee shop and employability portions of the program. Although the placements were not intended to change their established schedules, students sometimes had to travel to get to their placements or arrive a little earlier than the program start time, which was 9:00 am.

According to the instructor, Carrie, a job placement was an opportunity for students to gain knowledge about the workplace and workplace culture; it was the first workplace experience many students ever had; and it gave students a chance to build a resume. Although the students were participating in a job setting (the coffee shop), there was also a need for them to participate in a work setting outside the supports of the program in order to gain confidence and become more independent. In their job placements, students had to communicate with people they had never met before; depend on themselves, without the direct support of the program, its teachers and students; learn new skills for the specific placement setting; experience a period of diminished confidence that must be rebuilt during the first month of their placement; and encounter a variety of new people who may not always be supportive and accepting. She also emphasized that the placement experience

helped students to develop “soft skills” such as problem-solving, adaptability, working with others, and confidence. Very little emphasis was placed on the development of literacy and numeracy in the placements since most of the activities did not require a high degree of literacy and numeracy ability.

There were five different job placement sites and the choice of a placement site was negotiated between Carrie and the students. To choose a placement site, Carrie said she wanted the students to express an interest in the placement and wanted to ensure the student would be capable of performing the activities related to the placement. She referred to this process as determining the “job fit”. The sites were a childcare facility, a grocery store, a discount department store, the school board cafeteria, and the coffee shop, which became a modified placement. The sites were chosen for a variety of reasons, including their potential for future employment, their willingness to accept adult student placements, and their ability to provide meaningful employment experiences. The childcare—run by the school board for students in various adult education programs—is one of the few established childcare facilities in the city that hires childcare assistants without credentials. The assistants can earn over \$10.00 an hour and work up to 30 hours per week. A well-known chain grocery store, located near the centre of the city, accommodated students in both its bakery and produce departments. The grocery store placement was considered a good site because there were opportunities for students to learn a variety of jobs, including a coveted job as a cashier. A popular discount department store was chosen as a site because there was a potential to be hired and there were a variety of jobs within the organization. The school board cafeteria was chosen mainly because it also offered a variety of training opportunities, and it had a history

of working with high school students on placements. Finally, the coffee shop became a modified placement site to accommodate students with childcare needs.

Once the students completed their placements, they were encouraged to return to the program, unless they received a job offer. Re-entry into the program was established in order to support a transition from the employment preparation program to the workplace. Initially, the transition period was intended only to support students during their job search. But in addition to this support, Carrie recognized an even more valuable reason for students to return to the program after completing their placements. The returning students displayed more confidence, she explained, and other students began to inquire about his or her experiences in the placement. The returning students were more than willing to share experiences with those who had not been on a placement, and they compared experiences with those who did have a placement.

While the students were on their placements, the classroom became the setting in which they discussed placement experiences. The instructors initially thought the students would use the classroom for literacy support but they were rarely asked to help students solve problems related to either literacy or numeracy. Instead, students needed help dealing with a myriad of non-literacy issues, such as working with others, dealing with supervisors who didn't permit them to do any challenging tasks, or who expected too much, and working with staff members who either didn't understand that the student was a volunteer, or even felt threatened by the student. The classroom then became a setting for focusing on the behaviours and culture of the workplace, as they related to the job placements, rather than literacy.

Community of Practice

This section will examine how the job placements may or may not have resembled a community of practice. The following questions can be used as a guide to determine whether or not any of the placements had the elements of a community of practice. Was the focus on teaching the activity or learning? If learning was predominant, what was its purpose? Did students see and understand the whole? Did activities permit improvised practice or were they simply a set of skills and tasks that were unrelated to the actual practices of the job placements?

The childcare

Nadine, Martha, and Rouda had placements in the childcare, Nadine's placement arrangement was standard; both Rouda and Martha had more unique placement agreements. Martha wanted to work with children, but she most likely would always need to be supervised. The goal of her placement in the childcare was to help her gain experience, and not to find a job as much as perhaps to find a position as a volunteer. She continued to participate in the employment preparation program each morning and went to her modified placement two afternoons a week. Rouda's case was completely different. Her placement was almost independent of the program, and she followed the path that all potential childcare assistants took to be hired: she volunteered at various childcare sites, was on the supply list, and was beginning to supply teach in the hopes that a position would become available. She worked at childcare sites four full days a week and maintained contact with the program only one day a week. This arrangement was made in order to maintain Rouda's student status so she could receive support and assistance from the program.

While in the childcare, students were engaged in a variety of activities essential to the job of childcare assistant. They led reading circles; helped the children eat, wash and dress;

sang songs with the children; supervised their play time; changed diapers; comforted children who were upset; prepared the children for fire drills; and even participated in a professional development day for the childcare staff. Depending on the site and supervisor at each site, the students' level of engagement with the children, staff, and activities varied. At one site, Nadine was rarely permitted to act independently and was not given challenging tasks. She said she felt useless and incapable as a result. She transferred to another site where the supervisor asked her to "shadow" her and became fully engaged in all of the day-to-day activities.

All three students said they were most involved with the childcare supervisors, and referred to them for assistance, direction, and support. Rouda explained her interaction with the childcare supervisor, "They tell you. The first time they introduce you to the staff and [tell you] what you should do and shouldn't do. If you need help or you don't understand something, so [I] ask for directions myself." Rouda added that she has also learned to depend on her own skills and knowledge. "I really focused and depending on myself even."

The grocery store

Stacey worked in the bakery/deli department and Tom worked in the produce department of a chain grocery store located close to downtown. Both were assigned jobs that an employee would do. Tom explained that he had to unpack and display produce. He learned to rotate the old and new produce, and was surprised to find out how many different types of apples the store sold, all of which he learned to identify and name. Stacey unpacked the dry ingredients for various baked goods, she wrapped and bagged the muffins, bread sticks, and buns when they were cooled, and she brought out items for display. Both she and

Tom worked closely with other employees who would tell them what to do, then demonstrate the task, and then let them do the task independently.

Discount department store

Marion was the most isolated student in her placement but didn't complain about this to anyone. She was in the women's clothing department at a discount department store, and her job was to price clothing. She said she was given instructions first thing in the morning (she wasn't sure if the person was a supervisor or an employee) and then worked mostly by herself, tagging the new clothes or putting sale stickers on marked-down items. She didn't take a break, and sometimes left at noon without seeing or talking to anyone.

The cafeteria

Maritza traveled to the school board's administrative offices to work in the cafeteria. Her placement lasted only a few weeks. Carrie said she had a feeling it wouldn't work out when Maritza approached her about the potential difficulties she faced making bus connections in order to get to the cafeteria. Although her home was only a seven-minute drive away, she relied on the city bus and only one per hour ran up the street past the placement site. If she missed that one bus, she was forced to take three buses and spend at least an hour traveling the few kilometers to get to the site.

Maritza said when she first went to the site she was given a quick tour and expressed interest in learning to use the cash register. The supervisor misunderstood her interest and thought she was expressing concern. She told Maritza she didn't have to worry about learning to use the cash register. Maritza did not correct her. Despite this misunderstanding, Maritza had another opportunity to display her skills and initiative. One morning when she walked in, two employees were off and no one was available to make the day's soup. Maritza

volunteered to make it. When asked if she had ever prepared soup before she said she did it regularly at home. The supervisor told her she could use the recipe book but Maritza declined and made the soup on her own. Carrie found out about this when the supervisor contacted her to praise Maritza. She also said that Maritza had done more than her employees were able to do on such short notice. Carrie glowed with pride when she retold the story. Unfortunately, the pride was short-lived and a week later Maritza decided not to return to the placement. The cafeteria had the potential to be a community of practice but this potential was not fully realized because of Maritza's decision to leave. While there, she was able to perform integral activities, she seemed to be accepted (at least by the supervisor), and she was in a supportive environment.

The coffee shop

Because Hannah's four-year-old son was in the childcare run by the program, she was not able to participate in a placement outside of the school. To accommodate Hannah and a newer student in a similar position, the decision was made to open the coffee shop a third morning without instructors. Hannah and three other students were chosen to run the coffee shop. The instructors first discussed the idea with the students and chose the group carefully. They wanted students who would work well together and wanted to give capable students a greater challenge. After having one of the classroom instructors open the coffee shop, the students worked on their own to set up the counter, prepare the cash, display baked goods, prepare the coffee, serve customers, balance the cash, and clean. After a couple of weeks, they felt they were able to prepare so quickly that they had time enough to bake one batch of muffins. Hannah said, "We also cook because Carrie said, 'You did everything so you can try also cooking.' So we did very well." The only job that was pre-assigned was the job of

cashier. The students decided amongst themselves who would do the other jobs. Then they all pitched in to do the dishes and clean because it was agreed these were the least favourite jobs, and they decided no single person should get stuck with them week after week. The only time they called for instructor assistance was when the coffee maker wouldn't work one day. Hannah proudly explained that even the instructor had to get help from the custodial staff because it was a problem that she too was unable to fix.

Not all of the job placement settings resembled a community of practice. Only one setting (the childcare where Nadine was asked to "shadow" the supervisor) seemed to contain all the elements of a community of practice. The setting that contained the least elements was the discount department store, where Marion was isolated and doing the same mundane tasks day after day. In the second childcare where Nadine worked she was actively involved in the integral activities of the childcare, including leading a reading circle. She worked closely with a supervisor who used modeling and coaching to facilitate learning, and the focus was on learning rather than direct teaching. In addition, Nadine was able to recognize the learning purpose of the activities and how they contributed to the operation of the childcare. She was also engaged in activities that were improvised practice situations and related to the day-to-day operation of the childcare centre. Marion, on the other hand, was isolated. She received brief instructions in the morning and had little interaction after that. This provided little learning. She was assigned a single mundane task that was quickly mastered, and was not able to move beyond this activity. She learned very little about the day-to-day operation of the work setting and was not exposed to any other aspects of the store or even the department she worked in.

Participation

Participation is integrally linked to a community of practice and, subsequently, the sites that best demonstrated a community of practice (such as one of the childcare settings) also demonstrated participation. The opposite is also true. The site that least demonstrated participation (the discount department store) was hard pressed to reveal any tangible evidence of participation. In the best examples of participation, the students were engaged in a productive activity in a community of practice. In addition, based on the notion of legitimate peripheral participation, students were fully accepted into a community of practice, were considered a newcomer and trained by oldtimers, were immediately engaged in activities that were integral to the learning process, received monitoring and support, and were given room to make errors. In the poorest examples of participation, very few (if any) of these elements were apparent. The students readily shared their experiences regarding how they participated at their placements. Subsequently, this section is richer than the previous job placement descriptions that appeared in the content and context subsections..

Nadine experienced two participation extremes while doing the same kind of childcare work at two different sites. At the first site, she was often ignored by the staff, felt unchallenged, and made to feel incompetent. She described how she was not permitted to become fully involved with daily activities; she said she was sometimes given conflicting information from different staff members; and she said the staff sometimes laughed at her mistakes. She knew that she needed to become more involved in the operation of the childcare if she was to learn to be a childcare worker. She said,

I didn't feel comfortable there, and they didn't let me do anything, like take care of the kids. If I see them going to fall or something, they say let the teacher do it. I didn't do anything. I do lunch and stuff. I feed them and that thing. But I think I

need to get more involved with them or I not going to learn anything. So I never feel comfortable there.

Once Carrie became aware of Nadine's situation, she was moved to a new childcare site with a supervisor who was accommodating and well-respected. Despite her negative experiences at the first site, Nadine convinced herself to try a second time. "I said, 'I'm going to try.' I've been there a long time and those teachers teach me so I'm not going to let them down here." She added that the instructors "believe in me more than I do." Although she was initially motivated to try a second placement to avoid disappointing her instructors, she soon realized that she had greater strength and capabilities than she previously thought. Nadine smiled when she summed up how she felt about herself after trying the second placement: "I think I could do anything I want."

In the second childcare site Nadine was asked to "job shadow" and was told this involved following the supervisor and performing tasks under her supervision. Nadine described how the supervisor explained what it meant to job shadow, an idea that was new to Nadine:

She told me, 'When I told you things, I think you do very well but I want you to do it on your own. I want you to shadow me. Everything I do, do it because I want to make you learn so that you get the job. Shadow me to do everything. Follow me around.' And then I do.

Job shadowing the supervisor prevented Nadine from receiving conflicting instructions from other staff members, and she was given more challenging tasks.

They let me do with the kids: take care of them; watch them; talk to them if they are doing something wrong. I even read to them. I have one [singing and reading] circle by myself with the kids.

Next to the positive experience Nadine had at the second childcare site, the experiences of Stacey and Tom may have come closest to being described as participation in relation to a situated learning framework. Both Stacey and Tom talked about employees who taught them integral work-related activities in similar ways while at the grocery store. They first watched an employee perform the activity they were to learn. As they watched, the employee carefully described what he/she was doing and why. Then, Stacey and Tom were given the opportunity to try the activity under the employee's supervision. Finally, they were asked to perform the activity independently, but the employee remained available for questions or to help fix any errors.

In addition to this demonstration of participation elements, Stacey described how she felt accepted by the employees. When she joined them for morning break, she said she was able to contribute to the conversations they had about their children and even their pets. She was struck by what she learned about herself, and by the idea that she had more in common with the employees than she had ever imagined. She explained how nervous she felt the first day of her placement. "Oh my god. How am I going to do that? Maybe they hate me." She was surprised that the employees were so welcoming and supportive, and she felt comfortable enough to express her own ideas about what she'd like to learn. Stacey was one of the only students who talked about sharing breaks with the employees while on her placement.

I like the people. You never know them before and they [are] smiling, and say hi and talking [at] break-time. 'How are you doing?' I say fine. I like this job, you know. Sometimes another person tells the story too. Then I talk about [how] I came to Canada, and I don't know anything about English. Another lady said, 'Don't worry. My mom, she stay here all her life, and she never speak English.' She's Italian. We talk like that.

Humour also helped to create a positive placement experience for Stacey. She had an infectious giggle, and used it most often when she was nervous. The employees seemed to share Stacey's ability to laugh at mistakes, and seemed to use humour to help Stacey correct errors. She described an incident in which she was unable to use a pair of oven mitts that were too large for her.

I cannot put my hand inside. It's too long, you know. Then she said, 'Oh Stacey, your hand, where is your hand?' And I said, 'I don't have my hand. I can't reach the baking tray.' It's funny because...I learn a lot of things they show me to do. Sometimes it's nice to do something we don't know before, you know.

Tom was also at the grocery store, although in a different department than Stacey. Similar to Stacey, he also seemed to have had an experience that had elements that could be described as participation. He learned to do various tasks in the produce department, such as helping to unload shipments, displaying fruits and vegetables, rotating old stock with new, learning to identify various kinds of apples and lettuces, cleaning, and trimming vegetables for display. "It was a good experience. I learned a lot," he said. Besides the practical tasks, he was also encouraged to ask questions when he was unsure of something. "They said don't be shy to ask, just ask questions. I did that." He felt that one of the keys to being a good employee was to ask a lot of questions. "Asking questions, I find, is really good. I learn about produce and stuff. I've never seen so many different kinds of apples. I knew Macintosh, but they were all different kinds of colours." It was interesting to note that Tom was the only student who stressed the importance of asking questions. Both Rouda and Nadine felt that asking questions in the workplace was a sign that you didn't know something, and may lead employees and supervisors to think that they were not ready to take on a specific job.

The only other placement setting that may have had elements of participation within a community of practice was the modified coffee shop setting. Hannah's placement in the coffee shop allowed her to experience full independence and mastery of the coffee shop, and she was able to achieve the status of oldtimer as she began to train other students without any instructors present. A placement in the coffee shop may have been second best compared to a placement in the community, but it provided the setting in which Hannah (and other students) evolved from a newcomer in the coffee shop with the instructors to an oldtimer in the coffee shop without instructors. Hannah emphasized that she learned to be independent and was particularly pleased with her new ability to operate the cash register without instructor support. She said the students learned to fix problems by themselves. In addition, they assumed responsibility for jobs that instructors did, such as making a phone call to the office to announce the day's menu. "Before, without teachers, we thought we couldn't do. But after, when we try everything, we became independent."

Without instructors to guide them, the students not only showed their independence with the jobs, but they also began to change a couple of the procedures in the coffee shop. Only the job of cashier was pre-assigned by the instructors, and it was up to the students to assign the other jobs. Instead of using a sign up sheet and assigning one job to each student, they decided to do all the preparation together. Hannah explained,

Everyone's more responsible. They help each other. For example, my job is the cashier but when I come in the morning, we clean together, [and] we cook together. Then when we prepare everything, I go to my place, and everyone goes to a different place for working.

Unlike these experiences, the other placements did not have as many or any participation elements. Marion experienced feelings of isolation as she was left on her own

most of the time in the women's section of the discount department store. Maritza left her placement after completing only four out of 12 weeks. Lastly, Rouda occasionally experienced minor conflict and competition from other volunteers who were also vying for a paid childcare position.

Marion had the least to say about her placement experience. Her own shyness may have precipitated her reluctance to talk or she may have had very little to say about her experience due to the lack of interaction and challenge that she had. She was left alone to perform the same task each morning, and often left the store at noon without seeing the employee who had originally assigned her job. She was given little feedback, was not able to take on more challenging tasks, and did not have any social interaction with the employees. During the group interview, Marion was the only student who did not contribute to the discussion about placement experiences.

Maritza was the only student who did not complete her placement. The reason for this was not clear because Maritza gave different reasons for wanting to leave the placement early. Initially, she told Carrie that her arthritis was acting up because her hands were exposed to extreme water temperatures when preparing food in the school board cafeteria. Then, in our interview, she revealed that her priority was not to find a job but to help her son, Juan, who was in danger of failing Grade 4. Perhaps she didn't feel challenged at the placement and was not able to learn the jobs that she wanted. Early in her placement, Maritza asked her supervisor if she could learn to use the cash register, but the supervisor misunderstood her request. "One day I ask the lady, 'You teach me for the cash?' She say, 'Don't worry Maritza, I don't give a hard time for you.' I say okay. Oh, I need to try this." Maritza didn't correct the misunderstanding. Afterwards, she repeated the exchange to Carrie

who assured Maritza that she could learn to use the cash register when she completed her placement and returned to the coffee shop.

Perhaps the reason for her quitting the placement was related more to her own personal conflicts. In the few weeks that she was at the placement, she had demonstrated enough capability to be offered a job, yet turned down what Carrie thought would be the ideal situation for her. She was offered a part-time job at a high school cafeteria within a short walk of her home. The job would have enabled her to work and retain her social assistance benefits. Carrie was frustrated and confused when Maritza turned down the offer then left the placement.

Although she left her placement early, Maritza said she did learn while there. She explained how she learned different methods of food preparation in a large cafeteria and realized that her way of preparing food was very different from food preparation in the cafeteria. “What I think, they say is different. Everything they have is different, like make the sandwich, make the salad...” She knew she was doing well when other employees called her “the new chef”. She said, “They looked at me as if I had been there ten years.” Maritza may have showed her strengths when the kitchen was short staffed one morning and she was asked to prepare soup. Maritza explained the situation:

The boss told me, ‘You have experience for soup?’ I say yes, in my home. I say what soup you like? ‘You do any like Maritza, any like you want.’ Okay, so I make the tomato. After another lady told me, ‘you very good for soup. Do you have a lot of experience?’ ‘No,’ [I say], ‘everyday I do in my home.’

In addition, Maritza also learned to use recipes to prepare food. One of her first jobs was to prepare a salad for 20 people. She was simply told to “use the books” to do this. She was glad that she had learned to use recipes in the coffee shop and was able to understand the

directions to make a salad. She thought that she was told to depend on the recipe books rather than have someone teach her because the other employees were busy. Maritza's placement had many elements that would enable participation in a community of practice but her own conflicts and decision to leave the placement were barriers to full participation.

Rouda had the most intense and long-lasting placement experience of all the students. She also had a modified experience, which was done to help her get a job in the childcare and to maintain a link with the program in order to provide any needed support. This support was not related to literacy; rather it was related to childcare and personal issues. After volunteering four days a week at different childcare sites for three months, Rouda was put on the supply list and started to be called for paid supply work. Since Rouda volunteered alongside other women who were not in the employment preparation program, she experienced competition and conflict more so than any other student. Rouda described how she learned to distance herself from other volunteers who may have felt threatened by her.

There are a lot of volunteers there. They might say something wrong so they say, 'You and me in competition now.' You know, who is going to get the job and who's not. So you have to be friendly. [I said], 'God knows who is going to get it but I'm a student and I'm leaving anyway.' I don't get upset. No get [me] wrong. Whatever they say, answer whatever you can, otherwise leave alone and go keep on working.

She also learned to withhold comments, and not to confront staff and volunteers if they made mistakes. She said she learned this from Carrie.

My teacher told me about it, you know. Whatever you see, keep it to yourself. Don't say it. Like, if you see something wrong, that person is doing, you cannot say it...I learned something like that. You cannot say nothing about the person, like, 'Why are you doing that?' After that, she might be against you...I was always careful.

In addition, Rouda realized that she would have to learn quickly and remember information while on the placement because the staff would not be as patient as her instructors in the coffee shop. “One time they tell. You can’t repeat, repeat, otherwise they think you will never learn.” She also thought that repeated questions would indicate that she was not ready to do the job.

One of Rouda’s greatest problems was the amount of conflicting information and directions she often received from different staff members.

The child wake up and she no have shoes so the supervisor want to be that child walking down. Another person you have to pick up so two person arguing me. I’m in the middle. Supervisor in the front so one staff telling me, ‘Rouda, pick up that child.’ I pick up that child. Another staff telling me, ‘Rouda, put down that child.’ I put down that child. I don’t know what I have to do. So I am in the middle. I am getting stressed. We go outside and after that when the meeting come, the supervisor said, ‘No listen those two, and listen to me.’ How I can listen? She’s far away and these two are playing with my head. Which one I have to listen? I am a student here. I lost. I don’t know what I have to do.

Compounding this was her own experience as a mother of six, and the idea that she had to be shown how to do fundamental work, such as changing a diaper that she had done countless times in the past.

It sounds weird but you have to do it...this I know and the person is telling me how to do it. So if they want to have me watch that, I’m a student, I’m learning so I have to act like I’m learning.

Rouda began to feel diminished by these events and others like them. She said that she sometimes felt she was getting “smaller and smaller”, but she felt pressured to continue the placement so she would be hired.

Sometimes I say, 'Oh my god, what am I doing here? I have to give up everything.' I did that sometime. I think about it and I say what am I doing here? Somebody telling me to do something and I know already. So another person comes and different way. She telling me not this way, and do it that way. Even some people they tell me to stop, 'No listen to supervisor. Listen to us. She don't know nothing. We are the old staff, three years working here. She don't know something. Listen to us.' Who you listen? As a student, it's tricky.

The students experienced different levels of participation within their placements. Most often this was directly related to the extent to which they were accepted, the opportunity to perform integral jobs, and the kinds of support and feedback they received from other staff or supervisors. In addition, as in Maritza's situation, the students themselves affected the extent to which they participated.

Summary and Interpretation of the Job Placement Settings

A job placement experience, unlike the classroom, had a structure that could be fully described as a community of practice, but whether or not it became one depended mostly on the host and employees. The placements were like an informal apprenticeship opportunity, the learning dynamic that is central to the theoretical ideas behind a situated learning and a community of practice. They were opportunities for a student to learn a job that he or she could and would actually do with the skill base they currently had. The job placement sites were chosen to allow students to gain knowledge about work practices and market experience: two opportunities they may not have been able to obtain without the transition offered by the employment preparation program. For example, Nadine, who had worked as an office cleaner and had no other means of gaining other kinds of experience or even thinking she could perform other kinds of jobs, was able to consider other kinds of employment after her experience in the coffee shop and her job placement. Students in the

employment preparation program, who may have never received a second look based on their application and resume before attending the program, were offered employment because a supervisor got to know them and their work practices while they were at their placements.

All of the placement sites, with the exception of the discount department store, were focused on learning rather than teaching, presented the students with an immediate understanding of the job they performed, had opportunities for improvised practice, and allowed the students to *learn to do practice* and not to simply *learn about practice*. For example, in the childcare, Rouda, Martha, and Nadine worked alongside staff with the children from the beginning of their placement until the end. While each was given different levels of responsibility, autonomy, direction, etc., none were removed from the setting when engaging in learning activities. In other words, they were not sequestered in a room learning how to read the words to a song they had never heard or never witnessed being sung in order to prepare to sing it with the children. Instead, they were part of the circle when the song was sung, they tried singing along, they saw the purpose of the song in relation to the activities of the day (to quiet the children before nap time), they were given the words to the song and practiced reading them with a staff member—Rouda even sung the song at home, and had her children help her. Finally, Rouda and Nadine each tried to lead the song on their own. If words were forgotten, the voice of another staff member piped up to fill in the silences. In this way, they were engaged in a community of practice to become a song leader.

While the framework was in place to support a community of practice at each placement, whether or not the students become a part of one was less sure. Unlike the coffee shop, which had instructors and students actively working to foster a dynamic, supportive, and valued learning experience, the employees and supervisors hosting students at the

various placement sites did not necessarily share this perspective. Many were not directly involved with the negotiation to become a placement host. This was often done with more senior management staff (as in the case of the grocery store and discount department store). In addition, there was no formalized process to support the placement host in what may be an unfamiliar role. As a result, the ability of the students to participate in a community of practice was mostly dependent on the employees and supervisors.

The learning goal of the placements was to help students acquire knowledge about workplace culture and practices. The intent was not only to learn the practical skills, but to also learn more about how to fit into a workplace, how to communicate with employees and supervisors, and how to begin to feel like an employee.

Afterwards

Although Tom was not offered a job immediately after his placement, he did find another one three months later. Once Tom finished his placement, he returned to the program and coffee shop where he took on a supervisory role. At the same time, he began his job search with Carrie's support. His goal was to find a position in the produce department of a grocery store. When a new grocery store announced a job fair, he attended and was hired on the spot. Besides Carrie's support, he also received support and encouragement from his family, and his sister accompanied him to the job fair. When Carrie visited him during his first week, he said the opening had been very stressful. Carrie emphasized that he was experiencing the same feelings as all the new employees. By the third week, he seemed more relaxed, said Carrie, and he continues to work a part-time shift (no full-time employment is available) in the afternoons and evenings in the produce department. He also continues to

live at home and maintains his full disability benefits. His goal is to save enough money to move out of his parents' home and buy his own home.

Martha continued her weekly volunteering in the childcare after her placement was officially over. Her goal was to find a regular volunteer position in a childcare setting. Carrie had hoped to receive support from Martha's sister to help find a volunteer position in the community. Unfortunately, this support did not materialize and Carrie's options were limited. In order for Martha to have a successful volunteer job, she would need ongoing support. Carrie refocused and decided to ask the childcare where Martha had a placement if they would consider having her continue as a regular volunteer. The childcare agreed and Martha completed the employment preparation program, and will volunteer in the childcare without being enrolled in the program. The childcare site (located in the same building as the employment preparation program) and Carrie will provide informal support to Martha if needed.

Marion completed her placement at the discount department store without a job offer, but she had finally gained employment experience and an employment reference. She decided to return to another class in the general literacy program, a class that helps students prepare to enter one of several health care training programs in the community. Marion may face an insurmountable financial barrier when applying to any of these programs because she does not receive social assistance and will have to find a way to pay for the tuition herself. At the end of her placement she encountered a similar situation when she wanted to enter a training program for the food service industry. But she was unable to access the program, which was financed by the city's social service agency to help welfare recipients find employment. Carrie remained in contact with Marion and offered to help her find a job.

Marion was also invited to join a one-day food handler's certification session for the current employment preparation students. Marion never did start her own job search and is now pregnant.

Hannah decided not to return to the employment preparation program and said her priority had changed and she now wanted to continue to upgrade her academic skills in order to enter an adult high school program. Her goal is to earn her high school diploma, but she has no plans regarding how she would use it in the future. Completing high school may be possible for Hannah, unlike any of the other students in the study because she had already gained a high school education in her native country. Hannah, like Marion, returned to the general literacy program. She then enrolled in a class that focused on academic literacy skill development.

Maritza, who left her placement early, was ironically the only student who was offered a job as a result of being in a placement. Maritza turned down the job offer and enrolled in a food service training program (the same one Marion wanted to enter). Carrie tried to ensure that Maritza understood the impact of her decision: if she enrolled in the program, she would have to find a full-time job and eventually leave social assistance, lose her drug plan, and possibly lose her subsidized home. Maritza said she understood her decision and completed the food service training program. Soon after her training, during the job search phase of the program, Maritza saw Carrie and complained that she was only being offered minimum-wage, part-time jobs in fast food restaurants. "I'm no teenager. I don't work there," she said to Carrie. Her job search continues.

Stacey had hoped she would receive a job offer from the grocery store but she didn't. She mistakenly thought she had completed the employment preparation program and didn't

re-register the following term. Carrie called her at home and encouraged her to return for one term while continuing her job search. While at home, Stacey had been feeling very down; her daughter had recently moved to another city to go to school, and her ex-husband, who she saw regularly, had also moved. Stacey returned the day after Carrie called and has taken on the role of supervisor in the coffee shop. Carrie attempted to find a volunteer position for Stacey at a senior's facility close to the school. Unfortunately, the facility did not respond to several of Carrie's and Stacey's attempts to obtain a position. Instead, Stacey will return to the program and volunteer in the coffee shop two mornings per week.

At the end of her placement in the childcare, Nadine decided that she may not be the right person to work in a childcare setting. She enjoyed the children one-on-one but admitted that her extreme shyness made it difficult to fit in with the staff and the children as a group. She had enjoyed being the cashier in the coffee shop and decided to focus on this in her job search. She eventually found a job at a discount store and was employed part-time for nearly six months. She unfortunately lost her job, although the reason was unclear. She said she thought she was laid off because she wasn't able to use the computer database to track inventory, and she also said she was let go because the staff was downsized in the winter months. She did move out of her sister's home and into a one-bedroom subsidized apartment. She returned to the general literacy program and her goal is to find another part-time job in retail.

It took Rouda nearly one year to finally secure steady part-time work in a childcare. Initially, Rouda wanted full-time employment, but this would have meant that she would begin to see decreases in her welfare payments, and could even lose her subsidized home. Part-time work is an ideal situation because it will allow Rouda to supplement her social

assistance benefits without jeopardizing any of the subsidies she receives for her and her six children. In addition, she works only during the school year and shares all school holidays with her children.

Chapter Five - Discussion and Contributions

The final chapter of the study will directly address the research questions, discuss the implications of the findings, and delve into its contributions. First, the four sub-questions of the study (also the focus of the previous chapter) will be further analysed. This will not only serve as a review of the previous chapter, but it also raises issues and questions that will become the focus of the discussion and contributions sections. The issues raised are findings that were either repeated throughout the previous chapter or that stood apart and demanded attention. Issues from the findings are discussed in relation to the applied literature of adult literacy education, and address the study's overarching question: How do situated views of literacy and learning contribute to an understanding of the employment preparation program and its three settings? Following the discussion, are the study's contributions as they relate to program, policy, and research in adult literacy education.

ADDRESSING THE FOUR SUB-QUESTIONS

The previous chapter presented situated views of literacy and learning in each of the three distinct settings of the employment preparation program. Literacy and learning were described based on the content, context, community of practice, and participation that was evident in the classroom, the coffee shop, and the job placements. These descriptions directly addressed the study's four sub questions: a) What is the material and knowledge content in each of the settings? b) What are the physical and non-physical aspects of the settings that shape the context for learning? c) Who are the people and what are the activities that comprise the community of practice in each setting? d) And, how do people participate with each other and the activities in each setting? For review and further analysis, the findings

have been reshaped so that it is possible to compare and contrast the three settings together. The section will be guided by each of the study's sub-questions.

Sub-Question 1: What is the material and knowledge content in each of the settings?

The content in each of the three settings was diverse, which in itself is not necessarily negative. What is more important to determine is whether or not the content in each of the program's settings was congruent, and did each setting support the overall learning goal of the program or were there conflicting messages?

Content in the classroom setting emphasized the accumulation of literacy and numeracy skills, such as spelling, fractions, and vocabulary. The most obvious indicator of this accumulation was a class schedule that divided the students' learning by schooling subjects. This schedule was not strictly adhered to though, and personal or pressing issues from the lives of the students sometimes became the content focus. In addition, students also learned about employability, which was a chance to discuss work-related issues, such as safety procedures and employment rights. The knowledge focus of the classroom, which was predominantly school-based, was supported by the types of materials used, including commercially produced workbooks and stories that emulated a skills-building approach to literacy. Although the materials were often supplemented by instructor-created materials and the program's own curriculum, the focus of these materials was also on the accumulation of skills and facts. For example, students could learn the words for the equipment in the coffee shop by doing a vocabulary exercise or a word search puzzle.

The coffee shop, on the other hand, focused on the development of practical employment skills (such as using a cash register) in addition to soft skills (such as prioritizing activities). While in the coffee shop, students also learned a new literacy practice

that was integrated into their home routine. Knowledge was gained by performing the various jobs, such as baker and cashier, which were needed to operate the coffee shop. Each job was accompanied by a written job description, which became the material used to support learning. The learning goal was to achieve independent mastery of each of the coffee shop jobs. By successfully completing the jobs, students gained both practical and soft skills related to employment. One specific job (a baker) helped them to acquire a new literacy practice—reading recipes to bake. This was the only example during the study in which a new literacy practice was acquired.

The job placement sites were chosen to allow students to gain, then market, experience that they may not have been able to obtain otherwise. The focus of the job placements was two-fold: to successfully complete the various activities of specific jobs in order to apply for the same or similar jobs; and to learn about workplace culture. Similar to the coffee shop dynamic, the students were assigned specific jobs, such as a produce clerk in a grocery store or childcare assistant in a daycare, and were expected to perform the jobs independently. The various activities of the job were the knowledge focus, and materials directly related to doing the job were used in support. For example, as a produce clerk, Tom had to read, sort, and display signs for various produce. The signs were the materials used to support the knowledge focus, which was learning to display produce. He was not engaged in activities (such as writing the produce in alphabetical order or using the words on a spelling test) which were not directly related to his ability to do the job. Instead, he learned to identify and match the written name of the produce with the actual produce. He was engaged in sorting, classifying, and matching activities as opposed to spelling, alphabeticizing, and writing activities, which were not needed to do the job.

In many ways, the classroom content was distinct from the content of the other two settings. The original learning goal of the classroom was to help support and prepare students to do well in the other two settings through the development of literacy skills. These skills, once mastered in the classroom, could then be used to support learning in the coffee shop or job placements. In addition, if a student encountered a literacy-based difficulty in one of the other two settings, it could be brought into the classroom and addressed. There was a major problem with this thinking though: the students did not see the classroom as a support for the literacy requirements of the coffee shop. In their view, the content of the classroom, except for employability, was not related to the content of the coffee shop. Ironically, it was in the coffee shop—and not the classroom—that the students actually acquired a new literacy practice. An example of this disconnect occurred when students were learning about fractions. The intent was to build their knowledge of doubling fractions related to measuring ingredients but the choice of materials used (a worksheet) and not used (the actual ingredients and recipe) distanced the activity from its purpose. Students even had to acquire additional and different kinds of knowledge to complete the activity. Why was the classroom content not seen to be connected to the other settings? In addition, why did the coffee shop become the setting in which a new practice was learned as opposed to the classroom, which focused on literacy development?

Sub-Question 2: What are the physical and non-physical aspects of the settings that shape the context for literacy and learning?

The physical and non-physical aspects of the settings worked together to shape learning and literacy in each. Besides examining *what* aspects shaped the settings, it is also important to look at *who* planned and organized learning.

The context of the classroom mimicked that of a traditional elementary class. Many factors (including the physical setting, the background of the instructors, the funder's expectations and support) came together to form a schooling environment. The class depended on cast-off furnishings from the school system, and was located in a former vocational school. The instructors taught in elementary schools longer than adult literacy settings, and were familiar with this learning culture. In addition, the students expected this type of learning in the classroom. They were drawn to enroll in a school board program with expectations of what learning might look like in such an environment. These expectations may have been based on their own experiences in formal education settings and on the experiences of their children in elementary schools. Finally, one of the few widely-used documents produced by the funder for use by instructors drew heavily on an elementary school curriculum to describe literacy (Literacy & Basic Skills Section, Workplace Preparation Branch, Ministry of Training Colleges and Universities, 1998). The intention of the document was to help instructors assess progress in literacy skills, but it also became the dominant way in which instructors viewed literacy development.

The coffee shop was a simulated work environment focused on the operation of a small business. The physical context of the coffee shop was a workplace, although this sometimes created unease when students first entered the program because it didn't match the students' ideas of a learning setting found in a school. In addition, the functioning of the coffee shop centred around a kitchen and baking—work that is most often the domain of women. Most men who identified employment as a goal were reluctant to take part in the program. Of the potential students who did enter the program, most seemed to value the opportunity to learn a marketable employment skill (such as operating the cash register) in

addition to the chance to take part in a work setting to gain experience and knowledge about the expectations of work. Although they didn't usually transfer the practical skills developed in the coffee shop to their job placement, they did seem to draw upon their knowledge about workplace culture. Students also talked about how they learned to be more particular when reading, although most didn't say that they used any specific literacy skills in their job placements.

The coffee shop—like the classroom— was also shaped by the people in the setting. Unlike the classroom though, the students did not contribute as much to the context. In the classroom, students had expectations of what literacy and learning should look like and even asked for specific kinds of learning, such as the vocabulary lesson. But in the coffee shop, most students had very little paid-work experience and even less experience learning about work. It was a very new and unique learning setting for them. Subsequently, they contributed very little to the context. In addition, one of the instructors, Carrie, played a large role in shaping the context. Compounding this was the changed role of the other two instructors who took on the role of assistants while in the coffee shop. Fran even recollected how she learned to communicate with the students after witnessing Carrie. For the most part, the context of the coffee shop was shaped by one individual who held the balance of power. She established the routines, set the expectations, assessed progress, and gauged a students' readiness for job placements. One question that arises is what could this environment look like if the students had more of a say in shaping the context for learning?

The choice of the specific job placements was made with the following criteria in mind: the job had to offer the students a hands-on and supportive learning opportunity; the job had to be the kinds of jobs that students could realistically see themselves doing; the job

had to be different from the kinds of jobs students could get on their own, such as cleaning or working in a fast food restaurant; and the job had to have the potential for future employment. Although the program attempted to control the overall context of the job placement component, it could not always have any influence over the specific site contexts once students were in the placements. This was why Carrie, the instructor, who visited the students on their placements, played a key role. If a student experienced difficulties while in the job placement, as in Nadine's example, Carrie could intervene. Although the supervisor working with the students at each job placement was most influential in shaping the learning context, Carrie could negotiate changes if needed.

Again, the classroom setting is distinct when compared to the contexts of the coffee shop and job placements. Where the coffee shop and job placements were shaped by workplace culture and the expectations of that culture, the classroom was shaped by a schooling structure. Is this appropriate? In addition, how can the program reconcile the tremendous value students place on the classroom and schooling, compared to the need to create a context that is more in line with the other two settings?

Sub-Question 3: Who are the people and what are the activities that comprise the literacy and learning community in each setting?

Only one setting stood out as having consistent elements that could be described as a community of practice, and that was the coffee shop. Although certain job placements may have had many elements that constituted a community of practice, whether or not all of these elements surfaced at each site was unpredictable. The classroom, on the other hand, had very few elements that would allow it to be described as a community of practice. It is important

to fully understand the elements that surfaced in the coffee shop that enabled it to become a community of practice.

While in the coffee shop, there was a focus on learning the operation of a small business as opposed to being taught how a small business works. This difference was evident because students were actively engaged in the day-to-day functioning of the coffee shop and were ultimately responsible for its operation. This responsibility meant there was a very clear learning purpose and related to this, the students were able to see and understand their activities as a whole: they were working together to operate the coffee shop for their paying customers. At no time would a student be engaged in an activity that was not purposeful and did not contribute to the functioning of the coffee shop. Finally, one of the greatest attributes of the coffee shop was that it had been set up as an environment in which students engaged in improvised practice, which meant that the focus was on learning, and not production.

In stark contrast, the classroom focus was on teaching literacy skills and tasks rather than learning literacy as it would be used outside the classroom. This focus meant that students were engaged in activities *about* literacy that were intended to give them a basis of skills from which to draw upon in their daily lives. They were rarely engaged in literacy activities they actually used in their day-to-day lives. In other words, they were taught about spelling and writing paragraphs even if they had no purpose for this knowledge once they left the classroom. Activities, guided by a description of cumulative literacy skills, were done most often for the purpose of achieving progress markers and not for the purpose of performing an activity in daily life. The purpose of the classroom activities was linked more to the notion of literacy skill development than to its actual use. Most classroom activities were developed for use within the class and school setting and not for any setting outside of

that. In addition, the opportunity for improvised practice rarely surfaced, although this may have been the intention of the classroom setting, as in the example of the fractions lesson. The classroom was intended to support learning in the coffee shop by allowing students the time, repetition, and support they needed to master an activity. But in the case of the fractions exercise, this link was immediately broken when the fractions lesson was separated from the activity for which it was intended to support. Not only was the learning about fractions separate from its purpose, tools, and setting, but the format of the lesson added additional layers of understanding, knowledge, and interpretation that needed to be mastered in order to complete the activity.

A job placement experience had a structure that could be described as a community of practice, but whether or not a community of practice emerged, in which members of that community could fully participate, was out of the control of the employment preparation program. Each placement site—the grocery store, cafeteria, childcare, discount department store, and coffee shop—was focused on learning rather than teaching, presented the students with an immediate understanding of the job they would perform, had opportunities for improvised practice in that job, and allowed the students to *learn to do practice* and not to simply *learn about practice*. But in order for all of these elements to be realized, the student needed to be given the opportunity to fully participate, and this was dependent on the supervisors at each site and their interpretation of their role with the students.

Despite the lack of a community of practice in the classroom, there were hints that it could in fact become a community of practice. For example, the only aspect of the classroom that students thought was linked to the rest of the program was the time spent on employability. In addition, students themselves began to use the classroom setting in a

different way. It became the setting in which they shared their job placement experiences. A question that arises is how can the classroom better connect to the other two settings? Could the people and activities become a community of practice, and if they could, what would become the learning focus?

Sub-Question 4: How do people participate with each other and in the activities at each setting?

The notion of participation is integrally linked to a community of practice to the extent that one cannot be realized without the other. Further analysis of participation across the settings, permits us to see how sociocultural learning is sustained. If a community of practice is the road map that guides learning, then participation is its engine.

The coffee shop exemplified legitimate peripheral participation in a community of practice. Newcomers were fully accepted into the coffee shop community of practice and were trained by oldtimers, the students who had mastered one of the jobs in the coffee shop. The newcomers were immediately engaged in activities that were integral to the learning process and the operation of the coffee shop. They received monitoring and support from both the instructors and other students, and were given plenty of room to make errors. All of this led to the students' changed identity and new ways of seeing themselves as employees.

Unlike the coffee shop, which had instructors and students actively working to foster a dynamic, supportive, and valued learning experience, the employees and supervisors who hosted students at the various placement sites did not necessarily share this perspective. The ability for students to fully participate at each job placement site was completely dependent on the willingness of the employees and supervisors to work with a student on a placement and their personal approach to learning and teaching. Students had a range of participation

experiences, from Judith who was told to job shadow, to Stacey who shared stories about family, to Marion who was essentially ignored.

Students who entered the classroom were legitimate members of that group despite striking differences in culture, abilities, and lifestyle. But without realizing the learning purpose of an activity, it was difficult to perform integral tasks and to engage in the improvised practice that is a big part of participation in a community of practice.

What can be learned from the coffee shop, the setting that best exemplified participation in a community of practice, and applied to other settings? In addition, can the dynamics of the coffee shop be fostered in other literacy program settings?

A. Discussion of the Findings and their Implications: A Disparity Between Learning Literacy and Learning About Work

In addressing the study's four sub-questions, one issue seemed to emerge over and over, albeit in a variety of different ways. This issue also addressed the study's overarching research question: How do situated views of literacy and learning contribute to an understanding of the employment preparation program and its three settings? Using the frameworks of situated learning and literacy to closely examine the employment preparation program revealed a disconnect between the work settings (the coffee shop and job placements) and the class setting, and subsequently between the notions of learning literacy and learning about work. This disparity or disconnect became apparent when 1) the funder's vision of literacy education was not realized through its success measures; 2) literacy was schooling and learning was doing; 3) a new literacy practice emerged from the coffee shop

and not the classroom; 4) and the original intentions of the program were different from the results. In addition, there was an issue that remained outside the frameworks of situated learning and literacy as they were used in this study, and that is an understanding of the individual and the factors that affect his or her learning. As part of the discussion, the limitations of the employment preparation program to affect economic and social change in the lives of the students, will also be explored. Although all of the above issues are specific to the employment preparation program, they will be placed within a context of research and common understanding in order to make connections that suggest how this study has implications for the field of adult literacy education.

The employment preparation program's unique combination of learning—literacy development in a class setting, employment development in an operational coffee shop, and employment experience in a job placement in the community—is an uncommon approach in the field. St Clair (2001) notes that the combination of employment preparation and literacy education is unusual and not widely supported in Canada, despite suggestions that this approach is an ideal way to meet the employment, learning, and literacy needs of students (Hull, 1992; Imel, 1998; Martin, 1999). The program's uniqueness was an opportunity to explore a variety of learning dynamics within a field that is deeply entrenched in traditional methods (Purcell-Gates, Degener, Jacobson & Soler, 1998).

THE FUNDER SUPPORTS LEARNING LITERACY NOT LEARNING WORK

While the program's funder supports adults in developing the literacy skills needed for employment, they do not see themselves directly involved in employment training. Herein lies a key disparity between the funder's approach to literacy development and the idea that literacy and learning is integrally tied to social practices. Their role, as evident in a

