

Between the Life of the Mind and the World of Action: Explorations into Consciousness, Pedagogy, Politics, and Scientific Philosophy in Adult Literacy Education

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Abstract

What follows is a bibliographic review of my online and print based articles and book chapters from 1993-2004 on various facets of the pedagogy, politics, and science of adult literacy education. A strong autobiographical emphasis is highlighted especially on pp. 9-14, but more broadly throughout the text in the argument carried out explicitly and implicitly that the pedagogical and political are personal “all the way down,” to quote the aphoristic phrase of pragmatic philosopher, Richard Rorty. The common theme throughout all of the topics identified is an exploration of the complex relationship between the dynamics of my own lived experience as a director of adult literacy programming in Hartford, CT, and my alter vocation as an intellectual seeking to make sense of the scholarship of adult literacy in light of the concrete irreducibility of my own daily practice.

There is much discussion in contemporary progressive circles in education of transforming theory into practice, although less so of transforming practice into theory, which might be viewed as the underlying aspiration of much of what I have written in this field. In either direction the movement is more problematic than sometimes thought for the fundamental reason that theory and practice have their own respective logic, which may at times, but not necessarily crisscross. This dilemma, if that’s what it is, is related, in part, to the deep rooted chasm between the life of the mind and the world of action extending back to the ancient Greeks and influencing the entire thread of Western intellectual and cultural history. My prime interlocutor, the classical pragmatic American philosopher John Dewey has worked as diligently as anyone, to heal this breach, obtaining, at best, only partial success. My own efforts; the partial achievements and the failures, may be read as a faint Deweyan echo.

While my own articulations are considerably less astute than Dewey’s, one could reasonably argue that the tensions that I have been unable to resolve between the life of the mind and the world of action in this postmodern Deweyan narrative shares similarities to the ones that perplexed Dewey some 70-85 years ago. I do not seek to copy Dewey but to work within the Deweyan pragmatic tradition, extending insights gleaned through his work to the contemporary field of adult literacy education in all of the facets explored in this text and throughout the essays discussed herein. While I remain perplexed in many ways, the effort to more clearly understand the dynamics of the field through a simultaneous embrace of the logic of my field-based practice and theory construction, and to make concrete improvements wherever possible in either realm, continues.

Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen (New Testament, Hebrews, 11:1).

Linking Dewey's Logic to His Concept of Growth: A Personal Encounter

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The philosopher of science, Karl Popper (1960 cited in Miller, 1985) observes, rather than progressing “from theory to theory,” science might be better “visualized as *progressing from problems to problems* [original italics]—to problems of ever increasing depth” (p. 179). This position is similar to that of Dewey (1929/1958), who argues that problems burst forth from long-seated habitudes into consciousness, which then evoke a quest for resolution. Thus, for Dewey, “the starting point is” what is experienced as “the actually *problematic*” (original italics) (p. 67) in any given situation. Inquiry, more broadly, learning, is the primary method Dewey draws upon in the systematic effort of working from problems identified to “warranted resolutions” in any given situation. The recursive stages of inquiry progress via what Dewey refers to as a “means-ends” continuum in successive phases of hypothesis formation, data analysis, and experimentation in the leading toward the desired solution of the problem at hand.

For Dewey as with Popper, it is not typically theory that first stimulates a serious investigation. It is, rather, some perplexity that arouses doubt in an existing pattern of living or thought that then requires an investigation. The process includes provisional hypothesis (and eventual theory) formation along with the collection of and analysis of data in the careful working through of the various stages of an investigative process. Dewey (1938/1991) articulates this procedure most programmatically in his key chapter, “The Pattern of Inquiry” in *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry* (pp. 105-122). The object of such investigation is not the acquisition of knowledge, which for Dewey is a means. It is, rather, the resolution of the problem, to which knowledge contributes into the formation of a unified reconstruction. New challenges and problems emerge, but the result of a successful inquiry process is a proximate “close” to the earlier quandary. As Dewey expresses it in a classic statement:

Inquiry is the controlled or directed transformation of an indeterminate situation into one that is so determinate in its constituent distinctions and relations as to convert the elements of the original situation into a unified whole (original italics) (p. 108).

Dewey's logic closely parallels his concept of growth as the enhancement of experience through critical thought and deliberate action through the operation of the means-ends continuum in the movement toward a satisfactory learning occurrence.

It is as a well-read field practitioner that I “discovered” Dewey's concept of growth in the early 1990s through an indirect route of reading Richard J. Bernstein's (1983) neo-pragmatic text *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism*. Reflecting on my empathetic study of republican political ideology as a Ph.D. student in the field of U.S. history, my thought of linking this historical concept within the context of the current

setting gained a powerful assist through Bernstein's discussion of Gadamarian hermeneutics, a theory which explains how traditions can be drawn upon to speak to contemporary concerns. Through a blending of Bernstein's neo-pragmatism and Gadamar's concept of hermeneutics I moved directly into the primary resources of the intellectual tradition and moral and political value center of the American pragmatic tradition and its analogue, political liberalism via the direct route of John Dewey's rich philosophy. Taking Dewey's concept of growth as an operating springboard, I concentrated on those aspects of his vast work that appealed to me or that I could readily understand, with the prospect that this would serve as a scaffold upon which I could deepen my understanding of Dewey's philosophy and its possible applications to adult literacy education. The process that I described in that preceding sentence is itself an explanation of what Dewey means by growth, in short, progressive learning through continuity of development and engagement.

I experienced this systematic working through of Dewey's writing based on my own growing center of interest and knowledge. That is, my experience shifted from that of relative novice to emergent specialist as a result of a deliberate process of taking this effort on. This was stimulated by what Dewey (1934/1989) refers to as "an impulsion" of motivational energy that the task of grappling with Dewey in a serious and sustained manner offered the prospect of a sense of direction and coherence that I sought to attain. In terms of Dewey's logic, that was a tentative hypothesis that pushed the experiment forward which would require considerable experimentation, analysis and refinement to prove its mettle in my living experience as an adult literacy educator. This gradual shift from novice to specialist emerged as a felt accomplishment in the *expansion* of my understanding as I began to reflect upon and shape my practice based on what I came to understand and experience. As I worked through this framework in my practice as an adult literacy practitioner and in my more formal academic thinking about the subject, my understanding of the nuances of Deweyan philosophy grew.

The insight that that single word "growth" unleashed has taken on symbolic proportions which, at times, moves toward the iconic. This is guarded against by a sense of skepticism that a metaphor can serve as an adequate representation of reality, while acknowledging as well the inescapability of such perceptual processing of symbolic language. The additional factor is an awareness of the profusion of problems that face the field of adult literacy education in the working toward any proximate resolution that proposes a coherent source of direction (Demetrian, 2005). Nonetheless, and however metaphorical the term, as a heuristic, I have found Dewey's concept of growth a fruitful one. In my early construction of this concept, it evoked an imaginative resolution to the problem that I encountered in thinking about adult literacy education through the dominant paradigms of, respectively, functional and critical literacy, neither of which seemed to have gotten to the core of what I observed on site. There needed to be some mediating ground between these poles, I sensed. Yet, the resolution remained vague until I happened on Dewey's axial concept of growth that opened up the prospect of working out the problem of a viable definition of literacy that had perplexed me.

Initially, this concept served less as a formal intellectual framework than as a creative explanation of what I concretely experienced as a program manager of an adult literacy program in Hartford, Connecticut. It was not that I discovered Dewey's writing, but that his concept of growth that I adapted from his work seemed to have fit my situation. It was through this internalization of this core idea that I then sought to organize my activities in program, instructional, and curriculum development. As I continued to work with this concept, I increasingly sought to explore the various theoretical underpinnings that underlay Dewey's notion of growth even while persisting with what might be viewed as only a partially successful effort of developing a viable praxis through it in the literacy program I operated for almost nine years in the 1990s. I began to characterize this Deweyan space, based on the tradition of a reformist-based philosophical pragmatism, as a "middle ground" that was congruent with a distinctively American politics and pedagogy. The working through and the testing of this core idea, has consumed much of my practice and academic writing for the past decade.

Progress might have served as a less evocative term in the capturing of much of what I sought in the imagery unleashed in my mind by the term *growth*. This particular term, however, has the benefit of a specific philosophy of education articulated by Dewey (1916/1944, 1938/1963) and elaborated upon by contemporary Deweyan educational scholars (Garrison, 1997, 1998). It is this concept of growth that underpins Dewey's (1938/1963) quest for an "intellectual organization that can be worked out on the ground of experience" (p. 85) that I find so potentially fruitful for the field of adult literacy education even if only as an imaginative construct with heuristic power to effect change, which, without this impetus, would not likely happen. Dewey defines growth in a variety of ways. The following, an apt summary of the entire concept, provides a useful introduction:

[G]rowth depends upon the presence of a difficulty to be overcome by the exercise of intelligence...[I]t is part of the educators responsibility to see equally to two things: First, that the problem grows out of the conditions of the experience being had in the present, and that it is within the range of the capacities of students; and secondly, that it is such that it arouses in the learner an active quest for information and for production of new ideas. The new facts and the new ideas become the ground for further experiences in which new problems are presented. The process is a continuous cycle (p. 79).

Dewey's concept of growth permeates his key book, *Democracy and Education* (1916/1944). It is invariably linked with the optimistic imagery of the vision of American democracy that he held, notwithstanding skepticism toward any easy hope. As Dewey (1917) expressed it (cited in Hickman and Alexander, 1998 Vol. 1): "Faith in the power of intelligence to imagine a future which is the projection of the desirable in the present, and to invent the instrumentalities of its realization is our salvation" (p. 69). It is this faith that Dewey tied to an American vision of a progressive culture and society in which the growth of individuals is the expression itself of the nation's foremost ideals in an increasingly humane and democratic political culture.

As Dewey (1928 cited in Hickman and Alexander, 1998 Vol. 1) elsewhere put it about the “New World” civilization, at the heart of the American experiment is “[t]he liberation of individual potentialities” through “the evocation of personal and voluntary associated energies.” That is, the nurturing of “individuals and their potentialities” (p. 322) depends upon communities that both foster and depend upon what Dewey (1927/1954) elsewhere describes as the Great Community. This is an elusive ideal, but one grounded in the peculiarity of the American imagination, which holds the promise of unleashing potentialities of a better society and culture through progressively realized selves. This, in a nutshell, is what Dewey means by growth, which has personal, political, and cultural dimensions in which education, broadly speaking, would serve as a primary pathway, for its unfolding. I have richly drawn on this concept in a decades’ worth of work in the field of adult literacy education, as underlined in this review.

Thematic Overview

In its broadest of purposes, the articles reviewed in this essay, are a study of culture through a range of perspectives on adult literacy education that has characterized this author’s meanderings as a practitioner and scholar during the past 18 years. In this intent I build on the Freirian assumption that the pedagogical and political are mutually interrelated, and invariably mediated through personal experience. While there is obvious overlap in the reviewed essays, each stems from a particular angle of vision based on a specific problem or set of issues that set its writing in motion. This summation is intended to draw out the common themes in a quest for a level of coherence which remains only latent without this integrative effort.

What I seek to convey is a characteristic American story, notwithstanding the irony of any such effort from the perspective of poststructural identity politics in its unequivocal repudiation of grand narratives characteristic of the modern era (Giroux, 1997). The underlying question probed in this scholarship, “who is the ‘we?’” in any authorial intent that seeks to speak of a common framework, is a deconstructive impetus that problematizes my effort from inception. I am far from dismissive of these claims. At the same time I seek to problematize their self-evident canonical status in contemporary cultural studies, which may also be construed as a “metanarrative” truth. Race, ethnicity, gender, and class need to be taken into account, but not in a way that invariably makes them all-important or even always of central significance.

Rather, I seek to construct a counter narrative via a more benign embrace than that of Harvey Graff (1979), of the “literacy myth” by students, volunteer tutors in the adult literacy programs I have directed, and my self, notwithstanding the complexities and ambiguities in which this myth is held. This, in turn, is part and parcel of a broader story, namely, the internalization of the American Dream in its range of materialistic and idealistic manifestations, which undergirds much of the culture of literacy of such programs that I seek to describe based on my limited, but far from unrepresentative experience.

There is little “celebratory” about the claims I make. There is only the argument that these myths play a critical role in the reasons adult literacy students participate in such programs. Moreover, the literacy myth also imbues the ethos of many volunteers, paid instructors and staff members in the embrace of a common vision of achieving “a better life” through literacy, however variously this may be defined. This mythological perspective, therefore, need to be taken seriously as a crucial element of the “lived experience” of participants in such programs in their representation of the literacy practices through which they operate (Barton, 1994). This is a counter-perspective from the critical gaze of the poststructural university scholar which would tend to deconstruct this “naïve” view I am here putting forth. I build on these core mythological assumptions (and I am utilizing the term “myth” in its descriptive rather than pejorative sense as in “mere myth”) because they speak to something vital of what I have experienced and observed, while attempting to bring a critical edge to the discussion. It is through this nexus that my interpretation stemming from John Dewey’s middle ground concept of “growth” and his related concepts of inquiry and the aesthetics of experience, which I appropriate, emerge.

This highly partial frame of reference, which grounds much of these essays, is an incomplete resolution. It requires a more critical dialogue than I provide here, with Afrocentrist, feminist, postmodern, and critical theory scholars, particularly if my intent is to contribute toward the construction of an interdisciplinary field of what might be referred to as adult literacy studies. That crucial dialogue between critical pragmatism and other modes of poststructural critical theory within the context of adult literacy studies, which this review essay and referenced articles *begins* to get at, waits another time (Stuhr, 1997, 2003).

What I stress throughout this essay and those reviewed in this text is a pragmatic reading that focuses on the interface between critical analysis and a praxeological intent, designed not merely to analyze, but to improve the dynamics of adult literacy provision in the realms of educational practice and policy orientation. It is neither theory nor practice in isolation that to which I give emphasis. It is, rather, their interface in the quest to grasp, and where plausible, to progressively resolve a problematic situation that has emerged at a pivotal point in my thinking or practice. The result is clearly my construction in the effort to work through the various issues that I have encountered both in practice and in the academic literature. Nonetheless, whether through concrete practical operations, broader dialogue with the field through listserv postings on adult literacy forums, or through scholarly publications, I have sought to account for other perspectives and to subject my interpretations to the public scrutiny of relevant communities of practitioners and scholars.

Notwithstanding the impetus of the latter, my praxeological intent of contributing to the improvement of program operations is attenuated by the problematic nature of its quest in a social, political, and cultural setting that in many respects militates against it. This dilemma underlies much of the theory/practice tension that is grappled with, but far from fully resolved in what I have written. In the widest of sense, the themes explored in the essays highlighted in this review are those of self-creation, experimentation,

potentiality, pragmatic meliorism, and the aspirations of the “authentic self” in quest of fulfillment (the realization of the literacy myth) against the many socio-cultural forces, which constrains their achievements.

The result is less a negation. Rather, the various ways that constraints and possibilities open up within the context of individual biography among participants of adult literacy programs shape the modulations that emerge. As a microhistorical examination, I seek to give voice to a set of perspectives and conditions, much of which are grounded in what Jurgen Habermas (1987) refers to as the “lifeworld.” In this pragmatic effort, I am reacting against what might be viewed as the “inevitable” intrusions of a Weberian bureaucratization, or the “colonization of the lifeworld,” in Habermas’ apt phrase, by various structural and cultural forces of mass influence.

While limits and intrusions there surely are, as highlighted throughout this text and more fully throughout essays reviewed, not knowing in advance precisely what they are opens up moments of potentiality that provide for alternative constructions of reality, sometimes vast, sometimes exceedingly slim in their operative space for reconstruction. The pragmatic effort represents both a working through these crevices as well as an analysis of the constraining factors in which I speak as a practitioner-intellectual from the various problematic situations I have sought to resolve or better understand in a given essay. In their mutual commingling and contradictions, I have complexified both my practitioner and intellectual voice, not for its own sake, but as part of the process of grappling with the issue or problem situation with which I was dealing in any given essay.

In one sense, *Between the Life of the Mind and the World of Action* may be viewed as one extensive practitioner-based inquiry mediation in the perpetual grappling with the theory/practice nexus. That is one reading. It also challenges some of the fundamental precepts of this particular subset of educational research, especially in insisting on the importance of theory even within this emerging genre in which the relationship between practice and theory is anything but settled or easily understood. In this sense, while I seek to come to terms with some of its complexities, the very concept of “practitioner-based inquiry” takes on a certain symbolic significance in my narrative. Specifically, I am pushing beyond its common definition by utilizing the phrase somewhat metaphorically in the quest to work through the various practitioner-theory tensions that I have experienced as an intellectual whose laboratory is some aspect of the field of practice rather than a given set of issues stemming from the academic disciplines.

In this, I am seeking to speak both to the university and to the lived realities of the realm of adult education and literacy practitioners through a somewhat unique perspective that loosens up some of the common assumptions characteristic of both spheres. I do so because in a sense I am compelled by the nature of my own striving and social location as a daily practitioner in search of theoretical clarification. I do so even in my apprehension that this practitioner-informed intellectual voice is a muted one in both the academy and the realm of practice given the various constructions of reality that dominate prevailing discourses in adult literacy education, which read differently within

each of the spheres. In an attempt to move beyond such marginality, I seek to articulate something of the extent of these practitioner/theorist tensions as well as to push on the boundaries of their seeming limitations that constrain their interface in the many discourses that give shape to adult literacy education.

I write from my own experience and reading of the world based on a combination of 18 years of applied field and wide reading in the field and related disciplines. Notwithstanding its grounding in my own local experience, I am persuaded that the ideas herein have wider relevance, even as the text cannot but be read differently in various places and locations wherein adult literacy is practiced, studied, and conceptualized. In this respect, this overview and the essays it references seek to make a worthy contribution to a field comprised of many voices and many readings, in which this is one, arguably, of no minor significance.

This review is divided into four sections. The first focuses on various autobiographical reflections in terms of career pathways, my early work at Literacy Volunteers of Greater Hartford, and a case study piece of my year-long participation in a National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy (NCSALL) project on teacher research. The emphasis is on an embodied “self” in creative tension with a range of cultural/societal forces locally experienced. In the process, a more subtle sense of self emerged as a critical part of the process of working through the particular set of problems highlighted in each of the essays.

The second section contains six essays that focus on various aspects of adult literacy pedagogy in which I have sought a middle ground resolution between functional and critical pedagogy through Dewey’s concept of growth. I have linked this philosophy with the new literacy studies (Merrifield, 1998; Barton, 1994) in its emphasis on literacy practices, in which I drew on my field location at Literacy Volunteers of Greater Hartford for case study examples. While all of these essays have an ineradicable political subtext, their primary emphasis is on various aspects of student or tutor learning somewhat more than policy analysis or political culture, at least in its more overt intention.

On Freirian assumptions as well as my own, any sharp separation between pedagogy and politics is an untenable one. This claim is based on the assumption that knowledge is construed through discourses of power even as it is not deterministically shaped by such in that there are modes of plausible action within a broad stream of political and cultural discourses that may be operative in a given political culture. Nonetheless, the third section focuses more overtly on the political in its emphasis on various discourses of power. In this section I contrast a structural-functional policy orientation that has grounded U.S. federal policy since the 1960s with the oppositional political theory of the Freirian school of thought based on the precepts of critical (Frankfurt) theory and a post-structural identity politics stemming from leftist political thought of the 1960s.

These somewhat polarized perspectives have dominated much of adult literacy discourse since Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* published in 1970. I take a different

tack by drawing on a hermeneutical retrieval of the U.S. political culture of the late 18th century, and its accompanying British oppositional thought in its emphasis on liberalism, democracy, and civic republicanism to situate what I view as a more viable politics of literacy within the contexts identified in this book (Demetrian, 2005).

The final section examines research traditions. A critical issue is the centrality of theory as a functional tool in the determination of what sets of problems are addressed and the significance of what gets viewed as the relevant facts of the case as determined by the problematic situation under investigation. The first essay explores the significance of theory within the emergent field of practitioner-based inquiry and argues that it plays a crucial, under-appreciated role in the very determination of the nature of an investigation and its particular focus. I note in the essay that theory is implicit in any event, so by making theory explicit, there is no inherent muting of the practitioner voice. The extent and manner to which *academic* theory can be incorporated into practitioner-based inquiry is another matter that those invested in this research genre would do well to carefully tease out.

This last theme is also teased out in another essay on this section which examines a key argument in Cochran-Smith & Lytle's (1993) *Inside/Outside: Teacher Research and Knowledge* on the importance of "systematic intentional, inquiry" as a methodological grounding point for this emerging genre of educational research. In this essay, I draw on Dewey's (1938/1991) key text, *Logic: The theory of inquiry* to sift through critical issues in practitioner-based inquiry.

The final essay focuses more formally on academic research by putting forward postpositivism as a mediating research tradition between the quest for certainty in neopositivism and the relativistic tendencies of constructivism and postmodernism in which there is no intrinsic truth beyond the persuasiveness of various narrative construals. Postpositivist research is based on a problem-focused quest for truth as a regulative ideal, in which problem resolution can only be (but also must be) as exacting as the nature of the problem allows. Such "competent inquiry" is based on the underlying precepts of the scientific method, as described, in the fallibilistic postpositivist mode, and can be relied upon by the social scientific research community. Notwithstanding their different focal points, what both essays share in common is the role of theory (hypothesis formation) as a functional tool in combination with the relevant data in the formation of the very definition and progressive resolution of a problem situation. In Dewey's (1938/1991) language, the modes of inquiry "accrue" throughout the means-ends continuum of a competent investigation

There is more than a little compensation reflected in these essays, whether writing about pedagogy, the politics of literacy, research traditions, or my own autobiographical experience, in a search for a level of *imaginative* influence that I do not always have in my daily practice. There is also a desire to identify issues and perspectives that I could not easily articulate within the immediate arena of field operations without taking the somewhat distanced stance that the academic text allows, a genre that typically does not speak in the realm of practice. The tension I experience between my roles as a daily

practitioner and as an academic scholar are (a) those of the intellectual in a highly pragmatic culture and (b) those of a practitioner who looks a bit beyond the current reality, to often under-explored plausibilities resident within the actual, with limited, but some capacity to effect change in the desired manner articulated.

My embrace of John Dewey, the philosopher who sought the intellectual organization of experience, is the most creative way that I have been able to come to terms with these tensions in search of some meaningful level of integration. I embrace this Deweyan vision as an enormously fruitful heuristic even as I maintain an underlying sense that the hoped for fusion is practically impossible, if not downright undesirable in the very danger of collapsing the practitioner-theorist tension as perhaps the unintended consequences of any such integration. In the process, I often sublimate the intellectual drive in my role as a practitioner, while internalizing it in my writing in a manner that allows me to say something in printed text that I may not have the freedom (including the internal freedom) to say, or may not often have direct influence on, in my daily practice. From this vantage point, my objective is to construct another world, an imaginative one, to be sure, where possibilities beyond the given, but emerging out of it, can be given voice.

There is a certain illusory and elusive dimension to this even as I am convinced that there is something quite authentic about Dewey's fruitful concept of growth in application to adult literacy education. Notwithstanding this dilemma, there is also the problem that in muting this voice, which looks beyond the given, an imaginative world needed for reconstruction would be severely blocked. In that case, only the "real" in terms of what is viewed as practically possible as determined at the level of practice only by practitioners, or even by intellectuals who have gone "native," is given credence. That, too, is limiting, and also ultimately an abdication of responsibility, which I seek to actively work against based on my vocation as a public intellectual situated in a very pragmatic setting shaped by its own daily reality, nonetheless open to reconstructive reshaping.

This essay and the reviewed articles speak to the many constraints in the working out of the theory/practice nexus in adult literacy education, with a special focus on the political culture of the United States. It also seeks to illuminate prospects for reconstruction through a middle ground vision of pedagogy, politics, and research traditions in a manner that could, plausibly, attenuate some of the critical tensions between the realms of practice, policy formulation, political culture, and science and open up some new ground for exploration. Even still, it may be just as reasonable to conjecture that any such project contains too many problems to succeed. Much additional work is clearly needed. What I offer here are the sustained reflections of one practitioner-scholar within the pragmatic philosophical mode.

Between the Life of the Mind and the World of Action: Critical Autobiography

In the three essays highlighted in this section, I focus on various pivotal points in my career in adult literacy at Literacy Volunteers of Greater Hartford, Literacy

Volunteers of America-Connecticut River East, and in passing, at Literacy Volunteers of America. As a form of critical autobiography, my objective in this section is not simply to narrate my story, but to examine significant issues through this peculiar genre as another mode of scholarship. By making myself both subject and object of study, I have sought to problematize the practitioner/theorist nexus by interpreting experience through the prism of scholarly analysis, which in turn, establishes the irreducibly concrete, a phenomenological ethnography, as a critical laboratory for theory construction and research. Through this essay and the studies it references I have sought to raise significant issues about adult literacy provision and to mirror through my own odyssey, an appreciation for the various problems and prospective resolutions on adult literacy embodied in my autobiographical narratives, in which the personal, pedagogical, and political mutually intersect.

“Reinventing the Self: Passages into History, Business, and Adult Literacy,” is a narrative of my career evolution from graduate school to my position of manager of the Bob Steele Reading Center in Hartford, CT (<http://www.nald.ca/fulltext/George/reinvent/page1.htm>). The essay contains much detailed information over an almost 20 year span on a topic, on how at least one adult literacy career was formed, the general topic of which has been largely neglected in the academic literature. It is not that my story is representative. However, there is a linkage of my odyssey to the various generational studies of what is referred to as the career trajectory of post World War II boomers (Leinberger & Tucker, 1991; Roof, 1993; Whalen & Flacks, 1989). Therein may lay its broader significance, of which a collective case study of the career formation of adult literacy professionals could add much insight to this broader sociological phenomenon.

There is an additional purpose, perhaps the more fundamental one in terms of the larger objectives of *this* review. This is the analysis, obviously from my perspective, of tensions and points of creativity between the life of the mind as defined by scholarly reflection, and the world of action in my various roles as teacher, first-line business manager, and program manager in an adult literacy agency. This I characterize as “an enduring split” (p. 1) rooted ultimately in western epistemological experience, notwithstanding elements of convergence at pivotal experiential points. What is in tension is the seeming indubitableness of this split with what I refer to as an “Emersonian-Deweyan vision for an idealized American Self” (p. 4) in organic harmony with nature, culture, and society in which the mind-action polarity is imaginatively healed through the fulfillment, ultimately, of the American Dream.

Among other things, this sensibility informs my understanding of the dilemmas inherent within practitioner-based inquiry in particular, and more broadly the extent to which theory construction, research, and practice can critically inform each other. I do not argue that the division between scholarship and practice is inherently polarizing. However, I do make the point that each has, as they are commonly constructed, their own respective logics, in which, more often than not, they do not converge into a “theory into practice” continuum. I maintain, therefore, that a grappling with the gap is an essential aspect of any quest for their integration, which, at best remains on the way toward

harmonization. This tension is often marked by a multitude of contradictory impulses that are not easily, or perhaps ever resolved.

Notwithstanding these seemingly enduring constraints, there is a certain drive within me to explore these dynamics, in effect, as my own pursuit of the American Dream in the Emersonian-Deweyan vein as an imaginative construct of personal identity formation. Consequently, I probe into the intricacies of experience and academic theory construction, particularly in the realm of social philosophy in the desire to make sense of both in light of their interface, however seemingly contradictory they appear. There is a seeming duality in this drive, which, on the one hand, may appear escapist in what I, at least sometimes perceive as its interference with my capacity to operate full throttle in my role as an adult literacy practitioner.

On the other hand, in my quest for meaning, there is this need and longing for explanation, which partially informs, but also transcends my function as a practitioner, which speaks in some compelling way to who I am or at least, who I seek to be as a practitioner-situated intellectual. I am, therefore I write, even in the midst of the apprehension that in doing so, I am repressing certain aspects of a more constructive self that to be fully birthed needs to engage the world in a more direct manner that fully lets go of the scholarly voice. I examine these tensions throughout this section in application to the various realms of discourse on adult literacy education that the essays address.

“Crossing Critical Thresholds at the Bob Steele Reading Center” (<http://www.nald.ca/fulltext/george/crossing/cover.htm>), written after I had completed my eight-year tenure in managing that program, has two primary purposes. The first is to provide a broad historical overview of the key markers of the program’s development and its location within the Literacy Volunteers of Greater Hartford (LVGH) and Literacy Volunteers of America-Connecticut (LVA-CT) organizational cultures. The second purpose is to convey something of its “inner life” as it sprang from my imagination as the program unfolded over time. The two objectives are related in the sense that the evolution of the program allowed for considerable latitude on paths that could have been pursued within the contexts of varying degrees of openness and constraint within the changing organizational cultures shaping the contexts in which the programmatic trajectories unfolded at the Bob Steele Reading Center.

The program originated from a vision of the LVA-CT state organization to pilot a centralized learning center that would provide support to adult students and volunteer tutors and promote programming in small group tutoring, writing, and computer assisted instruction within an inner city context. The significance of this model becomes clear when contrasted to the traditional LVA instructional format of individual student and tutor pairs meeting in various chosen locations with minimal programmatic support. This traditional model characterized the LVGH operation in the mid-1980s, which functioned with a minimal budget and part time staff housed in borrowed administrative space.

While the 18 local LVA agencies in Connecticut had been operating for over a dozen years, there were built-in institutional logjams in the development of the individual

affiliates, particularly those within the urban centers. Specifically, the traditional model of decentralized programming and one-to-one tutoring reflected a suburban ethos, which did not fit the more dynamic and culturally diverse cultures particularly of the state's larger cities of Hartford, Bridgeport, and New Haven. Since the state office was located in Hartford, the capitol city became the logical place to pilot the learning center model, which required considerable negotiation with the local affiliate. Much of the early part of the essay provides a detailed discussion of these complex transactions.

How the program developed and the corresponding evolution of LVGH from a fledgling affiliate to a highly focused well-supported urban institution is described in the remainder of the essay, which I narrate in juxtaposition to my own positionality within this evolving system. I focus on three related factors; the probing of potentiality as a dynamic force-field of program development through the reading center's various evolutions, my imaginative construal of the program's vision through the image of an adult literacy laboratory/research center, and the tension between the uniqueness of my particular vision within the context of the emergence of a sophisticated managerial structure, which focused organizational energies in other directions.

In terms of potentiality, I drew on the core Deweyan concept that idealizations are embedded in the actual, and that their tapping into at propitious times establishes their own reconstructive dynamic. This, in turn, stimulates emerging energies leading toward their realization. I traced something of how these energies played out throughout the various stages of the program's evolution. However latently implicit from my inception with the program, the vision of a laboratory/research center crystallized in my imagination once the program began to shift into full throttle with the attainment of a permanent site. This location established the environmental matrix where small group tutoring, student writing, and project development flourished. It was the transformation of such potentiality as embedded within the original reading center model into its progressive realization that stimulated my own imaginative potential into a potent energetic mode. This unleashed new aspirations toward that ultimate destination signified by the vision of a laboratory/research center.

More as a symbol than a clearly articulated ideal, I drew on its imagery as a constructive force that emerged out of the very energies, at least as I interpreted them, that allowed what already transpired to come into place. If this energy source were marginalized, I reasoned, the source of vitality itself for the reading center vision would be impaired. It was this elusive, but potent force field that I sought to protect and nurture rather than the realization of the laboratory/research center, per se. That concept, rather, functioned, as an imaginative stimulus in the work of ongoing program development in the continuous pursuit of potentiality from the dynamics that were actually emerging. Whether that pursuit was wise, is another matter, which readers might be able to make a more informed judgment after reading the specific article under discussion.

Those operating out of other positions within LVGH viewed things from different perspectives, although all us involved in LVGH during the mid-1990s viewed the growth of the reading center as a notable accomplishment. Both the agency executive leadership and those invested in developing neighborhood center community sites sought to build on

the organizational stability the reading center achievement provided to the agency in order to realize other objectives of a broader organizational import. This, so it seemed, placed an outer limit organizational boundary on the realization of the reading center vision as I had envisioned it. Even so, I continued to hunt out spaces for new growth within the emerging structures that had or were coming into place. My negotiation of this tension between my internalized vision for the reading center and the broader organizational objectives of the agency was a critical aspect of that overview essay.

“A Yankee Individualist in Dialogue and Confrontation with the Progressive Literacy Left” (<http://www.nald.ca/fulltext/george/yankee/Cover.htm>) completes the selections in this autobiographical section. The essay was originally written in 1999 during my two-year tenure as Executive Director of LVA-CT River East, and after my 20-month career as Director of Materials Development at the LVA national organization in Syracuse, New York. In its most compact expression this essay is a heightened reflection of the various tensions stemming from my social role as a practitioner in juxtaposition to my status as an adult literacy theorist. In the grappling with this tension, the essay details a search for broader scholarly legitimacy from the very agency that sought, at least for the project under study, to locate him as a practitioner. To put it specifically, the essay describes my yearlong participation in a National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy (NCSALL) project on teacher research based on the topic of learner motivation, retention, and persistence. The core focal point was the tension between the objectives of the project developers and my own in relation to establishing a topic of investigation which would satisfy the criteria of the project developers and facilitator as well as make sense and be worthy of my most focused concentration.

The initial topic I chose was problematic from the get go at least in terms of my own motivation in that I was far from convinced that it was a viable focal point of study within the context of a year-long teacher research project. More fundamentally I sensed a divergence between my own theoretically-oriented definition of teacher research, drawn, in part, on assumptions laid out in Cochran Smith and Lytle’s (1993) *Inside/Outside: Teacher Research and Knowledge* and those that I intuited from the NCSALL project developers. To state this more sharply, I perceived at least a somewhat a-theoretical tendency toward practice rather than a dynamic interface, particularly when measured against the extent to which I tended to push the theoretical pole in the emerging genre of teacher research in which the boundaries between theory and practice were anything but thoroughly established.

In addition to an accent on the practical, there was a strong emphasis in the NCSALL project on data collection, to which, in principle, I had no objection, as long as that were viewed as a means of doing research rather than an end. My primary interest was in writing a teacher research essay that linked critical reflection and *relevant* data, as defined by the focus of the project to a problem focus that I could find sufficiently interesting and practical to complete within a calendar year. The search for such a topic remained highly elusive throughout the project year.

More fundamental yet, was the issue of power and authorial voice, specifically, on who had the right to define the criteria of the research project and on what basis. No doubt, NCSALL had the authority to develop its own project parameters and to assume that participants would work within the fairly broad framework set out in the descriptive notices. No doubt, too, I was seeking to piggyback on this opportunity as a way to engage the NCSALL research community with my own expertise as a literacy scholar, as well as a practitioner in search of creative convergence between these roles that I hoped the project would open up to me.

When it became clear that my initial project focus could not work, I probed into a variety of alternatives in the effort to develop a project that would satisfy both the NCSALL staffers and me. However, the NCSALL project staff and I became conflicted over definitions of teacher research on what would make for a legitimate project. That, to me was a most intriguing issue, worthy of study, itself, more interesting to me than what the NCSALL staff laid out as the focus of the project. This tension had underlain the tension that remained pervasive, at least in my mind throughout the project year.

The brunt of it was that I wanted to write a teacher research essay through the voice of a scholarly writer, while the NCSALL facilitator and project developers wanted me to focus directly on my role as either a teacher or administrator. In effect, I sought to push back on NCSALL's definition of teacher research, which I interpret, with Cochran-Smith and Lytle as a subtype of educational scholarship, which necessarily includes theory. Rather than abandon the project, I imaginatively resolved the crisis by making an analysis of my yearlong odyssey with it the subject of my study, namely the essay under discussion. In short, I wrote, therefore I became, and symbolically transcended the conflict at least within the theater of my imagination by exerting the voice I kept at bay throughout the project year.

The key point linking the essay with the original NCSALL focus was the drawing out of my experience as analogy to that of an adult literacy student struggling with motivation, persistence, and retention issues, as I was with the project. Questions abound when programs or agencies only partially meet the learning needs and expectations of specific students. Are the alternatives only those of simply working with the operative assumptions of the program or withdrawing, with the hope, perhaps of finding a better match elsewhere? Or do students have the right to push back to make certain claims of their own on the type and mode of learning to be encountered. In the article reviewed, these questions are left open, as are the various definitions of teacher research examined throughout the NCSALL project and in this essay.

Literacy as Growth

The essays in this section juxtapose critical and functional literacy through the mediating perspective of Dewey's (1916/1944, 1938/1963) concept of growth. While there is an evident exaggeration in this polarity, it has attained a certain canonical status in the iconography of adult literacy provision, which merits examination (Freire, 1970; Lankshear, 1993; Chisman, 1989; Fingeret and Jurmo, 1989; Auerbach, 1992). In its

starkest articulation, adult literacy education is defined as either empowering or normalizing. On the former view, it is linked to a radical politics of literacy designed to critique and, ideally, to restructure the status quo of normalized social, political, economic, and cultural power against the real interests of the socially marginalized and oppressed.

Its proponents make the case that functional literacy enables adults with limited basic skills to perform, if not proficiently, then at least in a modestly better manner in relation to various aspects of life improvement, particularly in the realm of the workplace. They, thereby enhance their own life prospects for economic security and adaptability within a society increasingly shaped by print-based means of communication and technology. According to opponents, the very notion of functional literacy is a highly reductionist form of education, which reinforces the “deficiency” view of adult literacy students (Lankshear, 1993). By contrast, advocates of critical literacy seek to build on strengths and resources adult literacy learners possess, particularly in a collaborative mode, and to structure programming in a manner that “problematizes” normalizing social, political, and economic structures through “liberating” discourses, which empowers the oppressed to be constructors of their own history.

This polarity has been challenged on a variety of fronts, particularly so by the British-based advocates of the “new literacy studies.” Scribner’s (1988) key essay, “Literacy in Three Metaphors,” comparing and contrasting functional and critical perspectives by highlighting the importance of local literacy practices, is a pivotal statement. Lytle and Wolfe (1989) draw out the complexities in the evolution of the concept of functional literacy, which in its more complex versions merges imperceptibly toward the literacy as practices perspective. Sticht’s (1997) influential work in functional context theory shares a similar sensibility in its blending of normative adaptability with the central role of culture in defining that which is commonly viewed as relevant knowledge within the context of various social roles. Similarly so with the National Institute’s Equipped for the Future project, which incorporates functional, participatory, and critical perspectives in linking the development of metacognitive learning with progressive mastery of the primary social roles of worker, family member, and citizen (Stein, 2000).

Building on Dewey’s pragmatic vision of a constrained yet open social universe, it is within these contexts that I situate the literacy as growth hypothesis, in which individuals have influence in the shape of its ongoing construction, through the exercise of creative intelligence and democratic will formation defined by Dewey as “a way of life.” Growth, on Dewey’s interpretation has several dimensions. Most fundamentally, it is the reliance upon learning strengths students possess as the basis for further development, and connecting subject matter to critical facets of student experience and motivational impulses, as the primary basis for pushing beyond any current student understanding and knowledge base. There is also the assumption that a “means-ends” continuum is in operation through which an inquiry-based problem situation, which grounds learning, is progressively resolved. Effective pedagogy is the tapping into these learning zones and extracting out of them something of “all” there is to garner at any

given learning/teaching moment. Learning, on this perspective, is a cumulative process of successive construction through which bodies of knowledge are progressively mastered and internalized within the expansive life experience of a student's learning history.

Sharing a sensibility with Vygotsky (1978), Dewey identifies a critical mediating role for the teacher, whose primary responsibility is to negotiate the terrain between the subject matter and the learning experiences of the students. The learning process is also facilitated by the quality of the social transactions of the collaborative classroom. Growth is that critical edge that builds on the foremost potentialities of students within a given time and place, stimulated in turn by attunement to Vygotsky's zone of proximal development in which students are able to garner resources beyond what they can master exclusively through their own capacities in pushing their learning forward. The essays in this section illuminate these themes in varying ways.

“Participatory Literacy Education: A Complex Phenomenon”

(<http://www.nald.ca/fulltext/George/Particip/cover.htm>), draws out the Freirian critique against the “banking” approach to education as highlighted in Fingeret and Jurmo's (1989) *Participatory Literacy Education* as well as the LVA's instructor's manual, *Tutor: A Collaborative Approach to Literacy Instruction* (Cheatham, Colvin & Laminack, 1993). The key point in both texts is the crucial role of learners setting the agenda for their own instruction in contrast to the traditional perspective in which the teacher is the center of the classroom decision-making. This participatory perspective has a prevailing influence in progressive adult literacy sectors. Building on the triple pillars of Dewey's concept of the efficacious teacher, the organizational psychologist Warren Bennis' concept of the “transformational leader” and my direct experience in operating an adult literacy program, the essay makes an empathetic, but critical assessment of the participatory model. It is empathetic in the agreement that participation, broadly defined, is a crucial dimension of adult literacy education.

Where the essay raises an issue is in how participation is fostered, particularly in relation to the leadership function of the instructor, or, as the case may be, the manager in an organizational context. Specifically, I argue, unless a climate already exists for a fully shared leadership approach, given the prevalence of habitual patterns and expectations of the traditional view of teacher as expert, progress toward a participatory climate would be difficult to achieve without the sustained commitment of the inspired leader who mediates conflict within his or her role identity and provides much of the orienting direction. In addition, it is only by establishing a stable classroom structure that a well-enduring participatory ethos broadly defined, is likely to be embedded within a reliable institutional setting. I make the point that, at least for many students, the participatory model, as described in the literature, is less important than that an adult literacy program meets the learning needs of students through an environmental context where their concerns and aspirations can be heard and taken into account. These themes are brought out in the specific case presentations highlighted in the essay.

“A Scaffolding Paradigm: Small Group Tutoring at the Bob Steele Reading Center” (<http://www.nald.ca/fulltext/George/scaffold/cover.htm>) builds on these themes through a specific focus on small group instruction. The essay highlights several key points; (a) the crucial role of the tutor in giving shape to the instructional program, (b) the negotiated relationship among the tutors, students, program staff, and the curriculum in the figuring out how best to facilitate student learning, and (c) the delicate balance between structure and improvisation in the shaping of a viable instructional format. The scaffolding paradigm, through which learning is enhanced by working at the nexus between students’ independent growth potential and what they can accomplish through support of facilitative resources, is the overarching thesis of the essay.

The very construction of the small group-tutoring program was one such scaffold in which the pull of necessity stimulated the kinds of development within tutors that led to various instructional adaptations as articulated particularly in the first example of a “program pioneer.” The effort to build curriculum structure into the program was another, as described in the second case presentation of Ingrid and Kim in their desire to create a specific content-based curriculum. The experiment did not meet the tutors’ expectations for a variety of reasons. Even still, the structured format provided them with a sense of direction that allowed for some continuity of themes over time, the lack of which, the tutors believed, was a contributing factor in the erratic student attendance fluctuations. Kim and Ingrid instituted this curriculum reform in negotiation with the students and the program manager throughout the semester term in which the experiment was in operation. Although it did not turn out as the tutors expected the reform effort provided the program manager and the tutors a learning opportunity since we did not know in advance the extent to which, if at all, the structured curriculum experiment would succeed.

The third case presentation focuses on the mediational relationship between pedagogical structure and emergent processes of learning/teaching in best facilitating student learning. At the center of this section is a “debate” between a pair of collaborating tutors on the best way to stimulate student writing. Less a pointed argument than a probing inquiry between the tutors and myself as interviewer, this last case study provides a glimpse of the diversity of ways that the tutors incorporated their own conceptual tools into their work. At the core was a subtle dialectic between structured and emergent pedagogical processes that undergirded not only writing instruction, but a wide array of topics that the tutors drew on to stimulate student interest and expanding their learning capacity and knowledge base.

The scaffolding paradigm represents a complex array of strategies, approaches, and methodologies, mediating already attained knowledge and experience with insights and learning capacities that are within proximate range through an apprenticeship mode of instruction. Through such modeling and guidance students gradually increase their knowledge. It is not that there is a one-to-one correspondence between scaffolding instruction and the internalization of new knowledge. Rather, learning and knowledge acquisition are built up through a range of developmental processes, which combines

what students already know with what they can come to know through the utilization supportive resources.

The first two essays link Dewey's philosophy of education to a Vygotskian scaffolding paradigm. In "Motivation and the Adult New Reader: Student Profiles in a Deweyan Vein" (<http://www.nald.ca/FULLTEXT/George/Motivate/cover.htm>) I look more extensively at the key concept, "growth." I lay out its role within the broader context of Dewey's epistemology, in a cumulative movement from the faintest glimmerings of an emergent problem to its progressive resolution via a more desirable reconstruction of some significant aspect of living experience. Learning and knowledge acquisition are viewed less as ends than as means toward the resolution of some problem or question that stimulate student curiosity and need.

These concepts are fleshed out in three case studies, in the description of student learning histories from initial motivation in entering the literacy program, to the highlighting of various learning trajectories, with the overall objective of tracing development over a significant period of time. In principle, the descriptive portions of the student narratives could have been provided without the overlay of a Deweyan thesis. Even still, the categories that give shape to his philosophy of education opened up areas of inquiry that I sought to draw out that I might not have otherwise pursued. One may have as easily drawn on Jack Mezirow's (1996) "transformation theory," given its well-established status in adult education to interpret such development. However, in addition to the rich complexity of its conceptual framework, Dewey's philosophy provides more of an explanation of gradual development, accounting for some of its detours as well as breakthroughs that occur at propitious times throughout a learning history. I draw upon it, in Popper's term, as a "bold conjecture" (1963) in its capacity to imaginatively transcend the dichotomy between functional and critical literacy.

The primary value of theory is the extent to which its mode of thinking opens up fruitful ways of interpreting experience that gain the support of some defined community of scholars or practitioners that cause the observer to examine what may initially be taken as self-evident, or, on the other hand, ignored, in a more systematic and reflective way. In this respect, I draw on Dewey's philosophy not because his insights upproblematically disclose the truth. I do so because its heuristic potential has much to offer discerning practitioners and scholars in illuminating important aspects about the adult literacy learning experience that its labyrinths of nuance and systematicity of thought open up.

The final three essays include more of an explicit political content, but are placed here because they remain substantially pedagogical in focus. Their political significance will be considered here to the extent that it is relevant in grounding the pedagogical import of the essays, noting that political culture will be more broadly addressed in the next section.

"Student Goals and Public Outcomes: The Contribution of Adult Literacy Education to the Public Good" (<http://www.nald.ca/fulltext/George/student/cover.htm>) draws out the argument that the public value of adult literacy can be more

comprehensively supported based on a policy concept of the “public good” rather than a cost benefits utilitarian return on investment rationale requiring an exacting mathematical calculus of impact. Drawing on the civic republican tradition, the essay identifies the public good as the strengthening of mediating institutions in which enhanced literacy serves as an intervening variable. The essay juxtaposes Freirian oppositional and capital development theories, which, in their different ways, draw on an expectation of extensive impact of adult literacy as a direct variable in facilitating social change. Building on the precepts of the new literacy studies, I posit a more modest and indirect effect, which depends on the efficacy of other institutional, social, cultural, and psychological factors in the interface with print-based texts within the context of individual lives.

The essay draws on the mediating pedagogy of the Equipped for the Future (EFF) Four Purposes of “access and orientation, “voice,” “independent action” and “bridge to the future” to ground an orientating rationale for an adult literacy pedagogy based on the life experiences, expectations, and capacities of adult literacy students (Stein, 2000). EFF includes a strong role theory focus, even as EFF founder Sondra Stein finds a more underlying “literacy for life” rationale that shapes the broader context in which the social roles are embedded. This literacy for life connection, mediated through the social roles, becomes the basis for linking student goals to public outcomes, a theme that is broadly explored through a brief review of the research of Susan Lytle and Hannah Fingeret, major progressive adult literacy advocates during the 1990s.

The essay concludes with a case presentation of three students from the author’s program, linking adult literacy education to the three EFF Roles Maps of Worker, Family Member and Citizen. Underlying the essay is the assumption that student goals in themselves are an insufficient rationale as a public justification for adult literacy education. An alternative is provided in the linkage of goals to the EFF role maps and related social and cultural contexts, based on a value system that aligns a civic republican philosophy of the “public good” with the strengthening of mediating institutions that an adult literacy framework so aligned contributes toward. This, it is argued, is a basis upon which a coherent public philosophy of adult literacy education could be established, stemming from the grounding values of the founding political culture of the United States in participatory democracy, the pursuit of liberty and justice, and the promotion of the common good (Demetrian, 2005).

“A Critical Pedagogy of the Mainstream”

(<http://www.nald.ca/fulltext/George/Pedagogy/cover.htm>) is a rhetorical play on Paulo Freire’s seminal text, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Just as Freire provides a complex understanding of an oppositional pedagogy, my appropriation of the term “mainstream” seeks to be similarly nuanced. Less a pedagogy of “normalization,” I link it to a reformist political orientation analogous to the inclusive progressive vision of John Dewey and Jane Adams as articulated in their work in the early decades of the 20th century when the Progressive Era was in full swing. Continuing to play off Freire, I define self-actualization as a vital form of “humanization” (Freire’s concept) particularly in an American vein, based on what students themselves identify as important. While actualization has a strong individual component, adult literacy students often seek the

building up of the self for the purpose of better participating in the social roles that are important to the enhancement of their lives and those of their families. This I characterize as a critical component of “a critical pedagogy of the mainstream.”

As previously discussed, I define the scaffolding paradigm as another core component of an effective pedagogy of the mainstream. The scaffolding concept does not stand alone, which would tend to reinforce a “deficiency” view of literacy. It is, rather, a critical component toward what students seek to accomplish by participating in adult literacy learning, which includes active learning through the progressive mastery of basic reading and writing skills and a broad array of content knowledge deemed relevant to various aspects of the students’ lives.

The third component is the quest for *inclusion* into the prevailing roles and mores of mainstream society in ways that are progressively humanizing as interpreted by adult literacy students. This sensibility is drawn out in the ethnographic work of Fingeret and Drennon (1997) and Merrifeid et al. (1997) upon whose core assumptions I build. The essay looks with some skepticism on the notion of “resistance theory” in which “maladaptive” working class behavior is viewed as an implicit critique of the dominant socio-political hegemony (Aronowitz & Giroux, (1993). As a grounding point in critical pedagogy, the issue I take is not so much with its theoretical significance toward the building up of a transformative alternative to the status quo. The concern is that it is not an accurate representation of the lived experiences of at least many adult students who participate in community-based volunteer tutoring programs or town and city-based adult education centers. The primary objective of many students who do is to better establish themselves as workers, more effective family members, and active participants of local community settings of their choosing, through the progressive mastery of print-based texts, in a manner that enhances their self-perception in the process.

It is not that structural issues of poverty, racism, and sexism are ignored. Rather, at least based on the stated purposes of adults who actively participate in programs for some durable timeframe, they are, in general, of lesser importance than the desire to make modest achievements toward the various goals and aspirations that motivate them to seek through adult literacy education some prospect of their attainment. These themes are illustrated through extensive case study example. They are more formally assessed toward the end of the essay through the accommodation/assimilation thesis of development posed by Myron Tuman (1987). Tuman argues that development needs to be grasped as a complex negotiation between what students can achieve through their own efficacy and what they cannot change and therefore need to accept as part of the given fabric of the prevailing culture and society. The critical developmental factor is that as students increase their knowledge, they are able to accomplish more while gaining a better sense of what is and what is not within their span of control, a somewhat fluid given, in any event. The essay links Tuman’s concept of development with Dewey’s concept of growth as core dimensions of a critical pedagogy of the mainstream.

“Discerning the Contexts of Adult Literacy Education: Theoretical Reflections and Practical Applications” (<http://www.nald.ca/fulltext/george/discern/cover.htm>),

locates the prevailing schools of contextually derived approaches with functional context theory (Sticht, 1997), the new literacy studies (Fingeret and Drennon, 1997), and participatory literacy education (Auerbach, 1992). Building on Scribner's (1984/1988), "Literacy in Three Metaphors," the author links these diverse perspectives to a common neo-Vygotskian social theory in which mind is internalized through the appropriation of culture and society in substantially different ways within these interrelated schools of adult literacy. The primary intent of the essay is to extend the notion of "literacy practices" embedded within the new literacy studies by incorporating elements of Sticht's (1997) functional context theory and Auerbach's (1992) critical pedagogy into a broadened definition without collapsing the legitimacy of these "supporting" interpretations of literacy into an overall harmonization.

As I argue, all of these perspectives have value within their respective spheres. Such objectives might include mastering the content of a driver's education manual, organizing a neighborhood group to oppose the opening of a new mall, or helping adults increase generalized reading and writing skills that students might draw upon in a range of contexts, whether at work, home, or the community. I draw on Fingeret and Drennon's (1997) *Literacy for Life* as a focal point for a U.S.-based example of the new literacy studies to argue the core thesis that in such generalized programs as community-based volunteer tutoring programs and town and city-based ABE centers, an extension of the "literacy as practices" concept strengthened by a selective appropriation of Sticht and Auerbach's theories has much to offer in the creation of a viable pedagogy.

The essay also points out that each of these perspectives exhibits tendencies, which places them along various locations within the continuum of U.S. political culture. Thus, Sticht's functional context theory is often appropriated as a form of adaptation to prevailing social norms and role expectations of mainstream culture. Fingeret and Drennon's literacy as practices thesis may be linked to a modestly reformist orientation that accepts the basic paradigm of constitutional democracy and market capitalism as overarching givens of political reality in which there is room for modest development toward greater inclusion of socially marginalized viewpoints. Auerbach's critical pedagogy directly challenges the operative assumptions of the political status quo and offers the vision of a radical alternative through an emancipatory vision, in which the "given" becomes "problematized" through an acute analysis of unspoken assumptions and normalized social situations.

I do not mean to imply that the three pedagogical perspectives invariably follow along this political trajectory or that there is any binary polarity between the pedagogy and politics of oppression and emancipation. There is considerable crossover in how these perspectives can be commingled. It is to point out that the relation between pedagogical and political schools of thought described, have historically exhibited such tendencies. This history subtly informs current thinking and is likely to maintain considerable influence in the near-term future.

The Pedagogical is Political

Politics is implicit in all of the essays in the section on pedagogy in which I situate a Deweyan middle ground of growth in contradistinction to various forms of functional and critical pedagogy. The binary polarity is an overstatement of much of the embedded practices of adult literacy programming throughout various operational sectors. Nonetheless, the distinction serves a useful point of clarification in which otherwise sharp differences would more likely have been attenuated in some type of neo-liberal modernization thesis, which might also be viewed as a form of ideological masking. Consequently, I choose to work within the boundaries of prevailing scholarly interpretations that have given shape to the historical discourses on adult literacy, in order to tease out a nuanced mediating approach both in the realm of pedagogy and that of politics as illuminated the next section.

I do so partly on the assumption that as currently constructed, whether in the scholarly literature or in the realm of critical practice, there is no coherent politics of literacy pervasive within the United States congruent with the nation's own prevailing political traditions. These traditions I link to the precepts of liberty, civic virtue, popular sovereignty, and the just rule of law. The values embedded in these concepts are the defining hallmarks of the late 18th century political tradition that gave shape to the ethos of the American revolutionary era. They represent, in the imagery of William James, a "live option" that has been the basis for hermeneutical retrieval in certain periods throughout the nation's history. I argue that this heritage holds a similar potential for the current era, particularly when wedded to the imagery of literacy as source of self-fulfillment and efficacious power in the mastery of the social roles of worker, family member, and citizen in the strengthening of mediating institutions. Whether or not such a potential is realized, my core argument is based on the assumption that these intellectual and cultural resources hold the most potential available for the construction of a politics of literacy within the United States based on the imaginative retrieval of the nation's own political traditions.

"Adult Literacy and the American Political Culture"
<http://www.nald.ca/fulltext/George/AmPolCul/cover.htm> sharply draws out the boundaries in contrasting the postindustrial capital development vision of policy analyst Forrest P. Chisman to that of Paulo Freire's founding text, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Chisman's (1989) influential report, *Jump Start* played a formative role in the passage of the 1991 National Literacy Act and in the shaping of the National Institute for Literacy a year later. Chisman argued that the educational development of the "twenty million plus" who were at the bottom rung of the literacy ladder was crucial to meeting the human resource needs of the nation's increasingly informational sector economy in light of the nation's "rendezvous with [demographic] destiny." His reference was the impending retirement of the baby boomer generation. This was particularly troubling, considering the rise of an increasingly lower educational, diversified workforce, unprepared to meet the challenges of a changing and increasingly sophisticated work environment. Through a relatively modest investment in federal funds and a highly focused federally led

initiative in strengthening the nation's basic skills, Chisman maintained that this problem could be substantially offset.

I critique this argument from a variety of perspectives, particularly over the definition of the learning needs of the "twenty million plus." Nonetheless, *Jump Start* sounded a trumpet that lent considerable clarity to the major adult literacy initiatives of the early 1990s. These, in turn led to the institutional flourishing of a range of resources through which a more complex and diverse legitimization of adult literacy was able to take hold at various federal, regional, and state levels. These consequences notwithstanding, *Jump Start* also played an important role in fortifying a reductionist-tending capital development rationale for federal support of adult literacy that reinforced a return on investment metaphor of accountability, measurable, in principle, through an exacting mathematical calculus. The passage, in 1998, of the Workforce Development Act and the accompanying National Reporting System were a direct outcome of this long-term federal policy orientation.

The review of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* draws out the key points of Freire's text. Among the major factors considered is the essential relationship Freire drew between pedagogy and politics, the "ontological" vocation of the marginalized to create and write their own history, and the radical difference between normative and oppositional perspectives. I also focused upon the dialogical relationship Freire stressed between the goals and knowledge-base of adult literacy learners and adult literacy educators in which both mutually learn and teach. The essay includes a critique based on a perceived contradiction within *Pedagogy* between an embrace of the Marxian concept of "false consciousness," wherein the "oppressed" internalize the colonizing voice of the invader within with a clarion call for dialogue through participation. I also noted that in the United States educational scholars operating out of the school of critical pedagogy highlight Freire's political radicalism, while a more reformist element focusing on the centrality of student participation emphasize Freire's critique of "banking" education and downplay the undeniable radical edge pervasive throughout *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*.

The final section of the essay charts out a Deweyan middle ground defined as literacy as growth and art, the latter drawing on Dewey's (1934/1989) notion of the "consummation" of experience as a form of aesthetic achievement. Building on a "hermeneutics of hope," I argue that this tempered space is the most likely location feasible of establishing an empowering pedagogy "in a profoundly ambivalent, at best reformist, political culture" of the United States. Whether or not any such pedagogy will be achieved in the American landscape in any widespread sense, I draw on a Lincolian imagery to argue that it represents "the last best hope" at least in any near-term future.

"The Postindustrial Future and the Origins of Competency-Based Adult Education in Connecticut: A Critical Perspective" (<http://www.nald.ca/fulltext/George/Post-Ind/cover.htm>) provides a case study of the capital development thesis based on arguments Chisman would make in a national context, several years later. The essay provides a brief history of the development of the concept "functional literacy," then takes a closer look at the highly influential 1975 Adult

Performance Level (APL study), which provided a policy-based rationale for the justification of adult basic education on the progressive mastery of core competencies in the areas of employment, consumer economics, health, government and law, and basic computation. This prelude provides the historical context for a more extended analysis of the Connecticut document (Adult Education Study Committee, 1985), *Looking to the 21st Century: A Strategic Plan for Adult Education*, the purpose of which laid the groundwork for an APL informed focus on competency-based education, particularly the realm of work, for publicly funded adult education programs in the state.

In making its recommendations, the committee, comprised of top representatives of business, government, education, labor, and the non-profit sector, focused both on the external, noting the importance of demographic trends and the increasing role of technology in the workplace, and internal factors, in terms of then current limits on the efficacy of the state's adult education program. Re-tooling was the operative metaphor of the report, both in terms of preparing a largely unprepared workforce for the postindustrial challenges of the near-term future, and in modernizing adult basic education through a workforce competency paradigm that would focus energies along a unified vision. Viewed by its proponents as an enlightened reform vision, the initiative was intended to bring in renewed funding and intellectual energy to transform a diffuse, eclectic, workbook oriented approach to adult basic education that the sponsors of *Looking to the 21st Century* interpreted as antiquated.

Given its compulsory mandate, from my own felt experience as a local manager of a community-based volunteer adult literacy tutoring program, *Looking to the 21st Century* seemed more like what Habermas (1987) referred to as the internal colonization of the lifeworld by the forces of the broader social order of the mass society. The remainder of the essay fleshes out this critique and proposes an alternative pedagogical vision, building on the precepts of the new literacy studies. The counter-vision includes the desirability of constructing a curriculum that draws on the subtleties of collective student experience, as well as the needs, interests, and aspirations of students, discerned in part, by educators working directly with students in a manner premised on dialogue and negotiation.

At risk with the widespread acceptance of the operative assumptions of *Looking to the 21st Century* throughout the adult education sector in Connecticut, was the very possibility of an alternative vision of a more progressive sort, based on precepts that extended beyond the purview of the postindustrial vision, as was envisioned in the report. Such a mediating vision that I had been proposing from my inception into the field, which sought to integrate "practical competency with self knowledge and broadened understanding of culture and society," appeared to me under serious threat once the state began to operationalize a "competency-based" agenda beginning in 1990. It was this apprehension that caused me to look at the roots of the Connecticut Adult Performance Program (CAPP) through the defining document, *Looking to the 21st Century*.

Notwithstanding what I viewed as the sounder pedagogical framework I proposed, what became clear was the capacity of system reproduction as exemplified in

the self-evident assumptions that gave shape to the 1985 report, particularly the linkage of adult basic education with the imperatives of human capital development. It was not merely operational politics at work, but values at the level of political culture that gave the report its overarching legitimacy, yet, which also could be the basis of critique and potential reform. I make the latter statement with some hesitation, not because I do not believe it is not true, but because of the difficulty of the task of working through the invariable gap between theory of even the most “obvious” type and its application in highly normative contexts.

This is particularly the case when the proposed change is that of a reform within the context of a highly intractable political culture and a teasing out of some subtle space in the nexus between political theory and social justice. Still, the argument holds that unless the human capital development and return on investment metaphors are transformed by another vision, such reports as *Looking to the 21st Century* and *Jump Start* are likely to prevail in the political discourse that gives shape to public and policy rationale’s justifying public expenditures in adult basic and literacy education. The alternative proposed here and in articles that this essay references is a call for a public philosophy that builds on more expansive values embedded in the nation’s core political culture as previously discussed.

“Reading Giroux Through a Deweyan Lens: Pushing Utopia to the Outer Edge” (<http://www.nald.ca/fulltext/George/reading/page01.htm>) looks at the other side of the coin through an empathetic, but critical analysis of critical pedagogy as expressed in the educational theory of Freire’s prolific protégée, Henry A. Giroux. The essay builds on several core arguments. The first is that in the reformist political culture of the United States, a Deweyan vision of growth and progressive political and cultural change represents a nearer-term utopian project having some viability of realization than the more transformative radical politics of critical pedagogy. The second is that critical pedagogy offers crucial supplemental insights that could be drawn upon to extend the more apolitical tendencies of Dewey’s thought. The third is that Giroux seeks to move beyond Marxism, without denying the importance of the critique of capitalism to establish a critical pedagogy that places racial and gender discrimination on an equal status to that of class-consciousness. In the process he elevates “resistance theory” to a higher explanatory level than “reproduction theory” wherein agency is viewed as irrelevant against the many structural factors of social and cultural reification.

The essay points to an ambivalence within Giroux’s theory between a radical emancipatory vision and the need to find critical theaters of space within mainstream settings and institutions (namely schools) that challenge the “totalizing” tendencies of normalizing attitudes, behaviors, and thought, without necessarily leading to a profoundly transformative result. Stated in other terms, Giroux is conflicted between the desire, on the one hand, to establish a democratic socialist utopia, and the institution, on the other hand, of significant, but piecemeal change within the framing contexts of everyday settings in which behavior and attitudes of social actors are often marked by considerable ambivalence. The latter places him close to the Deweyan quest to tease out moments of potentiality within the concrete immediacy of the lived experiences of daily life, but

Giroux's oppositional political vision blunts his effort to examine such ambivalent space to the extent that its complexity warrants.

Notwithstanding my critical commentary on Giroux, I argue for the importance of maintaining a vital connection to critical pedagogy as a utopian boundary that breaks into history at certain critical times in pushing change to a more radical edge than would otherwise be likely if a more "realistic" boundary line were drawn. Thus, while Deweyan pragmatism may represent a nearer-term ideal within an American context, Giroux's utopian vision of democracy radicalizes the very ideals that are at least latently implicit within the outer edge of the U.S. political culture. In not giving fuller credence to the more modest reform vision of Dewey's meliorism, Giroux marginalizes the more idealistic elements of what might be characterized as the utopian vision of the American experiment in democracy and self-creation in the pragmatic vein. While the essay maintains a predominant orientation within the pragmatic philosophical tradition, it argues that Giroux's critical pedagogy and Dewey's pragmatic epistemology and social ethic mutually reinforce each other in which a subtle blending could contribute to the development of a sophisticated politics of education in the American Grain.

The essay concludes by raising the prospect that *any* idealistic progressive vision may be problematic within the "realistic" context that gives shape to the politics of education and policy formulations of the contemporary neoliberal/neoconservative climate. By way of compensation, if nothing else, it notes the pragmatic value of such thought, whether in the critical pedagogy or pragmatic mode, as an antidote "against the despair and cynicism of skepticism in the face of the 'hopelessness' of change" (p. 28). While the conclusion does not represent an embrace of the inevitability of such hopelessness, it is meant as an indicator of the problematic nature of any sustained progressive movement of even modest proportions within the contemporary setting and near term future within the United States. Even within this relatively closed socio-political climate utopian thought is valuable in order to prevent "realistic" postures from freezing at premature closed encapsulations and to keep open prospects for a better day within the ongoing horizon of the American experiment.

"Exploring the Middle Ground: Literacy as Growth" (<http://www.nald.ca/fulltext/george/litgrow/cover.htm>) is the most constructive essay in this section in providing an integrative discussion of both pedagogy and the politics of literacy within the context of Dewey's mediating vision. I include it in this section because of the overall framing of the introductory and concluding portions of the essay within the context of a renewed American political culture based on resources grounded in the nation's political foundations. The essay links a neo-pragmatic vision to a postmodern sensibility in the rejection of foundational notions of truth, although in a "reconstructive mode" that takes the American revolutionary-based core political precepts as a hermeneutical point of departure for the reconstruction of a value system upon which a U.S politics of literacy could be constructed in the contemporary setting.

The essay notes the possibility "that there may be no solution to the politics of literacy that mediates justice, equity, and power," given the political and cultural

dynamics of the current climate, where adult literacy is viewed by policy elites, as at best, a highly marginal enterprise. The essay avoids an overly skeptical stance or an embrace of the utopian vision undergirding critical pedagogy. It points, instead, to the viability of pragmatism, grounded in the Progressive Reform tradition of the early 20th Century. This philosophical taproot, rooted in the “American Grain,” is a potentially viable heuristic for establishing a more feasible solution than that which is currently in place.

The open-ended meliorism inherent within the pragmatic outlook is linked to the somewhat generalized objective of many adult literacy students in their quest for inclusion into the main fabric of U.S. social and institutional life rather than radical transformation of the social order. This fluid socio-political context, in turn, contains resources for reform toward greater inclusiveness and democratic polity-formation that builds on the legacy of the Progressive Reform tradition, as, arguably the only feasible context through which a viable politics of literacy is likely to emerge in any wide-scaled sense in the foreseeable future. And even this modest space has many forces working against its realization.

The essay builds, in part, on a reconstructive vision of the “literacy myth,” which, while remaining critical, is more benign than the skepticism and pejorative intent in which this term is referenced by Graff and others. Arguing hermeneutically, the literacy myth serves as symbol in the quest for self-realization and the “better community.” In this function it has the potential of acting as a crucial motivational taproot that supplies some of the optimism and hope needed to endure in a challenging educational endeavor in order to garner at least some of the desired results that may accrue from sustained effort. In the process, it is hoped the motivational dynamic unleashed by the “myth” becomes embedded in actual literacy practices and careers. This pragmatic impetus in turn, can provide important scaffolding for the emergence of more realistic outlooks, while still pushing the edge of potentiality from the actualities that are emerging through the developmental processes of learning and utilizing new knowledge in real-world contexts (Vygotsky, 1978).

None of this dispels the critique of Graff (1979) and others that upward mobility in any significant statistical sense is achieved as a result of increasing the capacity to read and write. This critical observation speaks to a persisting reality that needs to continue to inform the politics of adult literacy. It is, however, to bring out another crucial point; namely that increased literacy aptitude is a contributing factor in what might be broadly defined as life enhancement, which has a range of materialistic, emotional, and social manifestations. What may seem like minor improvement even to an empathetic outsider may be perceived as significant to those who are experiencing such growth in their capacity to acquire new knowledge and utilizing it for the various purposes that they choose. Even such “modest” development can only widely flourish in a political context which values adult literacy education as a source of renewal itself of the body politic. Pragmatism, as a philosophical outlook, when linked to the political, social, and cultural values of the American Progressive tradition is a largely untapped resource that has much to offer toward the construction of a viable politics of literacy in the contemporary era.

Research Theory and Design: Postpositivist Perspectives

In their varying ways, all of the articles highlighted in this bibliographical review address, at least to some extent, the issue of epistemology—how and upon what basis knowledge is constructed. In various direct and indirect ways, all of the articles also address the theory/practice nexus. The middle ground thesis, argued for throughout these articles, is rooted in the quest to make sense of autobiographical experience, pedagogy, and political culture in light of the various tensional points between the “lived experience” of students, tutors, and myself, and prevailing theoretical constructs that gives shape to much of the critical literature in adult education and adult literacy studies. Obviously the construction is mine, which by definition is a partial one. I have attempted to mitigate such contingency by situating “experience” within the context of American pragmatic philosophy through an imaginative fleshing out of Dewey’s quest for the intellectual and aesthetic organization of experience, and “democracy as a way of life.” This is the middle ground that I seek to weave throughout these essays, the same impetus that gives shape to this current section on research theory and design through the intersection of two mediating constructs.

The first seeks to probe into the theoretical assumptions that underlay practitioner-based inquiry, the articulation of which could have value in clarifying focal points of research for practitioners, and, also, in helping to incorporate teacher research as a legitimate subfield of educational research. A fulfillment of these objectives, it is surmised, would expand the canon of what is viewed as academic research in a manner that is simultaneously relevant to university faculty and on-the ground critical practitioners (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993). At the least, the blurring of the genres on the relationship between theory and practice may be a crucial near-term step necessity in any systematic effort to move teacher research, in the words of Cochran-Smith and Lytle, from “the fringe” to the “forefront.” Without such a move, any effort in bringing the practice/theory-research, an exceedingly difficult task in any event nexus into closer proximity can only remain *but* highly problematic.

The second overarching purpose of this section is to establish a mediating framework in postpositivist scientific philosophy between the quest for an ever elusive exactitude in neopositivism, and the specter of relativism undergirding constructivism and postmodernism, at least as viewed from the perspective of a rigorous scientific viewpoint (Phillips & Burbles, 2000; Pawson & Tilley, 1997). The objective is not to establish an overall synthesis and thereby to trump the other perspectives. The center very well may not hold, and the extent to which it does, it is a tenuous accomplishment, which perpetually needs to prove its mettle in the crucible of ongoing work. Nonetheless, the quest for resolution, in this case, an effective problem-focused social science that pushes toward truth as a regulative ideal, has much to offer in the construction of a research agenda on issues of importance to adult literacy research scholars and practitioners. Whether the focus is practitioner-based inquiry or more formal academic research, the postpositivist prism combines the quest for as much exactitude as a particular problem can bear with as much complexity and openness to provisionality as is required for a thorough examination.

This is obviously an ideal, modulated by a fallibilistic scientific method, which if pressed too literally is all-too-susceptible to deconstruction. Yet, without such a prospect, even as a creative fiction (Popper, 1979) there is much less hope of substantially working through paradigmatic culture wars undergirding conflicting research traditions. It is not synthesis that is wanted. It is, rather, a common enough framework to substantially grapple with pressing educational issues of which the demands of practice and theory require at least proximate resolution in the creation of what Dewey refers to as “warranted assertabilities.” Based on this pragmatic premise, what is needed, are modes of research that allows for development and continuity of knowledge, of which postpositivism offers some intriguing prospects, even given the inevitability of unresolved tension that cannot be simply subsumed within its mediating vision.

An example of the type of question relevant both to practitioner-based inquiry and academic research is an exploration of the relationship between learning to read and write to that of knowledge acquisition in various areas of life application, whether at home, work, the marketplace, or a community setting. This type of interface requires wide scope in the identification of the range of areas in which there may be mutual influence. Crucial to such an objective is an awareness of the ways in which the connections between progressive development in reading and writing and increasing competence within a realm of application, in which the variables are multiplicative and recursive, take place. This requires accounting for the plurality of variations of potential response given the wide diversity of students who study in different types of adult literacy programs who participate for a wide array of purposes (Quigley, 1997). The infinite expanse of such ethnographic research needs to be reigned in by careful case study examination, including an assessment of which variables are most salient in the analysis and interpretation of impact, along with a comparative analysis of typologies if the object is to generate knowledge that extends beyond a given case.

To move in this direction requires provisional hypothesis construction supported by the collection and analysis of relevant data in order to assess various theories of literacy and reading development in light of thick and, at least, representational-like on-site experience that well-developed typologies can help to illuminate. In postpositivist research even established theories are but instruments, indispensable, to be sure, in situating investigations within broader research communities toward the objective of continuous knowledge construction even if only as a regulative ideal. Occasionally, reigning paradigms are shattered in the process, even as the more typical findings result in some refinement or modification of a given theoretical construct in which different perspectives will continue to possess much salience in moving a continuous research project forward.

Well-designed practitioner-based inquiry has as much potentially to offer as academic-based research, in which, given the mutual importance of the question under investigation to practitioners and scholars, would be well served by collaborative projects that build substantially on both types of research. The key is not so much the type of

research, but that it is competent, controlled, and rigorous in methodology in a manner that is sufficiently broad to adequately account for the complexity and richness of the problem or the topic under investigation. These values are at the core of postpositivist research theory and design, which have lineage in certain schools of practitioner-based inquiry and academic research.

“Practitioner-Based Inquiry: Theoretical Perspectives” (<http://www.nald.ca/fulltext/George/practitn/cover.htm>) takes as its angle of vision a comparative analysis of two major theories undergirding practitioner-based inquiry. The first is based on Carr and Kemmis’s (1986) widely cited study, *Becoming Critical*. The second is an articulation of Dewey’s concepts of inquiry and growth as a potential resource to ground teacher research projects. Carr and Kemmis build on a combination of Habermas’ theory of the “ideal speech act” and the more politically radical Frankfurt School of critical theory. Dewey operates from a reformist vision undergirding the American pragmatic tradition. His is a melioristic quest for gradual development through successive realizations of ever greater approximations toward the ideal from the vantage point of what seems potential stemming from actual conditions in a given time and place. To move beyond mere inferences or bare hopes, such aspirations have to prove their mettle in the crucible of reconstructive experience through the critical tools of controlled inquiry, democratic politics, and aesthetic achievement. Gradual movement toward the ideal, in Dewey’s language, the “ends-in-view,” is the “moving force” of a research project guided by these assumptions.

Both Carr and Kemmis and Dewey provide scientific-based models for investigating an issue or a problem. Moreover, in their practical intent, Carr and Kemmis veer toward a gradualistic reformist position similar to Dewey’s pragmatism. What I seek to bring out is the importance of the respective authors’ theory framing in giving shape to what sets of problems or issues each school of thought would likely focus on. Notwithstanding their methodological similarity, practitioner-inquiry projects stimulated by *Becoming Critical* are more likely to focus on “ideology critique,” in pointing out the distinctions between an “emancipatory ideal” and the various “distortions” or dissimulations engendered by and in practice. While social through and through, a project inspired by a pragmatic philosophical orientation would tend to identify the ideal in a somewhat different manner, as that which is plausible stemming from an expansion of any given actuality. Thus, research projects illuminated by *Becoming Critical* would tend more toward deconstructing the belief of students or practitioners in “the literacy myth,” whereas a Deweyan research project would seek to flesh out something of the potential resident within it, even if the result were a considerable refinement of its given orientation.

Practically speaking, both sets of authors would “problematize” the literacy myth, and therein would lay considerable similarity. Given the complex practical/theoretical objective resident both in *Becoming Critical* and Dewey’s key texts on inquiry, the difference would be primarily one of emphasis. In short, Carr and Kemmis provide a more compelling ideology critique in their formal embrace of critical theory even as Dewey is far from apolitical, particularly on his key texts on political culture, *The Public*

and its Problems (1927/1944), *Liberalism and Social Action* (1935/2000), and *Freedom and Culture* (1939/1989). In its bias toward Dewey, “Practitioner-Based Inquiry: Theoretical Probing,” emphasizes the importance of the reformist political tradition even in the technical realm of research traditions. That is one key focal point of the essay, while viewing *Becoming Critical* as an important supplement in contributing to a more critically focused pragmatic philosophical tradition, is the other. In this effort, the essay discusses the concepts of Carr and Kemmis’s book and Deweyan pragmatism in considerable depth.

The other overriding point of the essay is the inescapability of theory in practitioner-based inquiry whether it remains implicit or is explicitly articulated. In this respect, the essay argues that a range of theoretical perspectives could be drawn upon in the crafting of teacher research projects, which would have the added benefit of realizing Cochran-Smith and Lytle’s (1993) project of moving this sub-field from the “fringe” to the “forefront” of educational research. Such an impetus would be a double-edged sword that would require critical work in its own right in the determination of a flexible set of canonical standards through which practitioner-based inquiry is defined, including how projects are shaped, what counts as evidence, and the respective roles of participants in the inquiry process. Although not explicitly stated in the essay, the type of work needed to develop practitioner-based inquiry as a highly honed sub-discipline of educational research would require the sustained and collaborative effort of well-informed practitioner-sensitive scholars, whether they are located at the university or the field. There is much reconstructive potential for practitioner-based inquiry of this caliber to make a significant contribution to educational research and practice even as the landmines in working through the issues are many. The grappling with the theoretical applications of teacher research, a largely neglected concern, represents one critical aspect of such work.

The first essay in this section draws extensively on Dewey’s (1922/1958) *Experience and Nature* in highlighting his theory of “growth,” with point of comparison to Carr & Kemmis’s *Becoming Critical*. The second essay, “Dewey’s *Logic* as a Methodological Grounding Point for Practitioner-Based Inquiry” (<http://www.nald.ca/fulltext/search/details.asp?bkid=6460&oid=1>) focuses on teacher research methodology. The specific focal point in this essay is the argument in Cochran-Smith & Lytle’s (1993) *Inside/Outside: Teacher Research and Knowledge* on the importance of “systematic, intentional inquiry” as the methodological underpinning of teacher research. While Cochran-Smith & Lytle do not offer a sharply articulated definition, I refer to Dewey’s (1938/1991) *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry* as providing an extremely cogent example of what this could mean, which I flesh out in considerable detail.

While Dewey is more systematic in his organization of research than perhaps Cochran-Smith & Lytle intend, the underlying thesis of the essay is that if a valid methodology of teacher research can be obtained through Dewey’s *Logic* that would lend considerable credibility to the thesis in *Inside/Outside* on the importance of “systematic, intentional, inquiry” for this emerging genre of educational research. In the essay, I point

to some of the potentialities as well as difficulties in drawing on such a systematic framework for engaging in teacher research as well as the broader challenges of moving teacher research, in the words of Cochran-Smith & Lytle, from the “fringe” to the “forefront” of educational research. As a secondary matter this essay is intended to serve as an example of how other theoretical work can be incorporated into teacher research, which I view as essential if teacher research is going to find its location in the broader field of educational research.

My goal, in short, along with that of Cochran-Smith & Lytle’s, is to integrate practitioner-based inquiry into the realm of formal academic studies, both in order to strengthen its own standards and to provide this emergent sub-discipline with a level of legitimacy and durability that it currently lacks. While there are risks in the effort, particularly the potential colonization of teacher research by the academy, the risk of not moving in this direction is continued marginalization and underdevelopment. With care the risk is worth the effort particularly if practitioner/university boarder crossers are in the forefront in laying out the various frameworks of teacher research and overseeing specific research projects in this field.

“Postpositivist Scientific Philosophy: Mediating Perspectives” (<http://www.nald.ca/fulltext/George/post/cover.htm>) builds on arguments I began to flesh out in the research chapters of my *Conflicting Paradigms in Adult Literacy Education*. In Chapter 9 of that book, “Research Traditions: Problems, Paradigms, Polemics,” I sought to problematize Shavelson and Towne’s (2002) influential study, *Scientific Research in Education* through the utilization of Merten’s (1998) *Research Methods in Education and Psychology*. *Scientific Research in Education* sought to broaden the junior Bush administration’s Department of Education’s definition of science, which identified experimental design as the gold standard of reliability, by extending its interpretation of science while generally staying within its neopositivist assumptions. Mertens took a paradigmatic approach in her identification of three research traditions, which she referred to as the positivist/postpositivist (which I referred to as the neopositivist research tradition, following the nomenclature of Philips & Burbules, 2000), the interpretive/constructivist research tradition, and the emancipatory research tradition. In that chapter, I reviewed four of Shavelson and Towne’s six principles of science in light of the three research traditions identified by Mertens to make the case that the principles lead to different assumptions in each of the articulated paradigms of research.

Mertens was well aware that these schools of thought were typologies, in which, in principle, the categorizations could follow a number of divergent paths. She also acknowledged that these three traditions could not be simply divided into sharply demarcated schools in that there was overlap among them. Consequently, there was nothing in principle, *necessarily* conflicting about them. Nonetheless, she did stress their radically different assumptions in terms of what counts as legitimate methodology, the ways in which knowledge is constructed (epistemology), and even the ways in which the world exists (ontology) in terms of the constitution of objective reality.

My critical objective in that chapter was to flesh this argument out and to link it to my broader paradigmatic discussion of adult literacy education in the book. I also called for a mediating perspective among the traditions and provided in the next chapter an example drawing on Dewey's concept of inquiry-based logic through the example of his philosophy of growth. Building on Philips & Burbules (2000) *Postpositivism and Educational Research* and Pawson & Tilley's (1997) *Realistic Evaluation*, "Postpositivist Scientific Theory" extends this work through an examination of the basic theories of three representative philosophical figures, John Dewey, Karl Popper, and Nicholas Rescher.

What these three philosophers shared was a common critique of the positivist assumption that inductive observation was the surest indication of an objective based science, while simultaneously critiquing various modes of relativism based on the assumption that knowledge was nothing more than a narrative constual shaped by history. In their different ways each of the three scientifically-oriented philosophers accepted the notion of truth as a regulative ideal, which could be approximated through competent modes of inquiry, but never realized since the truth is an ideal to which humans "grope...even though it is beyond our reach" (Popper, 1963/1989, p. 39).

The other common link among these three philosophers was a problem-driven focus of inquiry in which the value of scientific research would be based on the significance of the problem addressed and the mode of analysis established in the search for its progressive resolution. Each of these scientifically oriented philosophers emphasized the importance of theory and hypothesis formation throughout all of the phases of a problem situation along with the corresponding role of relevant data, as determined by the nature of the problem itself. Thus while each sought to move toward objective truth as defined within the context of the identified problem, the concept of objectivity was considerably more fluid and fallibalistic than that based on positivist research assumptions as reflected, in the final analysis in the quest for certainty symbolized by reliance on statistical formulations. Dewey, Popper, and Rescher noted the potential worth of mathematical knowledge, although its relevance was determined by the nature of the problem at hand rather than assumed as an intrinsic value in providing the surest possible knowledge as that which may be discerned, for example, in randomized sampling, the gold standard of the current U.S. Department of Education.

Differences between Dewey, Popper, and Rescher are highlighted, although the main focus of the essay is to illustrate through these representative figures a common postpositivist temper. Dewey focused on what he referred to as the "intellectual organization of experience" in the trajectory from problem identified to problem proximately resolved in the attainment of warranted assertions. On this view, the logic of a particular problem "accrues" in the diligent work of moving from means to ends through the rigor and acumen of the inquiry process.

Popper was less concerned with the means-end continuum leading to problem resolution than in the role of well-reasoned conjectures (hypotheses) that possesses substantial explanatory power, subject to falsifiability in which theory survival requires

the passing of severe tests. Even theories that are ultimately falsified can have value in providing new insights, a position analogous to Dewey's, which then leads toward greater approximations on the way toward the truth, or more precisely, "versimilitude," the phrase Popper preferred, as an ongoing quest, given the indeterminate nature of the social and physical universe and the infinite limitations of human knowledge. Popper also emphasized more than Dewey, objectivity as a regulative ideal, which he referred to as World 3 knowledge in contrast particularly to World 2 knowledge, the subjective knowledge of the knower.

Dewey acknowledged the existence of phenomenon beyond experience, but did not place much weight in exploring its significance since the very act of doing so requires at least some experiential relationship with it. Rather, he emphasized the intimate connection between knowledge and the process of knowing, what some have referred to as a "metaphysics of experience" as opposed to a "metaphysics of existence" (Shook, 2000) as an unswerving grounding point of human epistemology. Notwithstanding these subtle differences, both Popper and Dewey focused on the infinite potentiality of the growth of human knowledge and its pursuit as an unending quest stimulated by an important problem situation.

Sharing strong similarities with Dewey's Hegelian sensibility, Rescher (2001) argued for a coherent theory of truth supported by empirical data in terms of "best fit" resolution of a given problem situation. Taking an epistemological rather than an ontological stance, Rescher defined the purpose of philosophical reasoning as bringing maximum coherence in sync with the data, to bear on any problem-based scientific investigation that aimed to get at the truth even as a regulative ideal. Given an infinite gap between a natural human drive toward coherence and a perpetually open social universe, Rescher argued that if this quest is pressed overly hard, the complexity of the context in which the pursuit of truth is situated, decomposes.

Given Rescher's epistemological objective, this requires trade-offs in terms of which aspects of systematicity to press in a given investigation, whether "comprehensiveness," "absence of internal discord," "functional simplicity," or hierarchical sequencing, to identify a few. What he stressed was best overall fit in which the drive toward coherence is inevitably undermined by the complexities of the problem to be resolved in an open social universe. In the essay I draw on Rescher's vision of a "duly-hedged synthesis" in laying out an idealized research project on adult literacy. The proposed synthesis incorporates technical definitions of literacy, based on learning to read and write, with metaphorical definitions that underlies the "multiliteracies" sensibility of the new literacy studies. The discussion on literacy based on Rescher's concept fleshes out earlier examples drawn upon throughout the essay to link the various philosophical and scientific reflections of Dewey and Popper to contemporary issues in adult literacy education, particularly, on the complex relationship between learning to read and utilizing print-based texts as a means for gaining knowledge and insight about some aspect of the world.

In their various ways, Dewey, Popper, and Rescher, provide much insight into the shaping of postpositivist theory construction and design, which can contribute much to the “third-way” of at least attenuating highly conflictual research traditions. Its efficacy will depend in no small part on the extent to which theorists, researchers, practitioners, and policy makers accept its core assumptions, at least in providing a working consensus in moving research on adult literacy forward in a manner that is both theoretically sound and practically viable. It will also depend on the extent to which a postpositivist temper becomes sufficiently broad to incorporate issues of values and power, and not be constrained by a “piecemeal social engineering” approach to research (Pawson & Tilley, 1997) with a corresponding tendency to rule out fundamental issues of politics and cultural influence. Any such scientific analysis needs to be as methodologically rigorous and exacting as the problem situation allows, even granting the inevitability of multiple realities and the diversity of objectives that characterize the work of a broad stream of researchers and practitioners.

This is not to negate the importance of other research traditions. A postpositivist temper is likely to be more salient with certain types of investigations than others, although its broader sensibility might be fruitfully incorporated within any research project that claims some affiliation with science. It is to argue that as a viable third way, postpositivist theory and design have something substantial to contribute to research in adult literacy in the progressive resolution of the types of problems illustrated in the essay. It is a third way that has yet been given its due.

Concluding Remarks

There is little purpose at this stage in repeating what has been previously stated. The red thread that connects the essays reviewed is the tense and provocative relationship between “lived” experience and theory construction, whether the specific topic is research traditions, autobiographical reflection, the pedagogy of adult literacy education, or political culture. The body of work highlighted in this review may be viewed as an effort in critical phenomenology writ large. In its deconstruction and reconstruction of academic discourse and in its blurring of several genres, this essay and the related articles may also be read as a postmodern text in the pragmatic philosophical vein.

In one way or another, all of this work has a taproot in my own lived experience and at least to some degree in the lived experience of students and tutors that I have drawn upon in my research, sifted, obviously from the vantage-point of my own narrative construction. I have relied upon this experiential fulcrum, in turn, as a grounding point to engage a wide range of scholarship in the realms of education, political culture, science, cultural studies, and social philosophy. In this respect I am seeking to challenge the taken for granted realm of what Jurgen Habermas (1987) refers to as the *lifeworld* out of which practitioners live and work, while also confronting the academy by pushing the logic of postmodern discourse beyond the confines of its university-based enclave.

The extent to which the effort will prove successful will depend at this stage more upon how readers process this text than anything more than I can do behind the screen. I

do have my sets of ideal readers in mind; critical practitioners, adult literacy and adult education researchers, Dewey scholars, and other academically-minded critical practitioners and university-based professors and students willing to engage in interdisciplinary studies in the effort of extending one's reach and contributing to the expansion of new research paradigms. That's the hope, which I expect will attain at least some modest level of success. The concern is that the reach of my ambition to cast a wide net extends well beyond the grasp of any substantial realization given the pervasive intra-disciplinary boundaries that dominate so much of academic discourse, notwithstanding rhetorical bows both to interdisciplinary studies and postmodern deconstructions and reconstructions of traditional scholarly texts. The concern too is that at best this text will only be read by a very select group of practitioners, who operate out of their own canonical assumptions, even as I seek to probe into the phenomenology of practice in my very articulation of theory, following Dewey's lead in what he refers to as the intellectual and aesthetic organization of experience.

Notwithstanding this aspiration, the reality may well be that the proverbial quest to link the realms of practice and those of scholarship may be more of a chimera than a substantial pursuit of contemporary scholarship and critical practice where each works out of the logic of their distinctive spheres. Even this skeptical statement can only be provisional, reflecting the limitations of my own inadequate effort in entering into what I perceive as these dual realms. Perhaps it is also a pessimistic strain of my limited capacity to patiently hope in the light of the many obstacles I have encountered, given the complicatedness of what it is after all, I am seeking to achieve.

This includes, in part, the difficulty of discerning the difference between "reality" narrowly conceived when contrasted to the "conceit" of a utopian vision, which is another form of reality shaping, one that also engages the world on its own terms, but with radically different implications than any anti-utopian impetus. Given the assumption that ideas are invariably embedded in any given reality, the manner in which utopian and anti-utopian ideologies construct the world in their various ways is the fundamental issue at hand. Critical as well is the more specific matter of locating and evaluating the impact of the idealistic strain in the American pragmatic tradition as a potentially viable force in the reconstruction of American cultural and political life toward what can only be arguably identified as "the better."

However realistic or illusionary my project may be, and writing, by its very nature is theoretical to its core (Tuman, 1987), I cast this work into the world and know not what will return. I wait in hope that regardless of any short-term neglect, the effort garners some effective results at least with some significant others and contributes in whatever ways it may to the ongoing development of scholarship and critical practice in realms both near and far to adult literacy education.

Perhaps, too, in the final analysis this overview essay and the underlying objective of my articles as a whole can only be but acts of imagination in the creation of an alternative world than that which currently exists, except right here, within the immediate construct of these collective words, which has the potential of opening up in various

definable and ineffable ways for those who are willing and so motivated to wade through its many labyrinths. Thus it is with the world of text. This bibliographical overview and the articles to which it refers, makes fundamental sense to me as the creator of them in my dual role as a practitioner-based scholar of adult literacy education. Even still, a certain level of self-doubt invariably dogs this text, given the range of topics I am attempting to address and the various discourses I am seeking to work through. That will undoubtedly remain the case unless and until my work, and this essay in particular, gains at least some degree of legitimization from significant other readers, clearly more than a passing nod.

Of what that would require I am uncertain, perhaps but a word from a particular reader whose own words would pierce into the soul of my own imagination. Whatever and whither those sources of legitimization, their emergence, by definition, would be recognizable if they did attain the visibility of some significant public, which any author, who seeks to have his work become visible would desire.

I wait patiently, giving up the ghost of anxious expectation as I do not believe that that dawn of recognition has yet arrived. In the meanwhile, I move on to other endeavors both near and far from adult literacy education, in the continuing effort to work out the complex problems of grappling with various connections as well as the invariable distances between the realm of lived experience and that of academic theory in light of each other—each in their distinctive ways, piercing into slices of reality in their own right in which the twain may at best only occasionally meet. Perhaps the significance of this text, which speaks volumes to me, is not for my ears to hear, notwithstanding the many compulsions that have driven me to write in which to write itself more often than not is at least a partially alienating experience from the demands and passions of practice—or so it seems—to which, nonetheless, I am driven to pursue.

The very drive itself is both the muse and the underlying problem that vexes and inspires me. I write, therefore I am so I sometimes think. Yet, to hold off on writing, even for significant periods of time, including the prospect of forever, if that is what is called for in order to make room for the emergence of a needed self construction, is also an act of faith. Such abstention, to which I am tempted, may be, so I sometimes think, a more profound resonance, a voice to which I have only partially been able to heed, the meaning of which is not precisely clear.

And so it goes.

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