

Motivation and the Adult New Reader:
Becoming Literate at the Bob Steele Reading
Center

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Preface

I originally wrote *Motivation and the Adult New Reader: Becoming Literate at the Bob Steele Reading Center* in 1994. Through the intervening years I have made modest revisions in the text. While maintaining the overall structure of the original essay, this current version is a substantial revision of the initial piece. When I took on the project the program's primary sources were limited to a single book of student essays, one volume of a projected three-volume oral history collection, and an instructional log and collection of brief interviews, which are no longer extant. Since that time, an additional collection of student essays was completed as well as the three-volume oral history collection that Literacy Volunteers of Greater Hartford (LVGH) undertook in collaboration with Trinity College, funded through a Connecticut Humanities Council grant. In addition, my colleagues and I completed a two-volume collection of interviews, titled *Dialogues in Literacy* that specifically focused on the learning history of 19 students. I incorporated data from these sources into this revision. I also freely added sections from my published articles, particularly in Chapters One, Three, Six, and Seven.

In this revision, I focus on four areas. First, I incorporate more extensive case presentation examples of student learning and motivation throughout the study. Second, I include tutor perspectives, particularly in Chapter Seven. Third, I seek to more systematically integrate the work within the educational philosopher John Dewey's concept of "growth" and broader pragmatic theory of knowledge, which has informed my published articles on adult literacy. Fourth, I add a more formal description of methodological issues in the latter sections of Chapter Seven to strengthen the briefer, initial discussion in Chapter One. Stemming from my academic training in the discipline of history, I tend to focus on the content of a study rather than give special attention to methodology. This is premised on the assumption that solid evidence, which speaks for itself, is required in order to make a convincing case. From this perspective, a work should be evaluated on its overall coherence, which includes the validity of the data upon which it is based. While I continue to adhere to this premise, given the importance of methodology in current discussions of educational research, I felt a formal discussion of this topic was warranted.

I am pleased to acknowledge the support of many people, particularly the students and volunteer tutors of the Bob Steele Reading Center, with whom I worked, from 1987-1996. Without their participation the program could not have developed and this study could never have been written. I would especially like to acknowledge the following people for their exceptional contribution to the Center and to the broader work of LVGH: Ingrid Arroyo, Jane Brosnan, Tom Eysmans, Jennifer Fiske, Patricia Franklin, Teri Fuller, Allison Gruner, Doris Anne Hauptman, Cheryl Johnson, Patrick Ladd, Sheila Lehman, Derrick Matthews, Allison Parks, Judy Pronsky, Maureen Swift, Brenda Rogeven, , Suzanne Shaw, Sharon Smith.

Special thanks to Susan Roman, LVGH Executive Director, who has done so much to sustain the agency over the past decade and to Steve Bender, whose pioneering work in developing the agency's community-based program dovetailed with the Reading Center

project. I owe much gratitude also to current Reading Center Manager Barbara Oles, who has worked so diligently to carry on and to greatly extend the work.

This study is dedicated to the memory of Bob Steele, Hartford's pre-eminent radio personality, for whom the program was named after, and Martha Fazzano, a tutor pioneer at the Bob Steele Reading Center and President of the LVGH Board of Directors for many years.

Portions of "Exploring the Middle Ground: Literacy as Growth," *Adult Basic Education*, 12 (2002) appear in Chapter One and in the Epilogue. Chapter Three and Six contain material from "Motivation and the Adult New Reader: Student Profiles in a Deweyan Vein," *Adult Basic Education*, 11 (2002). Chapter Seven includes a section from "A Scaffolding Paradigm: Small Group Tutoring at the Bob Steele Reading Center," *Adult Basic Education*, 9 (1999).

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East Hartford, Connecticut
December 1, 2002

Contents

Preface	i
Chapter One	2
Chapter Two	15
Chapter Three	23
Chapter Four	55
Chapter Five	76
Chapter Six	87
Chapter Seven	111
Epilogue	165
References	173

Motivation and the Adult New Reader: Becoming Literate at the Bob Steele Reading Center, 1987-1996

1953: I started to hate teachers. I was mentally and physically abused and lost all respect for them.

1990: I have grown to appreciate teachers. They've opened my eyes to a new and better world. Today I can start dreaming. I realize that I can find the paths to make my dreams come true. Now I can see the positive actions of hundreds of people from the American Literacy Volunteers whose devotion and patience has helped illiterate people like me. I know the effort my tutor puts in for me is time consuming. Also the gifts of friendship holds a special place in my heart. I feel like I've been blind up 'til now. I would like to personally acknowledge Pat as a special person and excellent teacher. Without him there would be no need for this letter because I could not write or read it. He also helps me help friends to learn to read and write. I believe that all good deeds are rewarded. I also know that Pat will be rewarded someday for the good deeds he's done for me.

Patrick Lizotte, former student at the Bob Steele Reading Center.

I see that even for myself, reading and writing, that's all I wanted, but come to find out, it was more than that I wanted because it opened up a lot of doors. When you keep on feeding the brain with new ideas, knowledge about reading and writing and other learning skills, other doors are opened up.

Derrick Matthews, student at the Bob Steele Reading Center.

If anything it's brightened up my life knowing that I come off better than I was. I learned more than I knowed when I first started coming. So it has inspired me. I felt down when I first started coming. So it has inspired me. I felt down when I first started coming, but now I don't. I feel good about it, about myself, since I'm doing it. And now, 'specially since I know I can read much better than I could, and write better than I could. I couldn't even think about writing a letter then; couldn't do that. So I just say it's been a big improvement; my head's coming up.

A former student at the Bob Steele Reading Center

Chapter One

Theoretical Assumptions

Literacy, Motivation, Pragmatism, and the Politics of Reform

This study seeks to identify sources of motivation in adult literacy learning through a case-presentation analysis of the program the author directed from 1987-1996: the Bob Steele Reading Center in Hartford, Connecticut. The program was a centralized, staff supervised site within Literacy Volunteers of Greater Hartford (LVGH). It was founded in 1986 as a pilot project, as a contrast to the prevailing Literacy Volunteers of America (LVA) model where an individual student and tutor “match” meet in isolation from the community of learners and program staff, often in public places like the local library, community centers, or churches. The Center worked with about 100 students on a regular basis in English as a Second Language (ESL) and Basic Literacy (BL). In its nine-year history under my management, the program had developed an extensive small-group tutoring program. It had compiled several student-writing anthologies (Smith, 1991; Demetron, 1995, and Demetron and Lestz, 1995) and books of student learning interviews (Demetron and Gruner. 1995; Johnson, Bender, and Demetron, 1996). The program also completed a Connecticut Humanities Council funded oral history project that consisted of the life stories of 16 Basic Literacy students (Smith, Ball, Demetron and Michelson, 1993; Lestz, Demetron and Smith, 1994). Other work included pilot projects in portfolio construction (Taylor, 1992; Constantine, 1991) and a counseling and referral service through a college internship (Arrojo, 1993), though neither of these projects became institutionalized. The program was also a site for qualitative research resulting in a series of published and unpublished essays (Demetron, 1993, 1997a, 1997b, 1998, 1999a, 199b, 2001b,

and 2000). This study is a historical reflection that focuses on students who participated in the Basic Literacy program from 1990-1996.

Work on adult literacy motivation is scant. Quigley (1990a) stresses the negative issue of “resistance,” while Ziegahn (1992) studies the motivation of adult new readers who do not participate in regular literacy programs. In a more recent study, Quigley (1997) discusses the importance of overcoming “dispositional barriers” and the appropriateness of matching learners to particular curricular foci. Although she does not discuss motivation directly, Lytle (1991, p. 121) identifies beliefs as “the core or critical dimension in [the]...movement toward enhanced literacy,” which may even serve as “a primary source or anchor for other dimensions of growth.” Fingeret and Jurmo (1990) link motivation to a participatory pedagogical framework, while whole language advocates like Smith (1979, 1988) stress the importance of “meaning-making” in becoming literate. Advocates of radical, critical literacy, meanwhile, link the motivation to read the word with the ability to transform the world (Freire, 1970, 1985).

In a more empirically based study than those above, Beder and Valentine (1990) tackled the issue of motivation directly through a “62 item scale to measure motivations...based on in-depth interviews of [12] learners” (p. 78) in Adult Basic Education (ABE) programs throughout Iowa. Through complex factor analysis the authors identified ten dimensions of motivation:

(a) self-improvement, (b) family responsibilities, (c) diversion, (d) literacy development, (e) community/church involvement, (f) job advancement, (g) launching, (h) economic need, (i) educational advancement and (j) urging of others (p. 78).

These “factors” were based on surveys of 3090 ABE learners in 255 classes throughout the state (p. 82).

Beder and Valentine’s impressive survey makes a significant contribution in identifying sources of motivation among those who participate in “mainstream” ABE programs. They

conclude that “motivation is multidimensional and goes well beyond the desire to improve basic skills” (p. 93). My study concurs with much of their general findings.

Beder and Valentine’s methodology examines motivation extensively across programs, but does not shed much light on how motivation is *experienced* by new adult readers. This study, which is grounded in a phenomenological methodology of case-presentation description and analysis, attempts to accomplish that. Through a collage effect, it orders expressed and observed learner experience and other relevant data in particular ways which, while invariably reflecting something of the world view of the writer, depicts certain, often hard-to-identify aspects of adult literacy learner motivation in one particular program.

In this respect, the study shares important similarities with the research of Fingeret and Danin (1991) that focus on literacy learners from Literacy Volunteers of New York City (LVNYC). In important respects their conclusions are similar to mine. Like this study, they point to both “changes and limits to change,” and the ineradicably situational (p. ii), or what I refer to as the idiosyncratic dimensions of adult literacy learning. Like this study and others cited, Fingeret and Danin identify an overwhelming desire among learners to embrace “mainstream” social and cultural values in ways that authenticate their own identity. Within such an orienting framework, they demonstrate the many complex and nuanced ways wherein enhanced literacy enriches both the personal and communal lives of new readers at work, at home, in the neighborhood, within the literacy program, and within the interiorized sphere of the self.

This study concurs and seeks space largely within the given political culture for an evolutionary project of growth through education. Its intellectual premises are based on the American pragmatic and neo-pragmatic intellectual tradition, drawing extensively on John

Dewey's theory of education. The emphasis on growth and the *enhancement* of experience through education, key Deweyan (1916) themes, are pervasive throughout this essay. In Dewey's terminology:

[Growth] is essentially the ability to learn from experience; the power to retain from one experience something which is of avail in coping with the difficulties of a later situation. This means power to modify actions on the basis of the results of prior experiences, the power to *develop dispositions* (original italics) (p. 44).

My embracing of pragmatism sometimes seems illusionary to me, although more fundamentally, it serves as a grounding article of faith that this tradition speaks most compellingly however faintly at times, to both the opportunities and constraints inherent within the political culture of the United States. In this respect, it takes issue with the radical, emancipatory camp (Freire, 1970,1985) which might interpret the role of literacy among learners identified by Fingeret and Danin (1991) and myself as a form of "co-optation," or "false consciousness," where through education, marginalized populations internalize dominant social values that often act against their "authentic" needs and interests. It also takes issue with what I refer to in this study as the human capital paradigm (Chisman, 1989, 1990), grounded in a technocratic persuasion that links purposeful literacy development with certain "needs" for citizens and employees to "function proficiently in society" as defined by policy elites.

Instead, as I argue elsewhere, "much space remains [open] for a middle ground between a reification of the status quo through functional literacy and the utopian illusion of the 'pedagogy of the oppressed'" (Demetrian, 1993, pp. 30-31). That space is the American reform tradition, which requires perpetual reconstruction in light of new experience, which nonetheless sets out the broad contours that mediate the relationship between change and continuity in a social culture that contains significant progressive and conservative forces. As new left scholars have pointed out so well, historically, evolutionary gradualism has thus far failed in coming even close

to realizing its inclusive, egalitarian vision; its movement to what Dewey refers to as “the Great Community.” This critique of the mainstream is vital to the political culture of the nation and as *theory* is compelling in many respects.

Yet, it too, is a historically failed tradition on having any profound impact on society, notwithstanding its energies in informing such movements as feminism, Afrocentricism, the labor movement, and engendering a greater respect for pluralism and equality in the public square (Diggins, 1992). Any “emancipatory” ideology that has had sustained impact on the American political culture, however, has had to come to terms with the reform tradition and has exercised little choice but to compromise its radical edge in order to enjoy sustained social influence. The issue for the nation is the extent to which such political pragmatism can lead to enhanced existence for as many people as possible. At stake is the extent to which people who think about these issues can work within the system, both within the “mainstream” and around its edges for meaningful reform even while exercising a critical perspective, or whether the only credible response is, at least for literacy, what Giroux rhetorically refers to as *A Pedagogy for the Opposition* (1983; Demetrian, 2001a).

This study does not provide an answer to this dilemma, for it is enmeshed within the struggle for meaning and direction in search of a viable pedagogy for our times. Nonetheless, it perceives within the American pragmatic tradition some potentiality that resonates more compellingly than either structural-functionalism or various strands of radical opposition, with both the constraints and opportunities inherent within the political culture of the United States at the end of the twentieth century. The pragmatic project could fail. Many would argue that this is likely to be the case. This remains, however, an open issue that can only be worked out historically. Perhaps that is why it requires at this time at least as much of a hearing as social

theories based on various European ideologies that have exerted such a profound impact on the intellectual and social history of the United States in this century. This study is one attempt to bring the pragmatic heritage to bear on adult literacy education through an extensive exploration of one local program.

Overview

This study takes a “life-cycle” perspective in exploring motivation throughout the “stages” of the literacy learning process at the Bob Steele Reading Center. This represents an imaginative assemblage that utilizes a collage effect in the effort to present a compelling story by arranging the student narratives through the artifice of the literary construct that I create. It is designed as a thought experiment for the purpose of stimulating critical reflection on the many sources of student motivation in the area of adult literacy education. Beyond that, it is an effort to achieve what Rescher (2001) refers to as coherence theory of truth, “searching for that resolution, for which, on balance, the strongest overall case can be made out” (p. 143). For Rescher, coherence involves more than an aesthetic sensibility, though it does involve that. Rather, it is a search for “best-fit considerations, without any foundation of certainty” (p. 173), a quest for attunement among all the available variables, which as he puts it, is *consistent with the data*” (original italics) (p. 170). It is this sense of coherence in conformity with the data that I seek to convey through a collage effect in describing the motivational cycle of adult literacy learning as an ideal construct from points of program entry to the progressive fulfillment of emergent, implicit goals and aspirations.

Through brief case presentations, the essay first focuses on student entry points by examining the importance of socio-emotional climate in the making and sustaining of commitment to the program. While the general observation that a supportive climate facilitates

commitment may appear self-evident, it underscores the importance of relationship building between students and instructors as a bedrock that stabilizes and sustains it. The study also points out the limitations of the Reading Center program as a centralized site to meet the needs of certain students who, in some cases, might be better served in neighborhood centers, which LVGH has addressed through the pioneering work of Outreach Manager Steve Bender.

The study then examines the process of becoming literate through four extensive case-presentations that explore literacy development historically over a one or more year period. This section confirms the importance of socio-emotional support, but explores more closely the different ways people have learned and the diverse issues learners have worked through in the process of becoming literate. Through these case presentations, I examine the relationship between whole language approaches to reading and basic skill development. I also look at the unique situation of each learner and the critical role of each student's peculiar circumstances in the stimulation of the learning process, consequently, the subjective nature of self-defined success and goal identification. Such factors make problematical the relevance of standardized assessment "instruments" in evaluating individual growth and program effectiveness. The case presentations also provide insight on the Bob Steele Reading Center as a literacy-learning environment.

In order to evaluate literacy across the learning "life-cycle," I draw on a wide range of site-based qualitative data. These include an instructional log, student writing, and student interviews. Each type of evidence discloses different dimensions of motivation. The log provides an assessment on the breadth of topics students worked on. Student essays provide more of a qualitative description on the value of particular content areas, although much of the evidence drawn from this source remains impressionistic, requiring "thick" interpretation. The

interviews provide insight on the ways students made connections between different types of literacy and often, provide direct evidence on the relationship between motivation and content for particular students. Cumulatively, the evidence provides a comprehensive profile on both the breadth and depth of the content of literacy instruction that has engaged students at the Bob Steele Reading Center during the period of this study.

In the typology of my “stage development” thesis, content serves as an intermediate link between process and goals. Such divisions are necessarily artificial, as process, content, outcomes, and goals are complexly intertwined in unique ways for particular learners. While it is difficult to directly assess the importance of content, it provides clues about motivation that are often inferential, but nonetheless expand our understanding even while leaving many questions unanswered.

Moving “forward” through the stages of motivation, I then explore student outcomes by identifying some of the visible benefits of adult literacy education. The evidence is drawn from several sources of standardized and narrative documentation, namely test scores, “life-skill” achievement lists, interviews, and oral history narratives. I define outcomes as specific accomplishments such as reading a roadmap, that in some way can be linked to increased literacy. The inclusion of test scores may be viewed as nebulous, in part, for what they actually disclose; an abstract sense of quantitative development, unrelated to the concrete ways literacy is actually utilized in specific situations (Tierney, Carter and Desai, 1991, pp. 21-34). Still, they are included here as one type of outcome both as a manifestation of reading gains and for their symbolic potency in signaling to students that they have made progress as a result of their efforts.

Life-skill achievements provide more information on outcomes attained by specific students. We expanded LVGH's original achievement list such as getting a driver's license or obtaining a library card, to reflect more of the social process of becoming literate such as participating in one or more small groups while continuing with one-to-one tutoring. Since 1990, LVA has embraced an integrative view of literacy as a complex socio-linguistic phenomena, whereby social and emotional experiences of learners is intimately linked with literacy learning (Cheatham and Lawson, 1990; Cheatham, Colvin and Laminack, 1993). LVA's collaborative, whole language, process-oriented pedagogy was embedded in the Reading Center program during my tenure.

Thus, participating in more than one group is viewed as a valuable precondition, for example, in obtaining a driver's license. Both were codified on the achievement list as outcomes, reflecting the influence of peer influence as well as "pure" instruction on the grounds that effective literacy development requires a connection between them. Yet, a codified list, even one that makes room for process, identifies what is significant from the perspective of the program managers. However much they resonate with the motivational drives of the learners, they provide no direct evidence on their significance for particular students. Much more than test scores, however, they point toward concrete outcomes, which combined with other evidence, can provide a useful angle in better understanding the sources of motivation among the Basic Literacy Learners at the Bob Steele Reading Center.

The ethnographic documentation taken from the student interviews and oral history narratives illuminate the relationship between outcomes and motivation from the perspectives of the students. The short interviews point to specific outcomes, but provide little scope for

students to elaborate on their significance. The oral history narratives illuminate those in more vivid ways.

Goal identification represents the most elusive “stage” in the development of motivation among the learners at the Bob Steele Reading Center. I make a distinction between explicit goals which differ from outcomes primarily in degree, and implicit goals or aspirations, which at their more profound spectrum, link literacy development with core values of being and becoming that call people further into life through the on-going construction of their personal and social identities. Students have attained certain explicit goals through their literacy development at the Reading Center. These more implicit aspirations represent perpetual drives that continuously prod learners on. The satisfaction is not only in their attainment but also in their role as a stimulus in the continuous calling forth of enhanced being. It is the energy released in the process of working toward their attainment, whether realized or not, which often serves as a powerful source of motivation. Dewey (1916) refers to this as “[t]he inclination to learn from life itself and to make the condition of life such that all will learn in the process of living” (p. 51). This, too, is what Dewey means by growth, which is the most elusive aspect of the adult literacy experience to describe that may be nurtured or negated by particular programs. Such released energy, perhaps, represents one of the most fundamental sources of adult literacy motivation.

Drawing on Raymond J. Wlodowski’s (1985) “time continuum theory” of adult motivation as a heuristic, the study moves beyond the case presentation material to explore a broad array of factors that influence the learning climate of the Bob Steele Reading Center. This heuristic reinforces and makes more explicit many of the insights into adult literacy learning gleaned through the earlier material.

The epilogue assesses the tension between Dewey's concept of "growth" as a compelling "inner" source of the program's vitality in juxtaposition to some of the more deterministic socio-cultural forces impinging on its "external" environment. It does not presume to resolve this tension, but concludes with a hope that there is sufficient resident power within philosophical pragmatism, and specifically, within Dewey's concept of growth, against the onslaught of deterministic forces to keep "the open quest for becoming" ajar.

Teacher Research: An Insider's View

This study is an exercise in what Cochran-Smith and Lytle refer to as "teacher research" (1993). It reflects an insider's perspective that is not easily accessible to the "outside observer, even if that observer assumes an ethnographic stance and spends considerable time in the classroom" (p. 18). In this highly personal interpretation of the program I directed for over eight years, there is apprehension that the effort may be biased. That the study only discloses certain aspects of the learning experience at the Bob Steele Reading Center is readily acknowledged as is the recognition that other observers, detached or participatory, might offer quite different interpretations on the Center's learning climate. On the other hand, as a reflection on a program in which I had been so personally invested, this study moves in specific directions that the interested outsider, however well informed, might not consider. If the gap between practice and research is ever to be mitigated, it is essential that practitioners engage in in-depth research on their practice, which then can be subject to the critical evaluation of others. In more recent times, the participatory-observer paradigm, reflecting an ethnographic research tradition, has often placed university-based scholars in local settings, developing their insights and gathering information in close attunement to the perspectives of participants who inhabit the scene (Cochran-Smith and Lytle, 1993, pp. 5-7).

As Cochran-Smith and Lytle point out, such projects are usually initiated at the universities, read by scholars, and raise issues primarily of interest to the academy. By contrast, in teacher research, issues emerge from the field in the desire to comprehend or resolve some perplexity inherent within practice (p. 12). In this respect its operative assumptions share a close affinity to that of pragmatic epistemology in which problems emerge from lived experience and serve as the basis for a process of inquiry in the quest for their resolution among participants themselves. Dewey's (1925) logic is based on the assumption "that common experience is capable of developing within itself methods which will secure directions for itself and will create inherent standards of judgment and value" (p. 38). This requires critical attunement among participants, themselves, to the various factors that give shape to the progressive resolution of a problem, toward the goal of more realizing desirable ends.

Teacher researchers sometimes draw on a wide range of scholarship, but integrate it eclectically, seeking first to comprehend lived experience in a classroom or program setting as the baseline for the working toward the more desirable. For example, this study stemmed from a felt anxiety that humanistic approaches to adult literacy are endangered in programs and agencies wherein social and cultural milieus are shaped by a pervasive "postindustrial" ethos. Within such frameworks, policymakers and administrators link literacy development primarily with the revitalization of the "information" sector of the economy and the attainment of basic entry positions among those who will serve at its lower rungs (Chisman, 1989, 1990). The tendency of such reductionism has been particularly pervasive within the adult education system in Connecticut with the introduction of competency-based education since 1990 (Alamprese, 1988; Demetrion, 1999b). It is not the intent of this study to deny the importance of economic motivation in an adult literacy curriculum. Its objective to demonstrate that adult literacy

learners have the capacity and desire to undertake comprehensive approaches to learning in practical, personal, and socio-cultural realms that resonate with a wide diversity of needs, interests, and aspirations in a multiplicity of contexts. In discussing both the process of learning as well outcomes, goals, and aspirations, I seek to illustrate something of the rich complexity of adult literacy education that builds on and seeks to contribute to other local studies as well being informed by and informing the broader scholarship of this emerging field. My hope is that this work will be of interest and value to practitioners, literacy and educational scholars, those influential in the policy arena, and potentially a broader educated lay public, who might appreciate the studied reflections of a practitioner-researcher who had been engaged in a single program for a lengthy period of time.

Notwithstanding my inevitable biases, this essay is far from “merely” a subjective foray of my own experiences and observations. Rather, it represents a “systematic and intentional inquiry” that Cochran-Smith and Lytle view as critical for the emerging field of teacher research (p. 18). This is accomplished not only through “multiple data sources” (p. 18), but also in the structured approach to motivation through the various described “stages” of becoming literate, though the argument is more imaginistic rather than “rigorous” in the scientific sense. There may be something finally elusive about the study, though I maintain that such a quality is inherent in the experience itself of adult literacy education, and certainly reflected in the history of the Bob Steele Reading Center. This study seeks to disclose something of that elusiveness, along with articulating many of the concrete and complex dimensions of adult literacy learning, sifted through the lenses of one reflective practitioner (Schon, 1983).

Chapter Two

Socio-Emotional Influences

Adult literacy learning is an integrated process whereby mind and emotion come together, mediated by social support networks and collaborative learning environments. It is not merely cognitive development as an isolated phenomenon, but the need for enhanced self-esteem, which provides the ground for an expanding self-perception that enables literacy learning to take place (Fingeret and Drennon, 1997). According to a noted social psychologist, a felt sense of “efficacy” is a core component of human motivation (Bandura, 1977). However imperfectly, The Bob Steele Reading Center provided such support for many students even while it failed with others. The following case studies illuminate the importance of socio-emotional support for literacy development.

Willie

Consider Willie, who was, when he entered the program, a sixty year-old forklift driver, born and raised in Georgia. Early in 1990, his wife brought him to the Center for an intake interview. Initially Willie was reluctant to participate in the program. It seemed evident to me that one of his basic concerns was whether his personality would be enhanced or diminished in attempting to undertake the intrepid journey toward literacy. The emotional climate that he would perceive at the Center, therefore, would determine his participation. During the intake, I had a relaxed, informal conversation with him. I also enlisted the aid of one of our experienced students to let Willie know about the program. (Sometime later, Willie played a similar role in initiating another nervous student). That increased his confidence.

It quickly became evident that Willie could read next to nothing, so I shortened the standardized testing procedure in order to forestall any sense of failure. Instead, I took an oral

history narration from the New Reader's Press collection, *Remembering* (1990). The story we chose told of an old Italian grandmother who had nine children and worked very hard. It was a paragraph in length and I took an assisted reading approach. Initially, I read the story, pointing to the words as Willie watched. On successive readings, Willie increasingly read more of the text so that by the end of our session he read the entire passage independently. That led to a felt sense of success. The passage provoked a conversation about Willie's childhood enabling him to consider the text empathetically in light of his own experience; thereby, reading for meaning was also established that evening. As a result of that favorable experience, Willie became convinced that the program was appropriate for him and decided to join what Frank Smith refers to as the "literacy club" (1988). He participated on a regular basis in the program with two individual tutors until he retired from his job some two years later.

Pat

Pat, a French Canadian from New Brunswick, illiterate both in his native French and English, was a forty-three year old construction worker who also nervously came to the Center with his wife. He had an unsatisfactory elementary schooling experience in Canada that contributed to the diminishment of his self-concept. As Pat put it:

I got to third grade and asked my teacher to help me learn my syllables and she told me I should have learned them in the 1st grade. She never showed me. Because I was poor, I was put aside in school. The only thing I learned in school was how to fight and defend myself from the principal's straps and rulers (Smith, 1991, p. 154).

Like Willie, Pat did not want to be pushed, but needed to find his own way into literacy in a manner that authenticated his sense of self.

Initially, I worked with Pat since no tutor was immediately available. I used an assisted reading approach and identified particular words that persistently stumped him, emphasizing either a phonetic or sight word memorization approach depending on what best facilitated Pat's

learning process in a given instructional situation. We also talked a lot and had fun. I have come across the term “warm fuzzies” typically used in a derogatory way to describe the LVA tutoring experience, particularly when “hard” data about observable and “measurable” results have been difficult to ascertain. While at times such “hand-holding” may prove excessive, the underlying need is the centrality of relationship building for effective adult literacy learning. The student-tutor relationship is expressed in a variety of ways, but for the vast majority of students and for many tutors, an emotional bond linking the process of becoming literate with personal self-regard represents the bedrock for stabilizing the match to enable learning to take place.

This was clearly evident with Pat. I obtained a tutor for him, but their personalities clashed and Pat stopped coming. In this particular case, the tutor was nervous and overly serious. There was little personal interaction, and the tutor attempted to keep Pat to the tutor’s agenda. From Pat’s point of view, this resembled his childhood schooling experience where he perpetually failed and was punished. Pat began to lose confidence in his learning aptitude. In an interview, Pat commented on the importance of support a tutor should provide for students to help enable them to exhibit the level of self-confidence they need to persist with their efforts at learning to read. As Pat described it, “[e]ven if we have a bad session,” it is important that the tutor give encouragement. Such encouragement “is number one.” This is “so we don’t feel like we’re nothing.”

I called Pat and encouraged him to return to the program by agreeing to serve as his tutor until an *appropriate* person could be found. Several months later we found that tutor, whose combination of personality and aptitude made this an ideal match. The success of the match had less to do with the teaching experience of Pat’s recently college graduated tutor, Patrick Ladd, than his basic openness to relationship building and the learning process. On occasion, the new

tutor fumbled in his attempt to figure out an effective instructional program, but for his student, it did not really matter because the bedrock of trust and commitment became firmly established through their relationship. This allowed Pat to learn at his own pace and comfort level, which increased his confidence and reinforced his motivation.

Pat remained in the program for three years, until he moved to Florida in 1994. He had increased his reading level in terms of objective scoring and used his newly developed reading skills in various practical ways. His self-confidence soared. He achieved psychological distance from a negative childhood experience, where he often thought of himself as “nobody.” He gained the capacity to reflect critically and with sensitivity on his past (Smith et. al., 1993, pp. 142-151; Lestz, Demetrion and Smith, 1994, vol. I, pp. 77-94). He completed an oral history narrative at the Reading Center of which he was extremely proud. He spoke at fund raising functions and tutor training workshops even though he was not typically comfortable speaking in public. That was so because he spoke from the heart and exhibited a profoundly natural eloquence, which helped him to reconstruct a negative self-image of being “a nobody.”

Pat also accomplished something else extremely noteworthy. He had a friend, a non-reader, who did not want to come to the Center. So Pat used what he learned in his own tutoring sessions and began to tutor his friend on his own. I am unsure how technically proficient were those tutoring sessions, but at the least Pat established the emotional connection which enabled his friend to begin the courageous trek toward literacy.

In a three-year period, Pat showed modest, but more than negligible gains on standardized test scores. His interview and oral history provide some information on the value of such learning in practical applications and in the building of his self-concept. What is of importance also, is the cultural and social milieu that gave shape to the learning environment:

the role of The Bob Steele Reading Center in providing emotional support. More was involved than giving “warm fuzzies.” Rather, it was the centrality of personhood and the inviolability of relationship building that served as among the most compelling of cornerstones which facilitated long-term adult literacy development at the Center. Learning to read in adulthood typically requires emotional and social support from others. Trust and friendship play a central in the process of learning how to read. The Bob Steele Reading Center fostered a supportive socio-emotional climate that enabled learners like Pat and Willie to take on the courageous journey toward literacy. Yet, as the following case demonstrates, the Center’s environment was not conducive to the needs of all potential literacy learners.

Sandra

Once Willie and Pat began their work at the Center in earnest, their motivational drives were firmly set. The same cannot be said for Sandra, whose commitment remained more tenuous over a several year on off again process. Whereas Willie and Pat, one African-American, the other Caucasian, enjoyed middle class social status while employed in blue-collar work, Sandra had been a life-long resident of the inner-city, who lived in one of Hartford’s south end housing projects and was on welfare.

Initially, Sandra joined the Center in 1988 at its Moylan School location in the south end of Hartford. She was pregnant at the time and had to walk over a mile to attend the evening program. Attendance was sporadic and her middle-class male tutor decided that the match should be terminated. I agreed as well since we could not resolve the transportation problem. Neither did I have much influence on the tutor’s decision to terminate the match. Sandra returned to our program in 1990 and had made arrangements for her new tutor to pick her up at home. On several occasions Sandra was not home at the pre-arranged time. That infuriated the

young white female suburban tutor who had no particular affinity for the environment of the housing project. The tutor terminated the match, and we had no immediate way of providing Sandra with other support.

Several months later, Sandra wanted to re-enter the program. We had limited options. I had no resources to resolve her transportation problem. I was sensitive that our program was not particularly well equipped to meet her needs that might have been better met at a neighborhood literacy center in the environs of the housing project, which, however, did not exist. I explained to Sandra that we could only offer her tutoring at the Center relocated at its then new headquarters on Arbor Street, in which she would have to make arrangements for her own transportation through the city bus system. I was able to provide her with an individual tutor and space in our small-group tutoring program, which she initially attended. I also encouraged her to take more responsibility for her learning and in exchange, the program would support her efforts. Rather than lecture Sandra, I engaged her in a realistic conversation about the strengths and limitations of our program and the importance of self-ownership in assuming responsibility for her own education.

We assigned Sandra to Bill, a retiree who worked with many students throughout the city. The relationship between Bill and Sandra was respectful, and clearly “on-task.” Bill acted very much the “teacher” while Sandra played the role of the “student.” This proved reasonably effective because it provided what each wanted and expected; essentially, a reconstruction of a traditional school-based model of education on more personalized terms. Such a framework contained drawbacks, particularly in fostering a strong sense of participatory learning, but it enabled the tutoring to proceed. Although far from ideal, both Sandra and Bill attained a sense of progress, however limited. However at times, misguided, Sandra also internalized a sense of

obligation to Bill. One time the match almost ended because Sandra was unable to carry out a homework assignment. She stopped attending because, as she put it, she did not want to face Bill “empty-handed.” I discussed the situation with Bill and he agreed to continue.

Sandra entered the program as an almost total non-reader and after a year’s work with Bill had achieved only minimal progress, which they both viewed as significant. Whether or not some twelve years later, Sandra ever attained enough reading fluency to achieve her career dream of moving off welfare by attaining an entry-level office position that she desired, is unknown to me. She had a long way to go and many roadblocks to overcome. At the least, she attained some reading proficiency and had the capacity to learn more. At the end of her year of study, she began to assume greater self-responsibility, applied reading at least minimally in daily life situations, and laid the groundwork in her own experience to support her children with their schooling. Moreover, like Pat, she also brought a friend to the Center and therefore helped to extend the learning network to others.

According to Brian Street, what makes literacy salient is not its “autonomous” quality (1984), but the contexts in which the entire process of emerging literacy interfaces with the “lived experience” of learners within a range of intersecting personal and social forces. From this point of view there was an impact: enhanced self-esteem, increased social responsibility, parenting socialization enhancement, and a collaborative relationship with her peers which may have had some positive sustainable impact on Sandra’s life. As with all of us, Sandra’s story is not complete. What she did not accomplish in the early 1990s may or may not be accessible to her now or at some other time. Moreover, it is far from always possible to discern how various factors interact with one another over time. At the least, in her work with Bill a cornerstone was

lain which had certain salience for her, which may have or may become increasingly important to her in time, or though not necessarily so.

Willie, Pat and Sandra illustrate some of the complex ways that social and emotional factors influence the adult literacy learning process. Their stories provide glances into the many ways that literacy development can be enhanced or derailed. They allude as well to the elusive quality of success that can only be grasped in highly personal terms. The stories also draw attention to some of the variety of ways by which literacy becomes embedded into the consciousness and social experience of beginning readers. More is involved than simply enhanced reading ability. Rather, what their stories and the case presentations below will demonstrate is that engaging the literacy process in its social, emotional, and cognitive dimensions influences the life history of learners in a variety of tangible and intangible ways.

Chapter Three

The Process of Becoming Literate: Case Presentations

The previous section broadly examined some of the complex and specific ways in which social and emotional factors influenced adult literacy learning among students at the Bob Steele Reading Center. This section will continue to draw out those connections, but will more closely focus on the “stages” of increasing literacy mastery as they have unfolded within particular lives over time. The following case presentations provide rich insight on the progression of literacy development of four students who have learned in variously different ways. While this section can not lay claim to comprehensiveness, it illustrates critical aspects in the process of becoming literate: the centrality of life experience, the quest for and resistance against integrative learning, the variability of pace, and the diverse relationship between basic skill development and reading for meaning and purpose.

Orlando

When he came to the Reading Center program, Orlando was in his late twenties. He was married and had an eight-year old son. Orlando was born in Puerto Rico and moved to the mainland as a boy. He attended bilingual school programs that on his account failed to help him. This was due in part because his single parent mother moved often, which destabilized his education (Smith et. al., 1993, pp. 6-10). He left school at sixteen viewing himself simply as “a normal kid having a hard time” (p. 7). He entered our program in January 1990 in a desire to gain increasing control over his life. He had ambitious goals; he wanted to attain his GED certificate, which would qualify him to attend auto mechanics school.

Throughout his eighteen-month stay, he remained matched with a single tutor while participating regularly in small group tutoring. He put in well over 200 instructional hours. In

the LVA system fifty hours per year is deemed significant. His effort, therefore, represented a major commitment. As his reading ability increased, so did his self-confidence. At several student meetings he spoke with power and conviction about the transformative role literacy was playing in his life and the importance as well, of the community of learners to whom he now realized he belonged. In a word, he recognized that he was no longer alone and desired to stand in solidarity with his peers. Orlando embodied the ethos of the Center in its full, collaborative sense, with the joining of learning and community.

Orlando's learning history at the Reading Center was complex and rich which included extensive gains on standardized testing. In the instrument developed by LVA, the *Reading Evaluation Adult Diagnosis (READ)*, Orlando jumped from B to J level in his decoding reading ability, which is roughly analogous to four school grades, from first to fifth based upon "the use of a readability formula to fit certain grade levels of written material" (Colvin and Root, 1982, p. 46). There are problems with equating adult literacy learning with school grade equivalencies. Life experience and oral vocabulary of adults are more extensive than with children and are primary tools in developing literacy with the former. Thus, once adults increase their reading ability they invariably achieve a richer literacy experience than children, which is not to negate the sense of wonderment the latter sometimes experience once the world of books is open to them. Moreover, the grade school analogy has negative connotations for many adult beginning readers, particularly with someone like Orlando, who while attending school felt as if he were "nobody." For all its limitations, the *READ* score increase presented *one* visible manifestation of Orlando's considerable literacy development. Yet there was more to his growth than increased test scores.

Orlando entered the program with a traditional goal of attaining a GED, though the gap between his original ability and its achievement was considerable and not practically attainable without much basic skill development. In my contacts with him since leaving the program, first in his move to upstate New York, then later to Texas, he was enrolled in GED classes, working toward achieving that goal, though I lost touch with him before finding out whether or not he had achieved that goal.

Given the gap between that initial goal and his original ability, upon entering the program, it became important to work with Orlando to identify additional, shorter-range goals and interests that would sustain his motivation and stimulate a sense of progress while ultimately working toward long-term aspirations. Thus, it was the learning along the way while at the Reading Center, including new areas of interest that emerged, which is of particular interest in depicting the process that enabled Orlando to make significant breakthroughs in his literacy development and self-perception. Our basic literacy program did not, in fact, include a GED focus, though we did eventually set up a pre-GED group tutoring session for advanced students (Demetrian, 2000). The primary focus with Orlando in our program was to provide as much instructional time as he desired through a combination of one-to-one and small group tutoring and to work with him on basic skill development through content areas that interested him and stimulated his imagination. It was in the supportive community of students and tutors provided by the program, that he thrived. Throughout his stay, he expressed a desire to master basic skill development, particularly the sight-sound relationship of written language. His tutors helped Orlando with that in which he attained considerable mastery over time. He overcame his deficiency.

It is important not to view the development of this basic decoding skill in isolation, but as part of a broader quest, as he put it, “to know the roots of things” (Smith et. al., 1993, p. 11). During a schedule change, I briefly worked with him and obtained a decent understanding of the sources of his motivation, which I interpreted as his quest to grasp the root or structure of things. This appeared evident in the material he studied on automobile mechanics. We read several chapters of a book available at the Center and he obtained more material at the public library. He read the chapters on how the engine works with methodical detail. Some of the vocabulary was above his normal reading ability but his curiosity was aroused in his search for systematic knowledge. He combined book knowledge with practical work on his own engine, which enabled him to move back and forth from reading, discussion, experience and re-reading in a recursive manner that exactly mirrored the “Cycle of Collaborative Learning” as depicted in LVA’s *Small Group Tutoring* manual (Cheatham and Lawson, 1990, p. 22). Orlando explained the source of his motivation and learning process in the following way:

Like in mechanics I take things and I put them in my head. It fascinates me. One of the first cars I had I took it apart, fixed the pistons and it worked. Definitely I want to get into mechanics, on my own or professionally. Now I know I can learn, I can do it. If I could master reading and writing I will do it. When I went to fix my car, with the little I can read, I was able to do it. I like being a grease monkey. There's a lot to know about (Smith et. al., 1993, p. 11).

In order to put his desire to learn about auto mechanics in perspective, it will be helpful to describe what led up to his decision to focus on that. Preceding his systematic study of the engine, I worked with Orlando to develop a five-year life plan leading from the advanced groups at the Center to entrance into a GED program with the ultimate educational goal of attending mechanics school. In the meantime he would obtain as much practical experience as he could, and if at all possible, obtain a job in a garage.

As we discussed the plan, I wrote the key points on the white board, enabling him to turn our discussion into a meaningful literacy lesson, further internalizing the content by integrating orality and literacy. Until this time he had no apparent career guidance, so that our lesson in some small degree, enabled Orlando to turn a partially believed hope into a concrete plan. This was then followed up almost immediately by our work on the engine. In our lessons, we worked on the complicated vocabulary, but it was the quest for specific knowledge, driven by the plausibility of its attainment and its personal relevance that propelled Orlando's intense motivation. The act of reading became fused with his thirst for knowledge. Orlando absorbed much during that period, about auto mechanics, reading, and himself. His goals, moreover, had remained coherent and intact as of my last contact with him in the mid-1990s (personal correspondence).

There is more to consider in the quest to understand Orlando's sources of motivation. In addition to his great relish in becoming a "grease monkey," he exhibited an indomitable hunger for humanistic knowledge. He spent months reading articles about geography and in an interview, expressed interest in the *Our Century* television series. He enjoyed reading history, geography, and science. "All of these things are pretty exciting. It keeps me motivated" (Smith et. al., p. 12). His goals, interests, and aspirations *expanded* throughout his journey at the Center and that is the critical point. His initial impulse to overcome a negative schooling history and to get on with important life issues he faced, were transformed into desirable purposes as he engaged the process of adult literacy learning and began to build on the successes he attained. This represented a significant reconstruction of his identity from one who could not, to one who could, in fact, learn and enjoy the process of doing so, in a formal school environment.

As his learning increased, so did his sense of possibility. He certainly desired to master the basics of decoding and that quest remained pervasive in his struggle to achieve increasing literacy. Yet as his ability and confidence expanded, he desired more. Through learning to read he desired to expand the realm of his own learning. More fundamentally, he sought to grasp the structure of things, from basic decoding skills of reading, to the intricacies of automobile mechanics, to the world around him, to the complex world of his own interior consciousness and his immediate social and cultural experience. At the Bob Steele Reading Center, Orlando obtained something denied him in his earlier schooling experience—an education that greatly expanded his world. This represented a significant reconstruction of his identity from one who could not, to one who could, in fact, learn and enjoy the process of doing so, in a formal schooling environment.

David

David was nineteen when he entered the program in 1989. He was born and raised on a farm in Guyana, one of twelve children. His mother, a single parent, immigrated to the United States while David remained for several years in Guyana, living first with his “auntie,” then with his grandfather. Formal schooling was not important in his native environment and David attended classes only sporadically. He never learned to read. His family instilled within David the values of hard work and a strong sense of loyalty for one another. As soon as he arrived in Hartford, he entered into an adult education program, and soon thereafter, came to the Center (Smith et. al., 1993, pp. 16-24). While school was not important to him while growing up on a farm in Guyana, it became vitally crucial on encountering the very different urban context of Hartford, Connecticut. As David expressed it, “[h]ere it matters to read because you’ve got to

find streets. You've got to find your job. You've got to know how to read inside the workplace” (Smith, Ball, Demetrian, and Michelson, 1993, p. 22).

David came to our program as a virtual non-reader, although occasionally he would recognize the sound of a letter or a small word like “cat.” The large class adult education program was not able to provide the individual attention he needed. During the course of five years, David worked extensively with five individual tutors and regularly participated in the small group-tutoring program. By the time he left the program in the mid-1990s he logged in over 600 hours of tutoring and had learned how to read and write with some fluency.

In 1992, David moved up from a high beginning to low advanced group and began to write. He served as a representative on the LVA-CT student council and won an award in Washington D.C. as Connecticut's student of the year in the Coors Brewing Company sponsored Literacy Graduation Day. David had come a long way in his journey at the Bob Steele Reading Center and like Orlando, was a total participant in its life. Although his leaps in reading were nowhere near as dramatic as Orlando in terms of test scores, *for David* they proved significant, reflective of the considerable progress he made from where he started the journey. In this study, I focus on David's early experience at the Center that enabled this nonreader to attain the “critical mass” to “crack the code” of the sight-sound relationship between print and oral language.

David studied at the Center for about a year with his first two tutors with little visible gain and no measured increase on the *READ* test. When he moved to Florida at the end of 1990, David was still at the A level, a complete nonreader by the standards of the test. His tutors were competent and motivated, while David was patient, hard working, and open to experimentation. Various, the tutors worked with phonics and word patterns and with whole language

approaches such as assisted reading. The results appeared negligible. It would have been easy to conclude that David was one of those people who simply could not “crack the code” of reading, although that was not our judgment.

His first tutor, though, wondered if David had “an undetected learning disability, possibly dyslexia,” since it appeared that he could not even master the most basic fundamentals of the reading process in making the sound-sight connection between the spoken and written word. According to Gerald S. Coles, (1990) “learning disabilities” is a contestable intellectual construct. That the vast preponderance of emerging adult literacy learners exhibit a wide array of problems with reading is self-evident to practitioners. What is questionable is the extent to which these should come under the rubric of a “disability” construct, often, although not always, accompanied by a “stigma” (Beder, 1991) that the problem resides inside the heads of nonreaders.

Consider first, that the vast majority of adult literacy programs and supportive social service agencies lack an ability to diagnose any “neurological impairment” which a strict definition of learning disabilities requires (Coles, 1990, p. 20; Ross-Gordon, 1989, p, 3). By focusing primarily on symptoms, “learning disabilities” may serve as a catch phrase for some acute reading problems stemming from a multiplicity of causations both internal and external to the learner. A second concern is that the learning disabilities label tends to ignore, dismiss, or minimize structural correlations of illiteracy with poverty, racism, or other related social and cultural factors (Coles, 1990, p. 25; Hunter and Harman, 1985; Kozol, 1985), except for a problematic “culture of poverty” thesis that links a “dysfunctional” social environment with higher incidences of impaired brain functioning.

While it is beyond the bounds of this study and my knowledge to pinpoint with exactness the many complex relationships between environmental and cognitive “causes” of illiteracy, the case studies shed some light on this complicated issue. For example, Orlando had achieved only negligible benefits in his earlier decentralized tutorials when he initially entered the LVGH program in the 1980s. It was only at the supportive social climate of the Center that he achieved the breakthrough toward becoming a fluent reader. Yet his *symptoms* could easily have been diagnosed as a form of learning disabilities, which his negative self-image might very well have reinforced (Smith et. al., 1993, p. 2-12).

In my judgment, David’s “mental equipment” seemed fine. He never learned to read during the traditional school years, so consequently, he had to acquire a new form of learning from the bottom-up in ways that resonated with his unique personhood. There was no particular reason why learning to read should have been easy for him. Besides, David made important, though barely perceptible breakthroughs during his first year through supportive “scaffolding” that was hard to measure in any standard way.

I occasionally worked with David and found his learning style receptive to the assisted reading approach where the learner gradually takes over more of the reading through modeling and practice. David “caught on” in this manner, although his tutor questioned whether assisted reading represented a form of “mere” memorization. That did not appear the case. Rather, through such bridging, David was engaging the process of fluent reading and was beginning to identify cues that slowly developed reservoirs of knowledge. At this stage, he sought schemas or organizational structures that would enable him to assimilate new knowledge (Smith, 1979, pp. 12-35). Memory played a minor role, but short-term memory can only hold a few items at a time. Depending even on long-term memory is too cumbersome a way to affect fluent reading.

According to Frank Smith, making meaning of print is the most viable way to foster literacy (1979, p. 46). For David, it was the entire environment of the Reading Center that enabled him to make meaning out of print. The supportive climate resembled his family life and his good-natured personality tapped into the altruistic motives of his tutors. These factors encouraged the experimentation so critical to David's developing literacy. His emerging literacy was a slow work that engaged the efforts of various tutors and myself and, of most fundamentally, David.

Focusing on the reading process, itself, whole language advocates maintain that there are a variety of cues: contextual, syntactical and phonetic (Altwerger, Edelsky and Flores, 1987, p. 145). David's tutors tapped into all of these with varying emphases in the quest to identify and expand his learning cutting edge. With David, I found kinesthetic cuing particularly effective, where for him perception often preceded cognition. I attempted to tap into his intuition as a primary location of his expanding, learning cutting edge. At times when David was unable to identify a word, I merely began to form my lips to initiate the appropriate sound which, given the context of the text, often proved effective. Sometimes all David had to do was to look again at a word he missed; that is, to focus his attention upon it. At other times I partially sounded out the word so that he could begin to "feel" the sound-sight connection between spoken and written language well before he understood it in any sustained cognitive sense. Only if he was completely stumped did I supply him with the word. I only drilled him on words he consistently mis-identified, even with an assisted reading approach. Here, I alternated between phonics, word patterns, and sight word identification, depending upon what I discerned his most effective learning required at any given time (Root and Colvin, 1987, pp. 19-45).

In effect, I sought to establish a dialogue with David, exploring with him his greatest learning potential at any given time however seemingly minute the instructional episode. Within

such a context, I attempted to provide him only with the most minimal cuing that he required, stimulating a fluent and constructive learning process. That is, I drew upon a Vygotskian (1978) scaffolding paradigm well before I understood the concept intellectually pp. 84-91).

Usually, I stressed assisted reading approaches based on the conviction that reading is “caught” at least as much as it is taught which requires a long term process of conscious and unconscious assimilation (Smith, 1979). Moreover, much of the vocabulary from one story to the next was repetitive. It was not essential, therefore, for David to completely master one text (an impossible task at this stage) before moving on to another. Such shifting of texts seemed valuable in order to sustain a sense of moving forward and to stimulate interest in the content of the material.

In November 1990, David moved to Florida, but came back to the Center the following spring. In Florida he had found another literacy program where he had begun to crack the code of reading. When he returned to our program, he was beginning to make the sight-sound relationship between spoken and written language and had mastered a rudimentary sight vocabulary. Whether the breakthrough took place as a result of the specific approaches to reading the Florida program provided or simply through an accumulation of reading practice is difficult to discern. David stated that the approaches used in the Florida program were similar to those at the Reading Center. In any event, something “kicked in” for him in Florida that enabled him to cross a certain threshold.

When David returned to Hartford in the spring of 1991, his progress in reading became at least discernible, although not yet “measurable” on the *READ* test. He participated in the small groups and was assigned to his third tutor. By the spring of 1992, he began to read with limited fluency, even though words like “the” still stumped him. Once David internalized the sight-

sound connection, he began to draw on phonetic cues extensively, which became his strong suit. That is, learning to read some, allowed him to grasp the significance of phonemic awareness.

By 1993, David was able to read with intermediate fluency. Independently, he post-tested at level D on the *READ* test, which translates to about a second grade reading level (Colvin and Root, 1982, p. 47). He picked up a flow in his reading, which remained halting, but reflected considerable progress from his beginning point 1990. He drew on his reading ability at work, packing meat, and also in reading road signs. He began to work independently at the Reading Center while waiting for his tutor or group. He eventually advanced into the higher-level groups and began to write and spell with reasonable accuracy. His “inventive spelling” was instinctively sound. He desired to progress further and had the capacity to do so.

David enjoyed a variety of topics focusing on work, culture, personal development, and human interest while working in the Reading Center’s small-group program. He also began to draw on reading beyond the program to help him with work, to navigate road signs, to read sections of the newspaper, religious materials at church, and books on babies and child care with his new wife. While his interests were more diffuse than Orlando’s because his life goals were not as sharply focused, what motivated David was a desire to fit into the demands and challenges of leaving the care and support of his mother, and becoming an independent adult. For both of these students, the Reading Center’s environment provided the necessary support to sustain their efforts over long periods of time. In David’s case, his warm loving family provided him with the emotional sustenance to take a relaxed, gentle approach to learning which sustained his gradual maturation and assimilation into the U.S. mainstream as a worker, husband and father, and church member. The Bob Steele Reading Center accommodated both Orlando’s intense drive for learning and David’s more gradual unfolding.

Angelo

Angelo was in his mid-twenties when he entered the program in January 1990. His score on the *READ* test indicated that he was a complete non-reader, but his G level post score, interpreted roughly as fourth grade reading ability, which he attained in approximately a year, raised questions about the accuracy of the pre-test. Perhaps he was nervous when he took the test or he may have simply needed small amounts of practice to re-cue the reading knowledge that he may have possessed while attending high school. Evidence, at this point, is unavailable to go beyond an educated speculation.

Angelo worked at Pratt and Whitney Aircraft in East Hartford and saw a profile of Reading Center student Derrick Matthews in his company newspaper. As Derrick describes his disclosure, “I put myself on the line when I went to my job, and told them I had a reading problem and that I was with the Literacy Volunteers. I exposed myself to help other people in my job: to let them know they can get help with their reading and writing” (Smith, Ball, Demetrion, and Michelson, 1993, p. 107). The result was that the company profiled Derrick’s story, which in turn, motivated Angelo, who felt he needed to master reading in order to advance at work and realized he could lose his job if he did not attend to his reading problem.

Angelo was born in Italy and moved to the United States when he was a young boy. He was educated in the Hartford school system and graduated from Buckley High School. Because of his then limited English literacy he enjoyed content area courses more than those which focused exclusively on reading and writing. Angelo entered the Reading Center program “with an open mind.” He tried “everything else and got nowhere.” As he put it, “I might as well give this place half a chance and see where it goes.”

In his initial interview Angelo expressed a mild sense of resignation laced with guarded optimism that he could in fact learn to read. His high level reading comprehension score led me to believe that he could make considerable progress given a sustained two or three year commitment notwithstanding his A level decoding ability score. Angelo grasped that and seemed willing to us “half a chance.”

Contrary to Orlando and David, Angelo only participated in individual tutoring. In high school he endured negative social experiences in the classroom setting and carried that legacy with him even to the highly supportive climate of the Reading Center’s small group programs. Initially, I did not inquire whether or not his high school experience included antagonism over race and ethnicity that he may have transferred consciously or unconsciously to the Center, although I suspected such. When I eventually asked him about that he stated that was the case, although he never much elaborated on the matter and I did not press. In any event, Angelo was highly bonded to his tutor, Helen and took no advantage of the Center’s setting for multiple tutoring opportunities.

Angelo’s test score increase indicated that he made rapid progress, although I have wondered about the validity of his pre-test. In any event, his growth was noteworthy particularly given that he worked only with his individual tutor for a maximum total of four hours per week, while Orlando and David often studied eight hours per week. That is, Angelo put in fewer hours than Orlando and David, worked with only one tutor, and missed out on the many advantages of collaboration with his peers. Yet, he still made significant gains. I’m not sure how to account for this, though having completed high school, participating in an adult literacy program may have allowed for a re-stimulation of skills he may have in part previously learned which he could hone and refine in a safe, supportive learning climate through Helen’s nurturing. Orlando and

David never learned to read in school and for them, adult literacy development had to emerge from the bottom up. Angelo had at least attended high school and that additional schooling may have made a significant difference in the skill base with which he started the program.

This is not to suggest that Angelo left high school as a fluent reader. His rapid gains indicate that he may well have absorbed in school a partial capacity toward independent reading, but he probably was not able to put them together in a fluent and consistent fashion. Clearly, I speculate. Other high school graduates participated in the Reading Center's program that invariably possessed some mastery of fluent decoding along with significant "deficits" in specific areas. Derrick, for example, was a high school graduate. A definitive diagnosis of Angelo's reading history is beyond the bounds of currently available evidence. Nonetheless, certain factors at least *appear* evident. First, Angelo attained some reading proficiency while enrolled in public school. Second, he probably had not attained fluency to any significant and sustained degree. Third, his social experience in school, in part related to racial and ethnic conflict, was negative. Fourth, throughout his schooling experience into adulthood he sustained a negative self-concept on his ability to attain literacy. This is somewhat speculative and open to further evidence and interpretation, although in my view these factors seem to have played a critical role in Angelo's life experience as an emerging adult reader and writer. However, I cannot supply direct evidence to back up my on-site intuition.

Throughout his efforts to increase his literacy, Angelo sought stability that at times interfered with a somewhat inhibited drive for transformative mastery that requires a degree of risk taking for successful entry into new areas of learning. Angelo's stated reason for participating in the program was job related, but his tutor believed his most compelling motive revolved around a quest to overcome his sense of embarrassment over his perceived

inadequacies. In agreeing with her, I noticed that Angelo demonstrated a need to control the pace of learning so he could assimilate it within the comfort zone of his then current abilities, which was the case with many students. Yet, as opposed to Orlando and David, he was cautious rather than exploratory in engaging new areas of learning. While Angelo expressed a desire to transcend those abilities, a stronger sense of apprehension may have operated that limited his willingness to take creative leaps in learning that might have exposed his current weaknesses.

The dominance of stability appeared evident in his tutoring routine as described by his tutor:

1. Angelo talks to Helen about his day.
2. They read something simple and work on words.
3. Angelo writes in his diary.
4. They read the on-going assignment.

Based on this description, Helen thought Angelo had progressed, but he did not seem enthusiastic about the actual learning process. Angelo diligently worked on his lessons in session, but Helen was perplexed that he engaged in no independent reading at home. The main narrative Angelo selected, usually action or adventure related, often took several months to complete, and he did not want to move on to something else until he finished a particular piece. Both Angelo and Helen felt comfortable with the process, but neither appeared inspired.

Angelo's interview confirmed Helen's observations in many ways. He attributed his success to the sensitivity of his tutor. "Helen's a very nice woman. She's patient with me—not pushing me into it." Angelo's advice to new tutors emphasized this concern. "Be understanding of their [the student's] needs. Don't push them into something they're not able or willing to do. Help them, but not too much, because they have to learn on their own. Treat them as a regular person." Angelo acknowledged that he only did limited amounts of homework, because on his account, he interpreted assignments as external pressure that he felt compelled to resist. He also

sensed that if homework became an issue between he and Helen, it could adversely affect his learning during the tutoring sessions. While difficult to say with certainty, this inhibition perhaps related to Angelo's need to associate the literacy learning process with a warm emotional climate that Helen provided. Homework, on the other hand, may have induced a sense of the isolation and inadequacy that Angelo had over learning, reviving his earlier experience of schooling.

On a surface interpretation, by focusing on decoding skills and innocuous reading material, Angelo appeared to have subscribed to the "autonomous" view of literacy without much regard to the significance of content nor of the complex ways that literacy and life experience interact. Angelo's discussion of his diary entries seemed to reinforce such an impression. When I asked him what he liked about writing in his diary, he stated that it reinforced his spelling skills. I pressed him to think more critically about the diary as a tool to evaluate his life experience. He perceived the diary as a form of remembrance, but only in the sense of how his spelling evolved over time. His commentary on the stories he liked to read about, "burglary, robbery, and cars" also seemed superficial from some of his more deeply rooted life concerns.

It seemed evident in his interview that he had deeper concerns. Notwithstanding the action-oriented focus of his reading assignments, a more potent source of potential motivation emerged from our discussions. As he expressed it, "[b]asically, I'm hungry for knowledge. In order to do that [to learn] I have to read." As the interview unfolded, some of his specific learning quests emerged. He expressed interest in history, current events, and environmental issues. He spoke about the destruction of the Amazon forest. "They're destroying it, but a lot of plants are [needed for] medicine that can cure just about anything." He spoke of a desire to learn

more about politics and the economy in order to draw his own conclusions about the significant issues of our time.

I also pressed Angelo to reflect on the relationship between literacy and some of his more practical life concerns. His desire to become an independent reader was in part rooted in a quest for self-sufficiency. Specifically, at work he wanted to be able to write in order to obtain credit for his own ideas. He desired the skill to present his ideas “in a fashionable way to the boss.” I encouraged him to reflect more specifically on the significance of writing as a form of workplace communication. His response suggested a sophisticated understanding of organizational behavior. “Right now, I’m limited. I have a lot of knowledge, but I can’t put it down.” I asked him why he could not simply present his ideas verbally. He responded that in the modern workplace “speaking isn’t good enough.” Angelo did not elaborate further, but it seemed that he was attempting to come to terms with the increasing formality of the workplace toward bureaucracy and administration, particularly in the large company where he worked. In order to function well in that world, an employee needs to know how to access the various chains of power and authority in an organization. Speaking afforded him only the opportunity to interface informally with his co-workers and boss. Writing would give him the ability to develop memos, reports, plans and proposals that could attract attention throughout the higher echelons of the power structure in the workplace. Had it existed at the time, an instructional program based on the Equipped for the Future Worker Role Map (Stein, 1997) might have been an inspiring source of motivation, enabling him to explore with much depth the kind of issues at work to which he alluded.

Angelo possessed some deeply rooted motives that propelled his quest for literacy. Yet they did not appear readily evident on the surface. His overt behavior seemed tenuous as

reflected in part in the topics he chose to read about which were not those most compelling to his life's concerns. Something seemed awry. Helen's observation that overcoming embarrassment was a major concern of Angelo's provided a clue. My sense was that Angelo needed to work at his own pace so that he was not pushed beyond his comfort level no matter how deeply he desired to expand his abilities. Although difficult to discern for certain, Angelo's negative socio-emotional experience in high school may have reinforced a compulsion to seek comfort at the expense of a more potent quest for mastery. There was some reluctance on the part of Helen to push Angelo into more adventurous learning which might have jeopardized the fragile stability that developed over a two-year period. Neither Helen nor Angelo was completely satisfied with the situation, but it did allow them to progress.

There seemed to be something more at work, for which a clue could be found in Angelo's schooling experience where he made the distinction between content mastery and learning to read and write. From his interview, it appeared evident that Angelo knew what he wanted to learn, but had not identified much direct relevance between his ambitions and the content of his literacy lessons that remained essentially mechanical and superficial. He appeared to have adopted a decontextual skill development approach that may have enabled him to apply such "skills" when and where he so chose without any external pressure to "perform." This may have represented a deeply rooted need for security and control that could not be lightly tampered with, particularly, since, as it appeared, comfort seemed more important to Angelo than mastery, although he desired the latter, as well. Both his need for comfort and his decontextualized understanding of literacy appeared to have inhibited a unified quest for complete literacy mastery that characterized the journeys of Orlando and David.

Angelo made much progress and the match between he and Helen in many ways should be viewed as successful. Angelo increased his reading ability significantly according to the standardized test score in approximately 100 hours of tutoring. He also began to utilize his emerging literacy in practical ways at work. Moreover, his confidence improved. “Instead of I can’t do it, I can do it.”

These represented important achievements, as did the durability of the match, which lasted for over two years. Angelo accomplished much at the Reading Center but had not utilized literacy as a powerful lever to tap into the cutting edge of his own most powerful learning dynamics. In order to accomplish that, he would have needed to take some risks and identify new learning as a more powerful motivation than his fear of failure. Angelo was very much “in process” while in the program. In partnership with Angelo, Helen and I sought to encourage his literacy development in whatever paths he chose, while encouraging him to press on however we could without jeopardizing the match between he and his tutor in the process.

John

John, an African-American in his early forties, was raised in North Carolina. He moved to Hartford in the early 1980s. In his interview, he did not offer much personal information and I did not probe more deeply than what he comfortably chose to disclose. John did not work on a regular basis, although he stated that he occasionally obtained odd jobs. He noted that he wanted to improve his reading and writing before he tackled the job market.

John had been active with LVGH for a number of years before coming to the Reading Center in 1991. He worked with two tutors who met him at the public library, but for various reasons, the matches broke up. John maintained that job changes of the tutors accounted for the termination of the matches. There may have also been communication gaps between John and

his tutors on missed tutoring sessions that could have contributed to the terminations. Whatever the reasons John was in danger of “falling through the cracks” of the LVGH system had there not been a centralized site with a flexible small group program that could help him sustain his commitment toward becoming more literate.

John’s library tutors may have played a significant role in shaping his perception of the *process* of literacy learning. Those tutors were trained in the standardized methodologies of the LVA tutor workshop in the mid-1980s which laid much emphasis on basic skill development, including phonics, word patterns, and sight word memorization at the expense of more holistic approaches to literacy that the national agency became committed to beginning in 1990 (Cheatham and Lawson, 1990; Cheatham, Colvin and Laminack, 1993).

Even before 1990 the LVA tutor training emphasized wholistic approaches to literacy development through the use of language experience stories. These draw upon a student’s oral language and life experience that the tutor would convert into text to serve as the basis of a lesson (Colvin and Root, 1987, pp. 19-20) to supplement basic decoding techniques. Still, the traditional training remained heavily weighed toward basic skill development, often reinforced by trainers who prioritized techniques over integrated approaches to literacy development. Whatever combination of prior schooling experience and the influence of his early tutors, John took an emphatic stand in support of basic decoding skills as a primary way to enhance his literacy. His advice to new tutors was telling. “You gotta learn them the vowels. You gotta make out some flash cards.”

When John entered the Center he regularly participated in the Saturday small group session and less often in group-tutoring sessions during the week. John tested at the J level on the *READ* test, the highest score possible, although he exhibited a variety of “deficiencies” in

complex word decoding, comprehension, and writing. His reading and writing skills were uneven and he required much practice in order to make significant improvements. He participated little in the discussions accompanying group reading assignments and seemed impatient to get back to the task at hand as he interpreted it: decoding the words on the page. I found disconcerting what appeared to me the contextual void by which this fairly advanced reader, approached literacy. While waiting for a tutoring session, he often picked up any piece of reading material, which he attempted to read without, apparently, any particular grasp of its content. At first this practice troubled me, but I restrained from intervening once I realized that John did not share my understanding of whole language reading theory. Once I became convinced of John's commitment to the program, I assigned him to an individual tutor. Soon thereafter, he completely dropped out of the small group program to concentrate more extensively on developing his "skills."

His tutor, Liz, developed an effective program for John that combined structure with reading for meaning and significance. She also included structured writing exercises from selected reading passages that worked well with John. What emphatically did not work was "process writing" where a student writes free form following a stream of consciousness and relying on "invented spelling" and dashes in order to effect fluency of prose, followed by revision and editing (Colvin and Root, 1987, pp. 21-23).

Process writing parallels whole language reading theory stressing the value of literacy as a meaning making activity rather than concentrating on isolated skills. Instead of laboriously focusing on the correct spelling of every word, an impossible task for low-level literacy students, process writing encourages cutting edge text construction in which the writer is personally invested. Of less interest is the finished product than:

on keeping the entire process itself going, even when and especially when semantic meaning may be breaking down. The challenge for writers and readers is not merely how to make a text make sense but how to make what they are doing make sense. From a process perspective we see that the essence of literate orientation is knowing what to do now (Brandt, 1990, p. 38).

From this perspective, literacy is viewed not as mastery of the “autonomous” text, but as an intertextual process that mediates the world of print and the life of the learner. It is the process of learning itself that ultimately provides the basis for writing competency (Coe, 1986, p. 311). Skill development is not ignored. It is contextualized. The emphasis is placed instead on enabling the student to express his or her “authentic” voice. Editing remains an important, but separate procedure. From the process perspective, correcting “errors” is not viewed as the primary purpose of writing instruction.

The process orientation resonates with a great number of students in providing them with a semblance of fluent writing even while they possess only a rudimentary grasp of reading. It requires risk taking and the willingness to tolerate imperfection. John resisted process writing not because he had nothing to say, but because the gap between what he could and desired to express seemed so wide that it appeared futile for him even to begin. As he expressed to me his more pressing challenges, “[y]ou got to know how to spell the words to write. You got to practice, sound the words out and memorize and listen to the sounds. You got to know the sounds of the letters.” This common sense perception inhibited John from operating out of the process paradigm. More fundamentally, his process required another approach.

Nonetheless, John would never learn to write by memorizing lists of words, but only by actively using them in ways that tapped into his own experiential framework. Liz established an intermediate solution between John’s desire to master spelling before beginning to write and the process approach, which emphasized text creation preceding skill mastery. The assignments she

selected for reading included a couple of lines for writing that only required a sentence or two. With much prompting from Liz, John tackled those structured exercises and attained a limited mastery of writing although his major preoccupation still remained correct spelling.

Liz's selection of *Champions of Change: Biographies of Famous Black Americans* (1989) represented a viable selection of materials for John in that it combined interesting biographical material, along with a wide range of skill work, including vocabulary development and short writing exercises. By working with this text Liz responded to John's need for structure while simultaneously concentrating on reading for meaning and value.

John became a fluent reader. He was one of the top decoders at the Reading Center. At one time I was concerned that John would have trouble linking the words on a page with any significant meaning making process; what Charles Schuster refers to as the distinction between sentences and utterances. For Schuster, "[s]entences are inert; utterances are interactive, intertextual, transformative" (1990, p. 230). Liz's sensitive tutoring accomplished much in enabling John to begin to see that the power of literacy lies in its meaning rather than in the decontextualized word or workbook sentence, that is, in transforming sentences into utterances.

One time I worked with John and two other students. I was impressed with the ease of his fluent reading ability that dramatically improved since the last time I had worked with him. John's active participation in the discussion also surprised me. When I asked him a question, he asked for clarification before responding. He also explicitly stated with some encouragement from me, that without understanding, reading was pointless. The balance Liz developed between John's sequential need to prioritize skill development with reading and writing for understanding and purpose was garnering results.

The extent to which the value of reading for meaning was a new perception for John was difficult to discern. His stated purposes for wanting to become literate ranged from employment to broad cultural and social understanding. As he expressed it, “[r]eading the newspaper is important to me so I can know what’s going on in the world.” He also pointed to aesthetic purposes in attaining the ability to write his own music. Like Angelo, however, John has tended to split the *process* of becoming literate which he viewed as basic skill mastery from its purposes in attaining practical and personal knowledge that he believed would enhance his life. With the assistance of a sensitive and able tutor, John began to venture out into more dynamic learning, although he did not appear to have made the *paradigmatic* shift in his interpretation of literacy from decoding to meaning making by the time he left the program.

During the summer of 1992 John began to miss some of his tutoring sessions. When Liz and I asked John whether he wanted take a break or cut back on the sessions, he affirmed that he desired to continue with his twice-weekly meetings. My sense was that John’s motive for participating in the program became partially unclear. He still desired to maintain his connection with Liz, but his need for regular participation was not as compelling since he acquired basic decoding fluency even though he still needed much work on writing. My hunch, though, was that John needed to re-define his motives for learning. Toward the end of his stay at the Reading Center, he returned to a basic skills emphasis by working on math. This was an important area of skill development for John and held his attention for the time. Yet, it also delayed a concentrated focus on shifting his literacy work from decoding to comprehension, meaning and purpose— from learning to read to reading in order to learn, the realms of learning that motivated Derrick, for example, for years. Despite John’s advanced decoding ability, by the time he left the program, he was not able to leave skill work in the background to concentrate

more on understanding and processing texts and their fundamental connections to his vital life experiences. Since, at the time he left the program he was a fluent reader of texts, perhaps he discerned that he achieved his goals and that there was little point for him to continue. Clearly, this is speculative on my part, though if reasonably accurate, John accomplished something of what he was looking for when he entered the program even if not all of what he sought. That is, in Dewey's terms, he experienced "growth," which represents a continuous reconstructive process rather than an end state.

Concluding Remarks on the Process of Becoming Literate

Susan L. Lytle notes "documenting changes in literacy practices with adult learners over time is obviously a complex process" (1991, p. 125). It is particularly difficult to pinpoint what she refers to as the "micro-practices" or "the more specific moment-to-moment transactions learners have with their texts" (1991, p. 125). For the purposes of this chapter, I have by-passed such a minute analysis of process in favor of a more *historical* evolution of literacy learning within four individuals over a one or more year period of time.

Although not comprehensive, the case presentations illuminate important aspects on the process of becoming literate in adulthood. They represent a microcosmic illustration of the learning cycle that I seek to narrate throughout this essay in a format designed to convey an ideal construct, similar in purpose to Fingeret and Drennon's (1997) five-stage spiral of change in the movement toward a literacy identity. From program entry points to the content of instruction, to the attainment of goals and the expansion of aspirations among students as they undertook their work, I seek to put into words (drawing on many of the words of the students themselves) something of the complexity, subtlety, and richness of the adult literacy experience. I also seek to convey aspects of its problematic dimensions. However, I deliberately concentrate on growth

phenomenon as experienced by students, clearly on my interpretation. I do so in order to tease out something of the subtle potentialities that can be, and at times are unleashed in the process of adults learning to read and absorbing new knowledge. Through the construct of the cycle from entry points to goals and aspirations unleashed, as depicted through the imagery of a collage, my aim is suggestively imaginistic rather than rigorously scientific, though congruent with the precepts of qualitative research (Merriam, 2001).

In various ways, each of the four students depicted in Chapter Three *experienced* a sense of progress, or, in Dewey's terms, grew in their capacity to draw on print literacy in meeting their needs, interests, and aspirations. The case presentations in this chapter point first to the uniqueness of each learner's existential experience and to some of the particular factors that have led to variable success. For Orlando, a fundamental process that facilitated his literacy development was his ability to connect reading with content learning in areas that resonated with his needs, interests, and aspirations to get at the root of things. He sought to unlock learning that he felt was denied to him as a child. Achieving a breakthrough in the sound-sight relationship between the spoken and written word, played a pivotal role in David's emerging literacy, along with his quest for cultural assimilation into the American mainstream. A supportive tutor played a major role in enabling Angelo to begin integrating the various pieces of the reading puzzle, which in large part, seemed to have eluded him throughout public schooling. The support of his tutor also provided a nurturing educational climate that contrasted with the social taunting he experienced in public school as a result of his Italian heritage and limited English mastery. For John, a concentrated emphasis on basic skill development through the support of a skillful tutor who was able to help him bridge toward more holistic approaches to learning, provided him with the ability to become a fluent reader (decoder) of texts.

Second, the case presentations point to the centrality of the Bob Steele Reading Center as an effective learning *environment* that enabled these and many other students to develop their potential in a collaborative learning setting. Orlando and John had “fallen through the cracks” of the decentralized LVGH tutoring system during the 1980s until the Reading Center provided a way for them to reconnect with the program a few years later. During his tenure in the program, Orlando had a schedule conflict that could have derailed his efforts in a one-to-one decentralized program. Yet, the flexibility of programming set up at the Reading Center through small group and substitute staff tutoring enabled him to continue without interruption. The on-site small-group tutoring program sustained Orlando, David, and John’s participation when individual tutors were not available. It provided them opportunities to learn from and link with other students and to engage in instruction for up to eight hours per week. Without an environment like the Bob Steele Reading Center, it would have been difficult to locate and place David’s four tutors who worked with him over four years. Without such an extensive commitment, David would not likely have made the breakthroughs he required to become a fluent reader. The Reading Center also provided Angelo with emotional support during periods of transition and difficulty that had threatened to jeopardize the continuity of his work. The social and emotional support provided at the Reading Center contributed to a lessening of a sense of isolation and alienation that sometimes accompanies adults as they take on the challenges and long struggle of learning how to read. Such support can be critical in sustaining long-term commitments to literacy (Fingeret and Drennon, 1997).

It was not that the Bob Steele Reading Center represented anything like an ideal environment for adult literacy learning. Still, in terms of innovative pedagogy and social support, it did have much to offer as an effective alternative to the traditional LVA format where

student and tutor pairs meet in decentralized locations within a given community, with minimal regular contact with the program. Nonetheless, it had its own systemic “cracks” and was not viable for all students. A study of those students who dropped out of the program would be different than the one currently told and neither more nor less legitimate. It would also add important complexity to the study of motivation, which is the aim of this essay. However, because studies that track the progress adults often do make in adult literacy programs is still relatively scant, I choose to concentrate on identifying some of the many ways in which adult literacy education does “work.” Through this, I seek to contribute to a body of emergent literature from which a more complex story might be told (Bossort, Cottingham, and Gardner, 1994; Fingeret and Drennon, 1997; Quigley, 1997; Merrifield, Bingman, Hemphill, and Bennett deMarrain, 1997, and Royce and Gacka, 2001).

Third, all of the students in the case presentations and the overwhelming majority of those who came to the Reading Center desired to achieve mainstream goals and aspirations through literacy. They sought decent employment, additional education, social skill enhancement, and a quest to learn more about themselves and the world around them. In addition to coping more effectively with a broad array of life challenges, students desired to explore and enhance subtle areas of personal and social identity as part of their expanding possibilities that participating in the program opened up. This quest was stimulated by the supportive milieu of the Reading Center, particularly through the social conviviality of the small-group learning context (Demetron, 1999a) and the generation and utilization of student-generated texts. Students focused on practical, personal, socio-cultural, and aesthetic learning in their quest to enhance their literacy rather dependency on some externally imposed standard of success. Their paths to achieving literacy were highly particular. Each of the students in the

case presentations possessed a unique learning style that until their participation at the Reading Center, at least on their accounts, had not been authenticated in formal schooling environments. In identifying the range of different interests among adult literacy learners, Lytle (1991) notes the following:

When adults who enter programs are given the opportunity at the outset to explore a range of possibilities, they typically go beyond a general interest in 'becoming better readers' [although they certainly do desire that] to name particular reading and writing tasks they hope to accomplish, often for specific purposes and audiences. Some come with a desire to learn more about a particular subject, for example, African-American history, parenting, or health. Many seek ways to deal with their own children's literacy and schooling whereas others wish to participate or assume new roles and responsibilities in their families, workplaces, or communities. Some are looking for community in the literacy program itself. Some seek economic improvements in their lives through new jobs or promotions, or by dealing more competently with personal finances and/or their encounters with 'the bureaucracy.' For many, the program offers the possibility of taking more control and ownership of their own learning. For most adult learners who come to the programs, the desire for enhanced self-esteem is implicit in many of their stated and unstated goals (p. 128)

Dewey scholar Jim Garrison (1998) expresses the purpose of education this way:

The aim of education is growth. To live, the student must learn to conduct successful transactions with his or her environment. To grow, the student must create novel forms of recognition and response, which he or she must then refine in ways that make them more discriminating and in ways that integrate them into his or her experience (p. 80).

As Fingeret and Danin (1991) characterize it:

Students do not necessarily have a concrete goal in mind, an instrumental view of literacy tied to some specific task or aspiration. More than anything, they want to feel that there are possibilities for the future, that there are choices and potential for change (p. 45).

As reflected in the four case presentations and throughout the essay, all of these dimensions of the U.S. progressive education tradition were incorporated into the Bob Steele Reading Center program during the early- and mid-1990s.

Fourth, the case presentations reinforce the notion that success is determined by the learner rather than by some externally imposed standard of success. John seemed to have

defined success in terms of basic skill acquisition and may have left the program satisfied that he had achieved his aims. Clearly, that is speculative on my part since, without a follow-up interview or other information, a more definitive conclusion cannot be made. Both Orlando and Angelo learned at a much faster rate than David. Yet *for David*, based upon his starting point and purposes for participating in the program, his learning was also significant, whether “equally so” or not. Based on their own starting-points, all of the students in the case presentations underwent the *experience* of their own literacy development in significant ways. It is the attainment of such felt change, when perceived as positive, which helps to sustain the quest for literacy over long periods of time through challenging life episodes (Fingeret and Drennon, 1997). In Dewey’s (1916) esoteric phraseology:

Experience as trying involves change, but change is meaningless transition unless it is consciously connected with the return wave of consequences which flow from it. When an activity is continued *into* [original italics] the undergoing of consequences, when the change made by action is reflected back into a change made in us, the mere flux is loaded with significance (p. 139).

One might speculate that the extent to which particular students consequently undergo such change, what Jack Mezirow refers to as a “perspective transformation,” represents an important variable in sustaining the motivation, which, in an effective educational climate, supports long-term growth and development that we saw particularly with Orlando and David. That is, when this happens, students not only come to know that they can learn in a formal educational setting. They also learn that their knowledge is gained through their own efforts, which has important consequences in sustaining persistence and on the end result in a way that makes a significant difference to their lives.

Regardless of degrees of progress, any separation of the processes and the goals of literacy instruction is necessarily artificial, since the underlying dynamic of motivation requires a

stimulation of effective ways of learning with a need to link them to outcomes students find inherently valuable. Some students like Angelo and John, identify as their goal, the mastery of basic skill development. For others, such as David, goals remained fairly diffuse even in their aiming toward general maturational needs. For him, they emerged almost imperceptively out of the learning process through the evolution of time and as a result of the gradual and continuous progress that he made. For Orlando, on the other hand, identifying particular goals related to career development and the desire to learn traditional academic subject matter as the pathway to self-development reinforced a desire for enhanced basic skill development.

A comprehensive discussion on the process of learning could expand almost indefinitely into the “infinite micropractices” that Lytle has described (1991). In order to trace the evolution of the adult literacy learning cycle as I am presenting it in this construct through the imagery of a collage, I shift the focus in Chapters Four through Six towards the content, outcomes, and goals of literacy instruction and broaden the numbers of individuals discussed. The examples of Orlando, David, Angelo, and John, are refracted throughout the remainder of this essay in other student examples. These are drawn upon to further illustrate various aspects of the literacy learning process in the evolution of learner development through the imaginative cycle I construct in this text, from entry points to the attainment of goals and aspirations.

Chapter Four

The Content of Literacy Instruction

The identification of literacy content does not necessarily point to goals, but it is suggestive of the varied interests that spark adult literacy learners along the way toward increasing literacy. It provides clues in identifying sources of motivation and serves as an intermediary link between the process of learning and desired outcomes. The identification of content will draw on three sources: a six-month instructional log, a student-writing anthology, and student interviews.

Reading Center Instructional Log

During a six-month period in 1990, I kept an instructional log that detailed approximately 150 basic literacy tutoring episodes. These were direct observations of individual and small group tutoring matches. I focused on whatever I thought was most salient in a given situation, often content, sometimes approach, and occasional comments about a student's progress. I tracked several students for seven or more episodes and made three or four entrées for many. The log provided a composite slice of the program along with a wide view of interests that students possessed, at least according to the material they selected.

A few examples from the log illustrate its variability: [There was] “much emphasis today on assisted reading approaches. He has progressed much in this manner. For writing he is copying sentences. His notebook is quite thorough, well organized and an invaluable source of continual review and historical record of progress over time.”

While that entree focused on basic skill development and organization, others stressed the utilization of literacy skills in daily life. “Orlando reports that he has been reading stories to his son for the past couple of months.” Or, “Margretta is studying for her nurse's aid certificate.”

“Derrick is studying job benefits pamphlets,” while “David worked on material to pass his driver’s license.”

I also documented broader uses of literacy. For example, Orlando made a breakthrough in self-perception when he “wrote an essay on the problems of bilingual education. He told the tutor this was the first time he wrote anything that made sense and will share it with his family.” Willie wrote a letter to all of Connecticut’s congressional representatives to protest Representative Daniel Rostenkowski’s proposal to put a cost of living freeze on social security benefits. Willie’s tutor at the time, a staff member for Senator Joseph Lieberman, helped him in making the decision to write. Yet it was Willie who received the material on the proposal and brought it to the tutoring session for deciphering and discussion.

Other incidents mentioned obtaining library cards, studying for the GED, writing editorials, working on basic skills, reading children’s literature, studying the lives of famous African-Americans, working on personal budgeting, completing first books, doing crossword puzzles, learning about jobs, reading articles on critical social issues, and varied other topics. These do not represent random assignments simply designed to teach decoding skills. They are indicative of the wide curiosity which adult literacy learning sometimes provokes, creating at times when learning is particularly intense, what one psychologist refers to as a *flow experience*:

The first phenomenological condition that separates a flow experience from everyday consciousness is the merging of action and awareness. The mind slips into the activity as if actor and action had become one. The duality of consciousness which is typical of ordinary life disappears: we no longer look at what we are doing from the outside; we become what we do. (Cszenmihalyski, 1990, p. 127).

It may be difficult to verify the existence of such an ineffable phenomenon as a “flow experience,” but at times students view becoming literate analogous to a “born again” religious conversion in its life shaking significance.

Although not so profound, perhaps, powerful motivational drives may have stimulated something like a “flow experience” as Manuel complemented his study of an automobile manual with accompanying video tapes, where for him, print and visual material mutually reinforced the learning process. Derrick also tapped into some powerful sources of intrinsic motivation while completing a third draft to his essay, “Working On My Dreams” that included the following expressive line: “My body grew tired and my mind became painful from too much thinking. My mind became more and more engulfed with thoughts I could not explain or could not understand” (Smith 1991, p. 92). Powerful sources of motivation accompanied Gary session after session while studying for his GED, and with Orlando as he made breakthroughs in his writing.

However ordinary some of this content may seem to an outside observer, it held significance to the learners. For some students such learning may have served as a signpost of emerging knowledge that often had remained underdeveloped or non-existent for years. As expressed by one student, “I see now that even though I thought all I wanted for myself was reading and writing, I wanted more than that. A lot of doors opened. When you keep feeding the brain with new ideas, knowledge about reading and writing, and other learning skills, other doors open up” (Lestz, Demetron, and Smith, 1994, Vol. I, p. 93). In many of the observed tutoring incidents, as well as those countless unobserved sessions, the process and content of literacy instruction became fused. As we saw with Orlando, increased decoding mastery often became enmeshed with enhancement of the symbolic imagination and the expanding life experiences of adult literacy learners in their quest for knowledge and power in the practical, personal, and socio-cultural realms.

A more systematic review of the log further clarifies the varied contents of literacy instruction at the Bob Steele Reading Center and its role it had in stimulating motivation. Both basic skill decoding and purely personal reflection received only minor attention while the majority of tutoring episodes focused almost equally on practically oriented or socio-cultural topics, mediated through personal experience. Since only twenty episodes were focused on basic skill development, the vast majority utilized literacy in a direct, contextual manner, as a means of attaining specific knowledge and information beyond the ability simply to decode the printed page.

Only a few episodes focused on autobiographical themes, which I found puzzling since there is such an emphasis in adult literacy on language experience approaches and personal reflection. The survey, however, concentrated mainly on individual tutoring episodes and contained very little from the program's weekly writing clinic from which much of the program's autobiographical writing emerged. The log was also completed before *Welcome To Our World* became available, the Center's first student anthology, which proved a major stimulus for personal reflection.

Practical Literacy

I prefer the term "practical" to the more commonly designated "functional" literacy to highlight a more organic connection between specific skills and aptitudes students develop within the broader contexts of their life goals, some of which are barely perceptible when they first enter a program. By contrast, functional literacy defined in major policy studies (Chisman, 1989, 1990) and in much of the published adult education instructional material emphasizes universal "competencies" such as those drawn from the 1975 Texas-based Adult Performance Level (APL) study (Northcutt, 1975). The APL study identified five major areas of competencies

for adult basic learners to master—occupational knowledge, consumer economics, health, community resources, and citizenship and the law. Potentially, such areas of knowledge could lay a foundation for a comprehensive adult literacy curriculum if viewed as a flexible framework, allowing for shifting foci in response to the diverse needs and interests of learners in specific communities. Instead, certain state departments of education have adopted the conclusions of the APL study more or less wholesale. California, for example, had instituted a competency based adult curriculum with the adoption of the Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment System (CASAS). This was paralleled in Connecticut with the Connecticut Adult Performance Program (CAPP) (Alamprese, 1993, p. 9). Both of these initiatives were modeled on the content areas and priority competencies of the APL study with only limited local variation. The CASAS initiative continues to evolve, which instructors freely adapt to the contingencies of their own classrooms. Yet, in principle, it remains framed within a behaviorist paradigm set by the APL study, with student goals defined as mastering a body of external information or “competencies.”

In addition to a tendency to universalize the “competencies” as literacy “tasks” to be mastered (Lytle and Wolfe, 1989, pp. 8-10), critics argue that the APL study ignores fundamental areas of adult experience that could serve as a provocative foundation for literacy education. They maintain that “excluded objectives include stimulation of imagination, sharpening and extending memory, reflecting on one’s place in the world, cultivating skills in interpersonal relations and expressing creativity” (Hunter and Harman, 1985, p. 18). From this viewpoint, a major critique of the APL study is that it reinforces the “deficiency” thesis of literacy in focusing only on a narrow range of things that students cannot accomplish, whether or not such tasks are relevant to their lives. It does so by identifying the primary task of adult

literacy education as “adjustment” to the status quo (Lankshear, 1993) through student mastery of pre-defined life-skill “competencies.” Those critical of the APL and CASAS argue that adult literacy learners are complex human beings who possess a broad range of learning needs, interests, and aspirations in many areas of life. Focusing on the concept of “literacy as practices,” practical (as opposed to simply functional) needs are grounded in broader life contexts than the more mechanistic thinking that underlies the APL framework (Fingeret and Drennon, 1997). The context, advocates insist, is critical to the meaning of literacy that is derived as a result of any particular sets of literacy practices.

A survey of the practical content areas identified through the instructional log illustrates this distinction. Willie J., who owned his own construction company, wrote a note with the help of his tutor offering a summer apprenticeship to one of the Center’s students. More than a functional “competency,” it was an act of empowerment and potential community building where learners would help each other to meet real needs in concrete situations. The video Manuel watched on the repair of Volkswagen engines helped him to refine his craft as an automobile mechanic. In seeking more than a mechanistic competency, he attempted to develop a practice; what one moral philosopher refers to as an art (MacIntyre, 1981, pp. 175-183), which plays an organic role in the creation of a person’s identity. Contrast these examples with some of the competencies identified in programs drawing from the APL study, such as:

- Compare price or quality to determine the best buys for goods or services.
- Use the telephone directory and related publications to locate information.
- Fill out medical history forms.
- Interpret employee handbooks.
- Interpret a voter registration form. (Tyskiewicz, 1988).

These may represent valuable skills for individuals to appropriate, but as universal competencies, they are at best abstractions, which prioritize a certain form of “information

processing, with a tendency to slot people into ascribed social roles or behaviors. Lacking is a nuanced recognition of the centrality of personhood, the role of individual autonomy in decision-making, and the importance of community and collaboration in the adult literacy experience. Critics maintain that what comes across in the APL driven competency model is a vision of the adult literacy learner as a deficient functionary of the postindustrial society whose predetermined task is to inhabit the lower strata of the social and economic order (Lankshear, 1993). A focus instead on practical-oriented literacy such as that developed in the *Equipped for the Future* (EFF) project (Stein, 1995, 1997), is based on a constructivist rather than a behaviorist psychology. It places occupational and other “survival” issues within the broader life contexts of individuals and groups of people and prioritizes specific needs as individuals identify them in time and place in concrete situations

Socio-Cultural Literacy

The socio-cultural topics identified in the log exhibit a wide range of interests. They ranged from stories on boxing to such articles as “Trail of Tears” on the forced Cherokee migration from Georgia in the early nineteenth century (Malone, 1981). They included folk tales, children’s stories, and essays on famous African-Americans. Several students read extensively from the Bible. One student read selections from escaped slave Frederick Douglass’ first autobiography, *Narratives* (1968). That same student wrote a religious song, entitled *Jesus* (Smith, 1991, p. 72). Another student read an article on the African-American Hugh Scott, Dean of Hunter College and at another time, read about the actor Danny Glover.

One pair of students read an essay called “Speak English My Ninos,” about a Mexican teenager and grandfather living in the United States. The teenage youth refused to speak English because he believed it violated his cultural identity. The grandfather persuaded him to

reconsider his position on the grounds that English could serve as the vehicle that would enable the teenager to share his cultural heritage with the English speaking community (Malone, 1981).

There are many other examples of the range of socio-cultural themes identified in the log. Yet, the log discloses little about the meaning of such topics to the particular student. The student anthology, *Welcome To Our World* and the student interviews provide a better format to explore the relationship between the content of literacy instruction in both the practical and socio-cultural realms and something of the meaning making that various students derived from it.

Content: The Evidence From Student Writing

The instructional log included the following entry: “John worked on an essay in *News For You* on the Supreme Court decision that allows police to conduct checkpoint searches on drunken drivers.” This was only a bare bones description. John’s essay in *Welcome To Our World* provides more information about the role of content in his learning process:

The Supreme Court had made a decision against drunk drivers because of lots of accidents. And the decision they made up, it will change people's behavior. The Supreme Court is right because a lot of people are dying from accidents caused by drinking and driving. People are right about their privacy but something has to be done about it. Even if stopping for the police at checkpoints is a hassle when you are not drunk, in the long run it is better for everybody's safety (Smith, 1991, p. 49).

John’s understanding of the decision-making power of the Supreme Court was vague. The court did not pass a law (make a decision). Rather, it *upheld* a law that allowed for such searches. Another lesson could have focused on the branches of government and their divergent areas of responsibility. Such a civics lesson, however, did not propel the motor of John’s cutting edge learning drive. His critical learning task centered on the ability to summarize the news article and to state his own subtle view. He identified the problem, stated his opinion, gave recognition to counterarguments, and provided reasons for his choice.

John had difficulty holding a job and at the time of program entry, lacked concrete plans for the future. He was a recent high school graduate who exercised some degree of decoding ability, but possessed only limited organizational and articulation skills related to reading and writing. His tutor had difficulty working with John since he could not express interest in any particular topic. Also, he missed sessions, often without calling in advance. John could have easily fit the profile of a student enmeshed in “deficiency” lacking the social and cognitive aptitude to succeed in our program. Clearly, his unstable situation made it difficult to match him with a volunteer tutor. I decided to work with him personally since the flexibility of my schedule provided scope for John’s fluctuating attendance.

Despite John’s difficulty in maintaining stable employment, he resisted literacy lessons concentrating on “the world of work.” Therefore, I focused our early sessions on the Steck-Vaughn text, *Champions of Change: Famous Black Americans* (1989) because of its combination of meaningful content and structured vocabulary and writing exercises. John and I struggled “to make meaning” out of the biographies and his articulated responses represented more fused efforts between us than independent commentary. I was convinced, though, that his learning edge required such bridging support in order to extend his articulation and organization capacities forward. I sensed that this was a more fundamental learning need than stressing self-directed learning since John’s intellectual abilities had been so little developed in school. There is a danger in fostering dependency, but pushing a student toward self-directed learning when they have no inclination to move in that way seems self-defeating (Demetrian, 1993).

Over time, John’s decoding capacity increased and within eighteen months he became a fluent reader. He could struggle through long articles in the *Hartford Courant*, although the inordinate time required to complete them sometimes frustrated him. His organization and

articulation skills expanded and he even undertook a small amount of writing. In one writing episode, he was able to verbalize his argument, but could not write it down. As a bridging device, I wrote down what he said and presented it back to him in outline form. He was then able to fill in the outline in different words than the original narration.

In the last few months of our sessions, we focused extensively on *News For You*, a newspaper for new readers, and occasional articles about Hartford in the *Hartford Courant*. These were valuable sessions because they extended John's understanding of his community and city, broadened his knowledge of the wider world, and expanded his sight vocabulary. Furthermore it allowed scope for the exploration of disciplined thought, an activity with which previously John had little formal experience. Given this background on John's learning history, his paragraph on the Supreme Court represented a signal achievement.

Over time John felt comfortable with occasional literacy lessons on "the world of work" and much of our informal conversation centered on that. It was not that earlier John had expressed no interest in the topic; in fact it remained a vital concern. Rather, he needed a broadened educational experience for the development of his self-perception, which, in turn, had better equipped him for the many work related problems that confronted him. When I last spoke to him (summer 1993), John was enrolled in automobile repair school and was living independently on his own.

With John, a particular topic served a broader education process of expanding his self and world horizon. This was also the case with other students, although for some, the actual topic selected had particular salience. Consider the following essay in *Welcome To Our World*:

Church is a place to worship the Lord. It is very uplifting. Sometimes we have guest speakers. I remember one in particular, the co-pastor of the Baptist Church on the corner of Albany Avenue and Vine Street. He brought the church to life. His message was "somebody ought to say something." The Christians who say nothing are just as guilty as

the bad people, with their silence. Somebody ought to say something about the homeless. Somebody ought to say something about babies having babies (p. 52).

Or this piece by Derrick on “The Person I Would Like in Public Office”:

The man was not for drugs. He fought against drugs and for better education. This man fought for rights for all people in the United States. He worked for years with the best man who was not violent. He helped organize other people in the states and city to keep their jobs and to learn how to get a job in their own city and town. He got other people to start their own businesses and to get their own houses. He got people to read. The man is a pastor from his home town. He is honest and concerned about others. This well known person helps the poor and homeless to get themselves some kind of aid. His issues about people is to help themselves. The thought is, I am somebody. The great person's name is Jesse Jackson (p. 95).

Both of these essays addressed important public issues. Through them, the authors not only articulated their views, but more fundamentally expressed their “voice,” resounding with the tension, hope, and power of the African-American urban religious experience.

The power was carried in the poetics of their prose, reflecting in their writing the potency of the African-American oral narrative tradition. The cadence of “somebody ought to say something,” energizes not only the mind, but stirs the heart, soul, and imagination, recalling the collective experience of revival Baptist preaching and the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s. Derrick’s piece built on similar themes, but was particularly riveting in the dramatic tension he constructed in his narrative. To me, the symmetry of his organization seemed flawless. Each line built upon the other as the text became increasingly specific. He could have titled the essay, “Why I Would Like Jesse Jackson in Office.” Instead, his poetic sense compelled him to build up to the climatic point in his narrative by dropping evocative clues. This is not merely an essay, but the equivalent itself, of a stirring speech, sermon-like, emulating the rhythmic flow of the powerful language of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Jesse Jackson.

These essays provided vivid testimony on the relevance of socio-cultural themes in adult literacy education. John’s experience confirmed this, as well. For all three authors, personal

experience and self-perception were enhanced through rich socio-cultural learning. The narratives these students provided, moreover, laid the foundations for other students to tell of their stories and their worlds in their varied textured nuances that cumulatively helped to build community at the Reading Center. Whatever else adult literacy education may accomplish, it holds the promise of opening new vistas into rich and provocative personal social, cultural, and aesthetic experience. As Patricia A. Graham puts it:

Literacy enhances our humanity. If we are literate in late twentieth century America, we expand the ways in which we can learn, understand and appreciate the world around us. Through literacy we enlarge the range of vicarious experience, both through our command of written materials and through formulation of new ideas demanded by the rigors of writing and speaking...To learn, to express, to decide and to do...together permit us to become more autonomous individuals, less circumscribed by the conditions of social class, sex, and ethnicity into which we are born (cited in Harman, 1987, p. 92).

Such deep-rooted human needs cannot be the exclusive province of the social and cultural elite. They represent the birthright of all people by virtue of our common humanity. Approaches to literacy, which empower rather than alienate, are urgently needed in our postindustrial, postmodern society. A comprehensive adult literacy curriculum, suffused with provocative socio-cultural themes and topics would make an important contribution toward that cause.

Content: Insight Drawn From Student Interviews

Materials from the instructional log and *Welcome To Our World* illustrate the breadth of topics and issues that aroused the attention of the literacy learners at the Bob Steele Reading Center. They point to significant areas of interest in the personal, practical and socio-cultural realms and provide clues on the interrelationship of varied content areas in stimulating literacy development. The three student interviews in this section provide more focused attention on the

ways particular students shuttled back and forth among such interests and its significance in stimulating the learning dynamic.

Patricia

Consider Patricia's brief career at the Reading Center as a summer 1990 participant of the weekly writing clinic. In an interview, she highlighted practical goals in explaining why she entered the program. She wanted to obtain her GED, complete application forms, develop skills for more satisfactory employment, and read and write notes from and to school to help her children. The writing clinic was not explicitly intended to meet those precise needs. It focused rather, on group process skills, comprehension, vocabulary development, and expository writing. However, indirectly the clinic supported the intellectual development that would help Pat utilize critical thinking capacities needed to pass the GED and develop general communication skills that could be of value on the job or at her child's school.

Pat knew how to tap into Hartford's adult literacy "delivery system." She was referred to LVGH from the Connecticut Regional Education Center (CREC) Work and Learn Center that concentrated more on the specific skills she wanted to develop. Soon after leaving the Reading Center, she enrolled in another more basic-skill focused program while maintaining the support of an individual LVGH tutor. Other task specific programs would be available to Pat in Hartford as she increased her basic skills in reading and writing. Thus, Pat exerted considerable competency in utilizing the city's adult literacy programs to meet her specific needs and interests that any single program had been unable to completely offer.

Through the writing clinic, Pat met some of her learning needs, particularly in areas in which she had previously not given much attention. She initially felt more comfortable with one-to-one tutoring, but the collaborative dynamic of the writing clinic grew on her. She

discovered that “[w]e all have the problem, it’s not just you who needs the help.” Through the solidarity of the collaborative learning experience, Pat gleaned the importance of discussion as a way of increasing understanding. “Sometimes I sit down and read and don’t really know what I’m reading. In discussion I can understand more than when I’m [only] reading.” The social climate of the group affected her as well. “It’s a nice program. We read a topic, discuss it and write a paragraph. Everybody is friendly. Whatever you need help in, they will help you.”

Most of Pat’s assignments are not retrievable for analysis in this essay. In one session, however, she wrote a response to a Langston Hughes short story, *Thank You Ma’am*, about a young black youth who tried to mug an African-American woman. This woman befriended the would-be thief and provided him money to buy the shoes he so desperately wanted. Pat would have taken a different course of action:

I would be so mad that I would chase him down the street for my pocketbook. I was so mad, I picked him up by the collar and told him. “Why you want to snatch my pocketbook? Don’t you know you would go to jail?” I wouldn’t bring him home with me because I don’t know him. I don’t know what he might do, but I would talk to him (Smith, 1991, p. 45).

Other topics that summer included autobiographical writing, reflecting on student essays, articles from *News For You*, and an assignment on what love means to you (Matthews, 1993).

Pat’s brief participation at the Center makes it difficult to draw definitive conclusions about how personal, practical, and socio-cultural content interacted in her literacy development. The interview, does, however, point to the importance of the type of content focused on at the Writing Clinic in providing a useful “detour” towards Pat meeting some of her more practically based objectives.

Wayne

Wayne was in his early twenties when he came to the Reading Center in the early 1990s. He had recently migrated to Hartford from Jamaica. He was reflective, self-conscious, and struggling to make his way in the United States. When his work schedule permitted, he participated extensively in the lower reading level small groups while studying with an individual tutor. Like so many other students, Wayne also felt the groups were important as they helped him to realize “you are not alone in this.” With his one-to-one tutor Wayne worked on basic skill development and preparation for his driver’s license exam. He noticed “lots of differences” in his progress that helped him in practical ways and with his self-esteem. He came to feel that his parents could finally be proud of him and that people would assist him rather than ridicule his low reading ability. It may be difficult to discern with exact precision what he experienced when he stated, “I feel a lot, lot different now. I know I can do it. I just know I can read and write. I know I’m improving.” It seemed clear that Wayne underwent significant change as a result of some combination of support, actual development in reading ability, and the ways in which literacy had helped him in his daily affairs, though how enduring such change was in the scheme of his life history is another matter beyond the available evidence to explore here.

Of particular interest was Wayne’s response to an article on Martin Luther King, Jr. As he described it, “it stuck in my mind for two days; I kept thinking about it.” There was no further elaboration in the interview, so it is difficult to interpret exactly why Wayne found this so compelling. What King both accomplished and symbolized, however, was the possibility and need for African-Americans to transform history, both personal and social, in King’s case through the power of the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s. Like King, Wayne sought to be an agent in his own history instead of passively accepting a more fated existence.

Through literacy, Wayne began to sense the efficacy of his own potency in a land so different than his native Jamaica.

Wayne sought inclusion in the American mainstream. His work schedule prevented him from continuing in the program. Still, obtaining steady employment represented one of his primary goals. Nonetheless, he sought more than that. He desired not only to become a single homeowner, but to own more than one home in order to be a landlord. He worked diligently at his job and in his effort to pass the driver's test. Yet it was more than "functional literacy" as mastery of specific competencies that drove his basic needs and desire for learning. The interview described a letter Wayne wrote to a friend back home who could not read well. He knew that many people in his hometown could not read and he wished he could help them. He was particularly proud of that letter which he wrote with no help. Like Pat, Wayne drew on the social support of the Reading Center environment and the small group sessions in the quest to meet specific practical needs. He expanded his self-esteem and understanding of culture in the process. For Wayne, "mainstream" aspirations were joined to the sense of freedom, mastery, and as the letter indicated, social solidarity, that he sought with others who shared his struggle to achieve literacy.

Elaine

Elaine was also from Jamaica. She lived in Hartford with her son and worked in a textile factory that made seat covers for airplanes (Smith, 1991, p. 26). She studied at the Reading Center for several years beginning in 1990 and worked with individual tutors as well as the advanced small groups. This advanced reader at times wrote extensively, although erratically. In the summer of 1992, she obtained her U.S. citizenship and fulfilled one of her goals.

Although Elaine sought to pass the GED, her “main thing is improving my reading which is low.”

Elaine placed considerable value on the small group-tutoring program, along with the collaborative climate of the Reading Center. “You meet a lot of different people. You see you’re not alone. You have people [here] a lot like you.” Still, Elaine preferred individual instruction, which enabled her tutors to spend more time attending to her specific reading and writing needs. She cut back on group tutoring when assigned an individual tutor, but continued to draw on the group tutoring experience. She enjoyed one group in particular because “the teacher explained a lot. What we don’t understand, we talk about.”

Basic skill development was important to Elaine since the “main thing” stimulating her motivation was the desire for increased reading fluency. Even so, she identified a range of pragmatic and aesthetic purposes that enhanced literacy had begun to satisfy. She began to read road signs and her mail with ease. She was able to pay her bills and write letters. She started to shop with more proficiency and began to read the small print in the labeling. Previously, she knew what she wanted to buy at the grocery store, but eventually was able to read in detail the nutritional information on the packaging. “I want to know what I’m eating. I want to eat the right thing.” She gained the tools to make informed consumer decisions.

Elaine also enjoyed reading material of a more humanistic bent. “What I like to read are love stories, Time Magazine and the newspaper” (Smith, 1991, p. 26). She enjoyed reading about people, particularly human-interest stories. She began to read with considerable fluency, so “understanding is the main thing for me now.” She liked a science fiction story called “The Forgotten Door,” because of the strangeness of the character that had no knowledge of common

things such as shoes or cars. “He comes from a different world.” Bible reading was also important to her. As Elaine expressed it in a later interview:

Reading is important to me because as I see everything, I can read it. That’s the bottom line. That’s important to me. I want to read *everything* [original italics] that I can see....[W]hen I open a book I can read everything in it. That’s what’s important (Demetrian and Gruner, 1995, p. 55).

Like Derrick, Elaine was a master storyteller, although her cadences were softer and gentler, reflecting the warmth and closeness of the Caribbean culture shaped more by nature’s time than the clock-like efficiency of a postindustrial city like Hartford. Consider the beautiful images she created in the following story, *My Grand Parents*.

My grandparents are very loving grandparents. They liked and they spoiled their grandkids. They were living in the country. When we visited them, they took us to shops and bought us lots of sweets. Then they took us around their friends. Then my grandparents took us to the pool. They put us into the pool and splashed the water on us.

We stayed there for a while. My grandfather climbed the coconut tree and let us drink the coconut water. After we did that my grandparents sat under a tree and told us about their parents. We all started to laugh. It was getting dark so they took us home. My grandparents sat down in rocking chairs and started telling stories about an old goat and we laughed till we got tired and it was time to go to bed. My grandparents tucked us in our beds (Smith, 1991, p. 18).

Elaine came to possess the tools that enabled her to share with us, her readers, the richness of her inner world and cultural heritage. Through her emerging literacy, the world of all who engage her work may also become enriched.

Subject Matter and the Dynamics of Interactive Learning

The evidence presented on content points to the complex interplay between personal, practical, aesthetic, and socio-cultural interests among adult literacy learners as they sought to make meaning through print in the literacy program, at home, at work, in the community, and in the larger world to which they belong. The Reading Center library, including its own student-generated texts, provided valuable resources in all of these content areas that students and tutors

drew upon to enrich their instructional program. A comprehensive adult literacy curriculum that draws on the EFF project, CASAS, the core topic areas of the GED, and the plethora of student narratives developed throughout many adult literacy programs, could be developed that allows expression for these varied and complex interests. Even so, instructional content is a means, only, toward more inclusive goals of learning and life development, which involves the engagement of the student in the process of acquiring new knowledge or reconstructing past experience through new insight.

For Dewey (1916), subject matter represents “working resources, available capital” in “further[ing] new experiences, which may, in some respects at least, surpass the achievements embodied in existing knowledge and works of art” (p. 182). As he further explains it:

Information is usually the name given to this kind of subject matter [content]. The place of communication in personal doing supplies us with a criterion for estimating the value of informational material in school. Does it grow naturally out of some question which the student is concerned? Does it fit into his more direct acquaintance so as to increase its efficacy and deepen its meaning? If it meets these two requirements, it is educative. The amount read or heard is of no importance—the more the better, *provided* [original italics] the student has a need [or desire] for it and can apply it to some situation of his own (p. 186).

As we think through the content that students drew upon at the Bob Steele Reading Center in the early- and mid-1990s, and even subject matter that could provide the basis for a comprehensive adult literacy education, it is the relationship between any specific content and the students’ needs, interests, and aspirations, which is the critical factor. Notwithstanding this caveat, content plays a critical role. In Dewey’s (1916) words, “[i]t is kind of a bridge for mind in its passage from doubt to discovery. It has the office of an intellectual middleman” (p. 188). All things being equal, the richer and more extensive the better—better still, a pedagogy that provides structure to guide educational decisions, including the selection of materials.

In the next two chapters, we shift the focus from content, to outcomes, goals, and aspirations. In doing so, it will be useful to keep the content of instruction as a “middleman” in mind as students and tutors identify and work with specific subject matter in the quest of making meaning of their learning within the broader socio-cultural context that gives shape to the environment both within and outside the program in which it is situated.

Chapter Five

Outcomes

The categories I utilize in this essay are at times, barely distinguishable. The ways of learning and the content of instruction are intertwined in practice, as are the complex relationships among social, affective, and cognitive forces in their intricate interplay as sources of motivation. This is also the case in the artificial distinction between outcomes and goals. They flow into and reinforce each other.

By outcomes, I am referring to specific, isolatable achievements that follow in some way as a consequence of literacy development. In this study, these will include test score improvements, definable “life-skill” achievements, and the self-report of students as disclosed in the interviews and oral history narratives. I discriminate between outcomes and goals, which even when specific, serve as signposts for more deeply rooted desires. I also separate implicit, emerging goals that can be better understood as aspirations, from those that are explicit which are similar to outcomes except they are broader.

Standardized Test Scores: The READ Test

Test scores alone provide limited information in discerning the success of particular students (Tierney, Carter and Desai, 1991, pp. 21-37). According to some of the foremost scholars on adult literacy evaluation, standardized testing “fails to capture even a part of the complex interactions involved in teaching and learning” (Lytle and Wolfe, 1989, p. 65). At best, they depict certain *measurable* improvements over time and cumulatively serve as one indicator in evaluating the success of a program.

They are limited in various ways. First, standardized test scores only demonstrate independent reading ability and fail to measure both the “scaffolding” (Cazden, 1992, p. 131) instructors provide through assisted reading practices along with the almost invisible progress

that ensues over long periods of time, particularly when scores remain low. Second, they fail to distinguish the importance of divergent abilities, motivational levels, and needs in the determination of the elusive quality of success, which is grounded ultimately on the uses of literacy and its influence on the self-perception of the student (Smith, 1988, pp. 93-108.). Third, standardized tests often fail to gauge the actual reading content students may encounter in their daily lives or even in their regular instructional program. Fourth, they have a tendency to reinforce a public school oriented competitive psychology, which is counter to philosophies of adult literacy that stress self-directed and collaborative modes of learning (Cheatham and Lawson, 1990, pp. 3-5). Finally, students socialized within a schooling model of education, often overemphasize the importance of testing. This can be particularly disconcerting when little visible gains are achieved even when considerable, hard to measure learning has taken place at the “micro-stage” level. Notwithstanding these critical limitations, post-score increases are viewed in this essay as one visible measure of growth. At least for those who can read somewhat fluently, they provide one rough indicator of progress. Moreover, many students view score increases as an important symbol of achievement.

The primary instrument used at the Reading Center during the early- and mid-1990s was the *Reading Evaluation Adult Diagnosis (READ)* developed by Literacy Volunteers of America (Colvin and Root, 1982). It was characterized as a diagnostic in pinpointing various skill “deficiencies” in the mastery of sight words, phonemic awareness, and basic decoding and comprehension of simple reading passages. Based on its sequential reading passages from B to J level, it was intended as an informal instrument, useful for placement and as a measure of progress. Although not strictly analogous to school grade levels, the READ passages

“correspond[ed] roughly to that encompassed by materials in elementary textbooks” (Colvin and Root, 1982, p. 47). The authors were cognizant that life experience and interest influence reading ability (p. 46). Yet, they were stuck with the grade school analogy since LVA had not developed more qualitative ways of evaluating literacy development that could be applied in a reasonably uniform manner across its approximately 400 local affiliates. Neither had the agency developed, during the time period that this essay covers, an assessment instrument congruent with its post-1990 philosophy of literacy based on whole language reading theory, process writing, and collaborative learning (Cheatham, Colvin, and Laminack, 1990; Cheatham and Lawson, 1993).

Notwithstanding these caveats, I draw on the accumulated test scores of Reading Center students to identify certain aspects of learner growth and to shed insight on broader programmatic development. Specifically, as a rough indicator, the scores provided one source of evidence that long term commitment to literacy learning resulted in increased reading ability among students at the Reading Center. Of the approximately forty post scores then available, gains in decoding word ability (word recognition) reflected in post-test advances in READ levels, were achieved by all students except one who experienced mental retardation. A conclusion that can be drawn is that literacy learning is a natural process, requiring considerable practice and attention. The scores provide some evidence that there was nothing inherent in the “mental equipment” of the vast majority of adult literacy students at the Reading Center program to prevent growth in basic reading ability given the availability and time to participate in an appropriate learning climate.

The scores also indicated a variable rate of learning among particular students, regardless of the hours of instruction. Notwithstanding such fluctuation, due to the many factors discussed

in this essay and elsewhere, a common LVA standard of program effectiveness states that fifty hours of tutoring generally results in one grade level of improvement or two letter grades on *READ*. This was more or less consistent with the Reading Center averages. Yet, as the case studies have demonstrated, there are many problems with such a measure especially in an learner-centered program with a strong individualized focus. For example, it took David over 100 hours of instruction to make any visible breakthrough on the *READ*, while Angelo moved up several notches in approximately the same time. On the other hand, Angelo seemed more inhibited in utilizing his skills and experimenting with literacy, while David maximized more of his full capacities. These factors make it difficult, if not impossible to determine who was the more successful student, a question that is at least implicit when a standard measure of performance is used.

From a student-centered perspective such comparisons are irrelevant, but they become part of the public discourse on literacy since funders and policy experts tend look to such “objective” information like test scores to gauge the success of a program. Test scores help to document the rate of learning for particular students. They can be useful to students, instructors, and program staff as one source of information, but other evidence is required to make a holistic evaluation of individual progress and programmatic effectiveness.

Test scores can also play some role in helping to document the overall effectiveness of the program if other, more qualitative factors are also considered. Literacy Volunteers of New York City (LVNYC) utilized test scores to demonstrate that “program participants reached a plateau after 50 hours of instruction” (Lytle and Wolfe, 1989, p. 28). LVNYC concluded, therefore, as the study put it, that “the agency should make other options available after the initial 50 hour period” and concentrate its efforts toward reaching new students while establishing

linkages with other literacy and adult education providers (p. 29). Instituting such connections in assisting students to transfer to appropriate programs represents an important service, particularly for advanced level students. Yet our documentation leads us to conclude that lower-level students at the Reading Center derived benefits well after 200 hours of instruction. In fact, as the case presentations in Chapter Three indicate, such time was often required to enable students to make significant breakthroughs to achieve even modest literacy attainments.

To assure such multi-year participation necessary to achieve sustained benefits from a single program, an appropriate learning climate needed to be established. This was more feasible in such an environment as the Reading Center, particularly when juxtaposed to the decentralized LVA instructional model where students and tutors meet as isolated dyads without much direct contact with the program. It was the flexibility of the individual and small group tutoring program, combined with the emotional support and social bonding the Center's environment reinforced, which made it possible for students like David, Orlando, Derrick and Patricia to meet a wide array of learning opportunities that would have proved difficult in another setting. The cognitive, affective, and social climate we deliberately nurtured helped to make the Center an environment that fostered long term literacy development. Advanced students were encouraged to explore other programs, but the Center developed a promotion system within its program so that someone like David was able to commit to a three-to-five year period in one stable environment without experiencing the plateau effect that LYNYC identified after 50 hours of tutoring. This is not to deny a plateau effect among students at various levels, though caution is warranted in assuming that visibly flat growth is synonymous with no or little progress or with potential for further development over time. Thus, aggregate test score analysis was useful in helping to identify some of the long-term effects of the Reading Center program.

Life Skill Achievements

During the period under study (1990-1995) LVGH reported test scores and “life-skill achievements” to its state office LVA-CT. Both were forms of coded information reduced to a letter or a number. The list of life skills developed by LVA-CT consisted of such achievements as obtaining a driver’s license, finding a job, completing a book, obtaining citizenship, and transferring to another adult education program. These skills were synonymous with certain general “behaviors,” or “competencies,” in which correlations might conceivably be drawn between them and increased literacy proficiency. However, without further documentation, it would be difficult to go beyond making inferences that in any situation, (1) literacy and skill development were directly correlated, (2) that such competencies were, in fact, desirable or particularly significant as experienced among actual students.

Still, we thought the list included important outcomes, but also required finer categories that more closely approximated the many *processes* toward becoming increasingly literate that students experienced in our program. That is, we needed to identify and document finer distinctions in what people were accomplishing through their participation in the program to better assess the sense of progress and growth they were achieving. The locally expanded list included participating in more than one group at the Center, writing an essay, moving to an advanced group, engaging in peer tutoring, and undertaking the GED pre-test. I included brief sentence descriptions of the accomplishments in my own “data base” to complement the expanded numerated categories.

Seventy-seven students achieved documented life skills and many had more than one listed. They ranged widely. Orlando participated in more than one group, obtained a job, and

completed an oral history. In the earlier code, job attainment would have been the only identified skill reported which in this case had little to do with his literacy development.

Catherine wrote an essay for *Welcome To Our World*. Delores entered Adult Basic Education (ABE), wrote an essay, and took the GED pre-test. Carol wrote an essay, took the GED pre-test, participated in more than one group, and moved to a more advanced program. Pat addressed a tutor-training workshop, served as a peer tutor, recruited a friend for the Center, spoke at a major LVGH fund raising function, and completed an oral history. All of these represented significant achievements identified in the expanded code list in their pointing to the complex interplay of social, emotional and cognitive forces operative in the process of becoming literate at the Bob Steele Reading Center.

It was possible to list accomplishments, but their significance within the context of the lives of students were not always so crystal clear. For example, Daniel started his own car detailing business, completed an oral history, participated in more than one group, and began writing. He completed over 200 hours of tutoring and had risen from level A to C on the *READ* test. Yet for a variety of reasons his participation in the program slacked off. If he has not joined another program, his literacy skills likely atrophied. If he has or will return to an adult literacy learning setting and attains a higher level of literacy, the accomplishments he gained while at the Reading Center may have had another meaning to him than if he remains disengaged.

What was significant for Daniel as well as for the other students mentioned was the on-going relationship of literacy development to life experience. These outcomes represented certain signposts on the way toward increasing literacy that had more or less meaning for

particular students during specific periods in their lives. Their salience can only be clarified as the life process of these learners, unfolded.

Even the expanded code list represented only standardized achievements identified by the literacy agency. Self-reported evidence derived from student interviews and oral history narratives shed further light on the subjective significance of specific outcomes. In a program grounded in a learner-center philosophy, these should have particular salience, certainly more so than test scores and coded “life-skill” achievements. To “legitimize” such documentation as a major source of programmatic evaluation will require a transformation of a fundamental metaphor of assessment from that of quantification to that of story (Kazemek, 1991, 1992). In “mainstream” agencies like LVA that depend so extensively on corporate and governmental support, such a shift will prove no easy task. Yet, as the following material discloses, insight generated among students themselves on the values that they attributed to literacy provided a powerful sense on how their newly emerging aptitude impacted on their lives in very concrete ways that standardized documentation could never illuminate.

Ethnographic Documentation

Student Interviews

Willie stated that increased literacy allowed him to read shipping tickets at his job more easily. It also enabled him to attain a better grasp of changes at work with “the new regime.” Thus, in his ability to read the word, he was also better able to read the world. In addition, he learned to read road signs, maps and the Bible. These were all significant outcomes to this forklift driver, then in his early sixties, on the verge of retirement. After studying at the Center, Quinten was able to read the labels on some of the material unloaded from trucks at his job and obtained more skill in filling out forms. He also used the public library to find new stories to

read. Durante reported that he was able to read portions of the newspaper independently. Maria began to read the newspaper and some of the magazines in the doctor's waiting room. This Portuguese born woman began to converse better in English on the telephone and developed more confidence in the reading and writing she needed to do in her daily life. Wayne learned to read road signs and "finds himself looking for things to read rather than avoiding them."

Pat began to read menus and road signs. He was especially pleased when he read the nametag of a waitress. This enabled him eat what he wanted when dining, and travel anywhere. As a French Canadian, he also began to speak more fluently in English and reported that he was better able to read a little in French. Pat also started to read portions of the newspaper. He did not always decipher every word he read but felt he could understand the gist of a story. Winston learned to read more items at the supermarket and the menu at the restaurant where he worked. Anthony said that he could "talk to people better" and "explain himself better" due to his expanded vocabulary and confidence. Orality and literacy were mutually reinforcing with Pat, Anthony (Chapter Six), and many other students.

Roderick improved his math skills and mastered long division. Filling out reports at work became easier. Roderick also learned to help himself learn. He brought some of his advanced group work to his individual tutor for additional help. Thus, he utilized the diverse resources at the Reading Center to meet his specific learning needs. Hector was able to read stories to his young child. He also became more aware of street signs and started to identify certain words in the newspaper.

Winklett learned to read the "easier parts" of the Bible and told of buying a cake in the supermarket in which she was able to follow the baking directions on the box. When she shopped, after participating in the program for some time, she was able to purchase goods with

greater discrimination. As she expressed it, “[b]efore I could understand what I wanted, but now I can read what I need very clearly. Before I would ask questions, but now I don’t have to” (Demetrian and Gruner, 1995, p. 2).

Brenda also began to read her Bible on her own. She spoke of being able to read her Narcotics Anonymous book, *How It Works*. The interviewer, commenting on the difficulty of the text, wondered if she had difficulty with it. Brenda’s retort was, “I get it baby, you can believe that. It takes me long, but I struggle with it. I read it...all by myself. And I was proud, too” (p. 6). Brenda also reported on being able to pay bills and read her mail on her own. She also was able to read correspondence from her child’s school. When asked why she couldn’t simply depend on the information her child tells her about school, Brenda relayed, “I’d rather know for myself.” As she further explained, “[s]ometimes the kids don’t say it the right way. They might mislead you. But if you have a letter, then you know exactly what the teacher wants you to bring or wants you to do” (ibid).

Oral History Narratives

While the interviews pointed out the significance of specific outcomes, the oral history narratives that LVGH completed in collaboration with Trinity College provided more vivid detail on the value students attribute to literacy. His narrative description subtly underscores the *significance* Pat placed on his ability to read road signs and restaurant menus:

The other night I went to move my sister-in-law. We took a new road that has been built out to Manchester (I-384) rather than taking the Silver Lane exit. We got on the highway to go home and my wife asked if I knew where I was going. I said yes. I could *read*. I could read the highway signs. It said “Boston” one way and “Hartford” the other. And I was able to do this all by myself. I could find my way home. I felt really good about that. I felt independent because I could find my way home myself simply because now, I can read (Lestz, Demetrian, and Smith, Vol I, 1994, p. 94).

Now if I go into a restaurant, I don’t have to pretend I am reading the menu, I really read it. My wife used to read it to me. I hated when people were with us or around us because

they would know that I can't read and may think I am a dummy. But now I can order food myself. I also can read the paper enough to know about what is going on. To me this is something (Smith, Ball, Demetron, and Michelson, 1993, p. 151).

Consider David's five-year odyssey of becoming literate at the Bob Steele Reading Center:

I try to develop myself now. When I see writing on the wall, I try to read it. I try to figure out what it is. I improved a lot to me, since I'm here; I've learned a lot. I read books by myself sometimes. I read newspapers with my teacher. I try to figure out the words. If I can't, she helps me. She makes me stagger couple of times, then I find it.

I feel good for myself. When I see "Exit" and the fire sign outside, I can read it. And *I know* [emphasis added] I can read it. So I feel good (p. 23).

David went on to relate how he turned down a promotion at work because it required reading.

Soon thereafter, he devised a strategy that enabled him to identify various meats that were unloaded from trucks at the grocery store where he worked:

But now I take the same paper [a check list] from last month. I take down all the meat from the truck, just like that. Because it's easy. If you just put your mind to it you can get it...So I think I could read anything in my workplace, read any kind of meat. But if I go somewhere without the paper, or without the boxes, I cannot spell it by my head. I could read it once I see it on the box, I could tell you exactly what it is. It's the spelling (p. 23).

As a parent, Florence reported reading books on babies and child care and reviewing her children's homework, all of which she was previously unable to do. Florence, who had migrated first from St. Kitts and then had lived in Puerto Rico for several years, came to the U.S. mainland when she was in her early 20s. She had first worked as a maid. Later, she became a day care worker. It was in that position that she first realized that she had a reading problem, as she could not read to the children. As she expressed it, "I couldn't get anywhere with it" (Lestz, Demetron, and Smith, 1994, Vol. I, p. 19). This predicament was amplified as her daughter entered school and was having difficulty reading and "needed my advising" (ibid.). It was at that time that Florence entered the LVGH program and worked closely first, with her individual tutor,

focusing much on family and parenting themes, before eventually joined the groups at the Center.

Both Pat and David entered the program as virtual nonreaders. Florence was somewhat more advanced, but far from fluent. Their outcomes may seem modest to the casual observer but were significant *for them*. Keeping in mind that literacy is only one explanatory factor that may be more or less salient in any given situation, through these and other such accomplishments, students move toward new horizons in self-perception and in the social worlds they recreate. As one student eloquently attested:

If anything it's brightened up my life. I know that I have come off better than I was. I learned more than I knew when I first started coming. So it inspired me.

I felt down when I first started coming, but now I don't. I feel good about it and about myself. I know I can read much better than I could, and write better than I could. I couldn't even think about writing a letter, then. So I can just say it's been a big improvement. My head's coming up (Smith et. al., 1993, p. 42).

Such statements need to be juxtaposed with other evidence in order to demonstrate impact, whether of short, moderate, or long-term duration. Nonetheless they serve as a critical baseline particularly from phenomenological and ethnographic research perspectives in discerning the various influences that adult literacy education has on the lives of students. Whatever their limitations in serving as evidence of impact, these expressed experiences and sentiments represent important information that only qualitative research can begin to investigate (Merriam, 2001). Additional research on the complex relationships between literacy development, motivation, and life impact clearly requires additional research. In our discussion in the next chapter on goals and aspirations, where we will draw more extensively on the Reading Center's ethnographic literature, the probe on motivation through the learning cycle and its life impact continues and deepens.

Chapter Six

Goals and Aspirations

Outcomes represent the visible manifestations of literacy education in their more immediate impact. They are also part and parcel of the total literacy experience and cannot be sharply demarcated from the processes, the content, and the more broadly ranged goals and aspirations that underlie the phenomena of becoming literate. Throughout this essay I have sought to describe the flow of literacy learning which at best, can only be imperfectly mirrored in a written text that imposes its own abstractions and categories on a process ultimately incomprehensible through language, alone. Much remains elusive even in the effort to explore the significance of content and outcomes. Such is even more the case in identifying goals and aspirations, which by their nature often transcend stated discernable ends. That aspect of growth that may be most important in any given situation may be the means exerted in the effort towards their achievement rather than in “final” objectives realized. Nonetheless, an effort is attempted in the following section in the same manner characterized throughout this study, through “thick description,” the triangular deployment of evidence, and my own critical reflection.

While certain goals may be specific and concrete, others, grounded more deeply in possibility and potential, may also serve as the means by which individuals seek to transcend given realities in the on-going process of relating being to becoming. Thus, even in the attainment of a GED or a job, the satisfaction is not always only in the material objects sought, as important as they may be, but also in what they represent in the psychic and social experiences of particular individuals. These often point to more deeply rooted aspirations that perpetually call people further into life in the on-going constructions of their personal and social identities. However ineffable such aspirations may seem, they very well may hold the keys to some of the

most fundamental sources of motivation, which may or may not be nourished by the tutoring process.

Explicit Goals

Students sought to achieve a variety of explicit goals upon entering the Reading Center linked to job mobility, educational advancement, helping children with school work, living more effectively in the neighborhood and community, reading the Bible, and improvement of reading skills. A perusal of the student interviews, *Welcome To Our World*, and the oral history narratives, shed much light on the specific goals that motivated particular learners.

Derrick, for example, wanted to become a deacon at the Hopewell Baptist Church. This required an ability to read the Bible and other church related material (Matthews, 1993; Smith, 1991, p. 53). Pedro studied in order to attain a better job (Smith, 1991, p. 61). Winston wanted a driver's license and "to get a better job so I can make more money" (p. p. 12). Marva sought her GED in order to go on to college (p. 24). Elaine wanted to become an independent reader "without anyone helping me" (p. p. 26). Gary joined the program to gain the reading skills necessary to obtain a real estate license, but pointed to something more elusive as well:

Literacy is a means of achieving a new way of life. The ability to read, write, and understand what you are doing will help you not to shy away from anything and deal with the situation at hand (p. 64).

Dan's story also suggested some of the more personal goals that motivate many literacy students.

One day I went to work. It was a new job. I was there for two weeks. So that day my boss called me into his office. I was not sure what he wanted. He told me to write a note because I needed a name tag. I was scared. I did not know what to do. I did not know how to write. So I got up and said I had to go to the bathroom. I was so mad at myself. I left the bathroom and went back to his office. He was not there. I took the paper to my office and wrote the note with my dictionary. Thanks to my tutor Tom I can write this essay (p. 64).

The student interviews confirmed a similar range of explicit goals as depicted in *Welcome To Our World*. Willie sought skills to pay bills, write checks, read road signs, and the Bible. Quinten entered the program because he was “tired of looking at stuff I couldn’t read. If I go to school I could learn more than being on the street.” Durante identified reading the newspaper and filling out job applications as important goals. Angelo wanted to become an independent reader so that he could learn enough to get by and keep learning after that. He wanted to learn how to organize his thoughts and make presentations at work. Pearl wanted “to fill out...personal papers [and learn] how to read a cookbook—different things to help me in my old age.” She also desired to read the Bible and participate in religious discussions.

Pat wanted to obtain a high school diploma. “For me, it’s almost a must. I’m going to be the first one in my family to finish high school.” Pat also wanted to read blueprints at work to provide him with the skills to become a partner in the firm where he was employed.

Ralph, a working class Italian-American in his late fifties, was “fascinated with poetry. [It] touches your heart...it has so much feeling and meaning.” Ralph also had more practical goals. By improving his literacy skills, he would be able to take the lead in day-to-day situations that require reading.

The oral history narratives documented a similar range of explicit goals that motivated the adult literacy learners at the Bob Steele Reading Center. Sylvia wanted a driver’s license and a high school diploma in order to become a hairdresser. “I have to go to school for that” (Smith, et. al., 1993, p. 52). Florence identified as one of her main purposes, the ability “to read more for my kids....I’m more interested in reading right now so I could help my kids more” (Oral History draft).

As noted above, Orlando sought practical goals of GED attainment and the desire to become a mechanic. Yet he also pointed to an innate quest for learning as one of his deepest sources of motivation:

I read about history and geography, and about the planets. It's a thrill to go back in time and live in that time. I find that interesting and fun. I like to know about nature and stuff, human and animal. All these things are pretty exciting. It keeps me motivated. It's too bad I wasn't thinking before, when I was in school. I've been cheating myself. You miss out on a lot you should be doing, things you like doing, because you can't read and learn about it.

About a year ago I really started to think about how I could have done this or that and where I'd be today if I could read (Smith, Ball, Demetron, Michelson, 1993, p. 12).

David's goals were more diffuse, which emerged almost imperceptibly over time. Yet even at the beginning of his journey at the Center, he recognized the importance of literacy for living in such a complex city as Hartford compared to his native Guyana:

I think the future got to come with school. Don't want to start thinking about the future as yet, you know. I get a good feeling because it's one step I make already. I wait for the last moment for the first time to come to learn to read (p. 23).

As a construction worker, forty-three year old Pat needed to learn to read in order to have reading skills that would prepare him for non-manual labor work in later years. "I am tired of using my arms for work. I want to use my head. My body don't want to go anymore. My bones need oil" (Lestz, Demetron, and Smith, Vol. I, 1994, p. 91). Earlier, we saw the importance of literacy in enhancing Pat's self esteem, which his oral history narrative clearly disclosed.

Carlos equated becoming increasingly literate akin to his "born again" conversion experience to Christianity:

You know what it is...I ruined my life...I went to school, but everything is forgotten. So you forgot how to read, you forget. You forget how to write. So you've got to come back and study on it so everything will come back to you. And that's what it's been. I've got to come back and start all over again. Because I am a new child. I was born again in Christ, so everything is new. For me class work is new for me, and it's a goal, because I

have to do something with my life and not waste it like I wasted all those years (oral history draft).

The born again motif, linking literacy and religion to the “new man,” profoundly shaped this former gang leader’s “new” being. Self-esteem and self-renewal represented primary goals. He concluded his oral history with a discussion on how his parents viewed him after undergoing profound life changes:

My father and mother, right now, they shocked. They’re still going, “wow, that’s Carlos.” They proud. Now they’re proud. ‘Cause if you’d see me going out in all those years, and you would see this terrible kid. But now you see this man who is going to school. Trying to make it. Going to church. What I didn’t do when I was young, I’m doing it now. So, they proud (oral history draft).

Emerging, Implicit Goals and Aspirations

The explicit reasons people give for participating in the Center’s program were significant. The discussion on outcomes and explicit goals provide evidence that for the persistent, many concrete objectives have been or were in the process of being realized. An undue focus on specific “goals,” however, tends to shift the learning process toward a behaviorist mode whereby students and tutors identify specific objectives and work systematically toward their attainment. Such a model works best when a particular and achievable goal is at hand such as studying for a driver’s license or citizenship. Thus, for a six-week period, Carlos worked with his tutor, Jane, four hours per week studying the driver’s manual, which he did obtain.

Many other goals, however, even those concrete, occur through indirection, particularly if the literacy level required is considerably higher than what the student already possesses. In order to maintain commitment for the long term, more intrinsic sources of motivation need to be tapped.

Derrick

Derrick, for example, had specific goals in mind related to his church life when he entered the program, but new vistas opened up to him as he engaged the literacy process. Initially he thought he would improve his reading and writing skills, which he did accomplish. What he did not expect, however, was the experience of learning itself, would open up to him, which stimulated intense autobiographical reflection and writing. Derrick had always possessed an expressive oratory, but through literacy, he was able to develop his poetic voice in writing as attested in his essay on Jesse Jackson previously quoted. Consider also the following extract from “The Lone Ranger:”

I feel like I am the Lone Ranger. Sitting alone without a care and without a home. No one to see, no one to talk to, not using my time. I feel like I am losing my mind. Days and nights have gone by so fast, I do not need my mind to help me to remember how lonely I am. It pains me to think of the loneliness I feel inside. But the pain to my heart has reach up to my brain (Smith, 1991, p. 93).

Derrick’s heartfelt and provocative essays are interspersed throughout *Welcome To Our World* and a special section is devoted to a collection of his work (pp. 90-98). The following essay, “Working on My Dreams,” written early in his career at the Bob Steele Reading Center, provides a glimpse of the complexity of his thought process in his articulation of words and images by which to convey the sense of his shifting levels of motivation in “owning” the process of learning to read:

It was a rainy night years ago. I was looking at the walls of my house. At that time I was not doing anything. I had an instant thought about learning how to read better. But my mind was not in tuned with the thoughts I had come up with to solve my problem.

As the night air became cold and filled my room, my mind was wrestling with bad thoughts that I could not explain or could not understand.

I know you are thinking that I was losing my mind; I was thinking the same thing. I was trying to put myself together in one piece.

The next thing I knew I had to put myself to sleep. As I was sleeping, I was reading a book in my dream. I was reading like I did not have a reading problem. I was reading so well and so good. I read it from beginning to end without any problem at all.

I had awakened from my dreaming. I realized that that the dream that I had was not complete and I must do something about it. I had given a lot of thought about my reading problem, then something came to me. If I read more and study my words harder, my reading skills will increase.

My thoughts sounded solid and clear about what I should do. I put my mind, body and soul in my reading and writing. As the days and nights have gone by, I have experienced constant improvement. I felt so good about working hard and long to better myself in reading and writing.

Afterward, the wind had died down and the trees had stopped moving from side to side; I had not lost even one thought about what I wanted to do about my reading.

My mind was clear and my body was strong with all that with me. I was ready to do the very thing I had dreamed about which was to read anything without any mistakes (p. 92).

It is not perfectly clear the extent to which Derrick fused creative fiction into this seemingly factual account. Assuming there is some of that, his capacity to blur the genres of different art forms is a reflection of his artistic appropriation of print literacy with his emergent autobiographical development, particularly expressed in the revelatory nature of the key motivational shift, where he said (above), “then something came to me.” This art form of what might be characterized as *creative fiction* became the basis through which Derrick conveyed something of process of how he transformed a far from perfectly formed wish into a strong desire, the manifestation of which was confirmed throughout his substantial, multi-year involvement in the Reading Center program.

Through his participation at the Center, Derrick not only developed his intellectual aptitude, but became an integral member of the Literacy Volunteers of Greater Hartford community by serving as a student support leader as well as being a member of the affiliate’s

board of directors. He was also a charter member of the agency's North End Committee, which developed LVGH's presence and credibility with Hartford's African-American community.

Derrick was an exemplary adult learner who drew upon the program's resources to meet some of his own life ends and to expand undeveloped talents, which required explicit nurturing for them to become manifest. Although not what he originally had in mind, he maximized opportunities inherent within the Center's social and intellectual climate to fulfill some of his more deeply rooted, latent aspirations for knowledge, community, and mission while pursuing literacy education (Matthews, 1993). Initially, he wanted to develop his skills in order to be a more effective churchman. His increased literacy proficiency helped him with that. Yet through the process of learning and participating in the life of the Center, Derrick opened new perceptual vistas that proved at least as, if not more important to him, than his stated goals. Moreover, by defining his calling at the Reading Center as part of his religious mission, Derrick was able to connect new goals with some of the original sources of motivation that had initially brought him to the program (Smith, Ball, Demetrian, and Michelson, 1993, pp. 107-108).

Through his years at the Reading Center, Derrick had written a novel, peer taught, led student support groups, participated in various program-wide initiatives, and served on LVGH's Board of Directors. By embracing the many dimensions of literacy and experiencing its intrinsic satisfactions, Derrick expanded his own consciousness and made a vital contribution to the program. These were unintended accomplishments that emerged through his vital participation in the program for over almost a decade. As he expressed it:

You have a variety of ideas to offer. But it takes education to bring all this out. I guess what education has done for me is to bring all these things out of me. I may have had it from the beginning, but there never was an opportune time for it all to be brought out. I had to wait until education came into my life and opened these things up to me, to give me more ways to express myself (p. 108).

Commenting further, Derrick noted that the program was “a big test” for him. Instead of constraints he experienced possibilities. Even though he knew there were limits to them, he didn’t know what they were. Rather, in “seeking to see what” they were, he was testing his own emergent capacities. As he put it, “[i]f I get into something that doesn’t work right, I move on to the next thing. I don’t know my limits, right now. I’m just taking anything I can grab onto and seeing what I can do with it” (p. 109).

Derrick was able to read with approximately fourth grade reading proficiency when he entered the program. He was a high school graduate and had worked steadily at Pratt and Whitney Aircraft in East Hartford for over twenty years. He only “discovered” he had a reading problem when his pastor passed him by in a group Bible reading session after he had flubbed the reading the first time. Until that time, he had not realized that he had, what he referred to, as a “reading problem.” As one of the most advanced students I have ever encountered and one also possessed with a very strong sense of self-direction and artistic creativity, Derrick’s learning career exemplifies something of the outer boundary of the adult literacy learning experience.

However, as the following case presentations illustrate, there are many manifestations of progress at all levels of learning that take on a wide range of expressions. Neither the student descriptions throughout this essay, nor that of Derrick’s learning history, are meant to be representative in any statistical sense. Rather, I draw on them to illuminate significant aspects of the learning process and the varied impacts, both those direct and indirect, on adult literacy education that beg additional research and analysis from a wide stream of academic and practitioner-based frameworks.

Estelle

Unlike Derrick, who possessed a clear sense of what he wanted to achieve, even as new aspirations emerged through his engagement at the Reading Center, Estelle's motivation was more diffuse. Estelle, who was in her mid-thirties, experienced mild mental retardation, and lived at home with her family. Her concerned sister brought her to the Center. She made some progress in the mastery of decoding skills, but her comprehension and reading ability were only negligibly improved.

Estelle seemed secure in her family life, although frustrated at her marginality at home, where her family wanted to do for and protect her that exacerbated her dependency. Few support systems were in place to aid Estelle in developing independent living skills. She and/or her parents may have thought that the Center could have provided some help in the expansion of her practical, coping skills. However, it would have been difficult for a two-hour per week volunteer tutorial program without other support systems, to provide much help in those areas. Estelle held brief employment as a dishwasher in various restaurants, but invariably lost those positions due to her inability to cope with the workload and, to some extent, the unwillingness of the management to re-organize the workplace in response particularly to Estelle's difficulty in keeping up with the pace of work. However, she gained part time employment in a nursery stocking shelves, a position she attained through the assistance of a neighbor.

Estelle's two tutors provided much insight on her hard to measure progress. Both tutors concluded that decontextual phonic exercises and sight word memorization had little appeal. However, her second tutor noted that phonics embedded within a workbook had more effect than simply breaking down words on a note pad that provided a type of context for working on them that she might have learned in school. Estelle also did better with sight words that were

contextualized through *cloze* exercises in which the student needs to choose the correct word to make sense of the sentence. Her first tutor discovered that rhyming exercises proved somewhat effective, while the second tutor identified the visual as a primary context through which Estelle learned best. Estelle had no discernable silent reading ability and learned most effectively through assisted reading approaches. According to her second tutor, “Some days she’s cold as ice, other days she’s rolling.”

Her first tutor was a college librarian and had a strong avocation for children's literature, which she and Estelle read constantly. Her second tutor continued in this vein, but broadened Estelle’s instructional program to include human-interest stories from the *Reader’s Digest Skill Building* series. She also drew upon easy to read plays, job applications, vocabulary related to the kitchen, and games. Estelle responded well to this expanded curriculum

For Estelle, context was particularly important, both in terms of facilitating the instructional process and in the broader social and emotional support systems that undergirded her literacy efforts. The Center was a place, as her second tutor put it, where “you can put your feet up and read together.” For Estelle, reading was predominantly a social and emotional experience where instruction was mediated through story and where place was critically important. Her first tutor expressed some concern about the noise level at the Center, but her second tutor identified a profound source of Estelle’s motivation in her observation that her student enjoyed holding sessions in the copy room because of the hubbub of activity that provided her with opportunities to meet and talk with people.

It was clear that Estelle had many needs including, perhaps a somewhat buried drive for autonomy. The Reading Center provided little direct support in enabling her to develop practical skills that would enhance her autonomy. Yet it proved more successful in helping her to satisfy

other aims such as a need for growth and affiliation. She improved her reading ability and at least in part met her intense need for support and friendship for which she had only a few other outlets. At the Center Estelle belonged to the community of adult literacy learners and experienced solidarity with her peers. I questioned her second tutor on the value of Estelle's participation in the program since her marginal literacy enhancement exerted seemingly, such a negligible effect in any practical way on her life, although that could not be determined for certain. She concluded, "everyone has a right to learn," which I amplified in the interview with the rejoinder, "and that is enough justification in itself."

Despite their many differences, Derrick and Estelle shared one experience in common: the inherent satisfaction of engaging the literacy process as a source of intrinsic motivation whereby goals and aspirations emerged over time. For both, literacy learning was fused with a range of social and emotional motivations. Derrick was clearly more autonomous than Estelle, yet both shared deeply in the life of the Center, which met some of each of their varied needs and aspirations.

Peter

Peter, who was in his early sixties, was retired. He had lived in the Italian-American South End of Hartford from birth through much of his twenties and resided in suburban Newington ever since. As in the case of Estelle, Peter's goals did not appear readily discernible. They seemed to have little direct linkage with enhancing "functional" life skills as defined by the advocates of competency-based education. Peter had been enrolled in the LVGH program with apparently, negligible results prior to coming to the Reading Center in 1990. After a steady three year commitment at the Center, Peter finally began to make sustained progress from his near

complete non-reader status, although he remained far from fluent as an independent reader. He did not identify any distinctive goals other than wanting to learn to read.

Whatever the sources of his motivation, they were enduring. He worked intensely with a small group of three students for six months until placed with an individual tutor. After working with that tutor for some time, another opportunity for group tutoring opened up, which enabled Peter to take on both group and one-to-one work. Peter, who worked painstakingly slow, but at a pace that made sense for him, almost never canceled a tutoring session. However unarticulated, based on his continuous persistence, powerful sources of intrinsic motivation had seemingly underlain his efforts, though their sources were difficult for the outside observer to identify.

Hypothetically, Peter's situation raised a critical issue for the Reading Center's value system. In an era of scarce resources, both human and financial, one might question the extent to which tutoring services should be provided to adult learners like Peter. As he was retired, he did not need literacy development for work. Given his age and reading ability, it seemed unlikely that his literacy level would be greatly enhanced even with a sustained several year effort. Also, since Peter had no outward, stated goals other than wanting to learn to read, an argument stemming from a utilitarian, cost-benefits analysis could be made that scarce resources should be allocated elsewhere that might have more tangible benefit.

Clearly, one assumes Peter possessed goals, however inarticulate they seemed to others and perhaps to him. Along with Estelle and Derrick, the quest for affiliation seemed to have played an important role in his motivation. Peter lived a relatively isolated life and had little social connection with others. He had limited family contact and no association with other "mediating structures" to help him expand his social and emotional boundaries, which in turn, could enhance his sense of personal and social identity. Therefore by joining the "the literacy

club” at the Center, Peter found one social outlet for a somewhat isolated existence to which he adapted with reasonable skill. That is, he got by. Based on my own personal observation, I sensed that he appreciated the respectful empathy he received from his tutors as they worked together on Peter’s emergent reading skills session after session over a period of many months and that this was an important, subtle source that sustained his long-term motivation.

With Estelle, affiliation represented a primary source of motivation. For Peter, it seemed to have served as an important second. The quest for mastery, nourished by the progress he made and the acknowledgment of his tutors, leads me to assume that this was a more enduring aim. However limited his progress was viewed statistically, Peter discovered something quite profound: a creative taproot into his own intellectual development. The core experience of growth, itself, reinforced through continual practice, seemed to have spurred Peter on. (I have no proof for this other than my own intuitive sense based on personal observation). Engaging the literacy process at his own pace for his own purposes, those articulated and those not, seemed to have enhanced Peter’s life by opening up new vistas of learning and self-development. More may be desirable, such as the attainment of particular “outcomes.” Nonetheless, the inherent satisfaction Peter derived from his efforts, even if it was difficult to specifically identify them, was sufficient in itself, particularly in a program that recognized the innate worth of the individual and shaped its program’s mission on that core value. As expressed by Dewey (1916):

Since growth is characteristic of life, education is all one with growing; it has no end beyond itself. The criterion of the value of school education is the extent to which it creates a desire for continued growth and supplies means for making the desire effective in fact” (p. 53).

Though ineffable and virtually impossible to measure in any objective sense, the felt experience of barely imperceptible, but steady and determined growth itself that Peter seemed to have made

in his reading progress, may have been the most enduring source of motivation in his learning history at the Reading Center.

The public worth of this type of development can only be discerned by the value system of the political culture that legitimizes or de-legitimizes such experience. Regardless of starting point or life circumstance, the importance of emergent goals and aspirations, the possibilities that sometimes open up when individuals engage in adult literacy learning for significant periods of time, is brought out in a more concrete and visible manner in this final case presentation.

Anthony

Anthony, a young African-American, was in his early twenties when he joined the program. He was a graduate of one of Hartford's high schools. He entered the Center's program initially in 1990 while taking remedial reading courses at the Greater Hartford Community College. Those courses and the thick textbooks he brought to the Center proved well beyond his ability. After about three months, Anthony left the Center. Approximately a year later, he returned, this time without the baggage of the college courses. We found space for Anthony in our advanced small group program. Several months later an individual tutor became available which enabled Anthony to put in about ten hours of study per week.

Anthony's interview provided clues to the sources of his motivation, which, although diffuse, were enduring if his over 600 hours of tutoring were any indication of a sustained commitment. Improving his reading skills represented an innate need for Anthony in his shift in identity from someone who could not to someone who could learn in formal educational settings. That may appear insufficiently concrete given an emphasis in the field to link literacy to specific outcomes like employment, community involvement, and family education (Stein, 1997). Yet given Anthony's situation as a somewhat isolated young urban black male with limited

educational and vocational skills, he may have viewed the expansion of his capacity to read, write, and learn, in themselves, as self-evident, that required no further explanation. That he was able ultimately to articulate specific reasons is an indication of the progress he had made, both in his general level of competency with literacy and in his sense of identity as an educated person.

This enabled Anthony to identify the capacity to communicate through speech and writing represented a significant goal. After participating in the program for awhile he sensed that he could “talk to people better” and “explain himself better” due to his vocabulary expansion and enhanced self esteem. He also linked a prospective career in carpentry with a need to “effectively interact with his customers.” On a more visionary note, he also aspired to “become a great artist like no one else before.” Whether through art, speech, or literacy, Anthony sought to enhance his communication skills.

Through literacy Anthony sought to overcome a compelling sense of social isolation intensified by limited education and failure to master the basic requirements to succeed at the community college. He desired both to communicate with others on a level that authenticated his humanity and to organize and refine his own thought processes. Consider the following passages written by Anthony, which although long, merit our full attention in the illumination of his rich and provocative life experience and “voice:”

What is Art Without Human Life?

Without humans, art would not be the same: it would be loneliness. Art brings the beauty out in some people. Some people have the talent in it.

Art make you realize that it is important to human life. It helps you to understand what you want out of your career in your life time. Art also helps you to understand how to communicate with people who don't understand what you are going through in life.

Art is like love that can help people respect one another in life as human beings. It is a way to communicate with jealous people who can't understand someone with talent. Art has many understandings (Demetron, 1995, p. 15).

In the next piece, Anthony spoke more directly about the dilemmas and challenges of his personal life experience:

Painful Experiences

Sometimes I wonder where I have been, who I am, and where I am going and where I am in life today. How do I fit in this world as a human being? How do I make my beliefs respectful so I can feel like a human being in life and respect people who are true to themselves like me?

Some people don't understand what I am going through in life. Sometimes I have trouble getting my words across with people. In life, it is hard to survive, to believe that you can go on.

My beliefs are of value to me. Some people wouldn't accept me as I am because they are jealous of the beliefs that I cherish. Some people wouldn't respect your beliefs that you have in life. They would put you down for every little thing. They can't accept a person like me.

They have two faults. Everything they do and everything they say. Because these people have so much hate in them, they don't understand what is going on with people like me. We shall come together and understand each other in life to make a better world to live in today (Demetrian, 1995, p. 15).

At the Bob Steele Reading Center, Anthony realized some of his more deeply rooted aspirations for authenticity, and “voice.” Like other adult literacy students in the U.S. who have found in literacy the power of autobiographical expression both in speech and in writing, Anthony began to exercise the “power to be able to make [himself]..heard and felt, to signify” (Schuster, 1990, p. 227). Through the articulation of his voice, he began to discover new potentialities about himself both in terms of his self-perception and in his capacity to better negotiate the terrain of his social environment.

An exploration of some of Anthony’s specific learning will illuminate the sense of “growth” he achieved. In a 1994 interview he discussed his learning history in a simple, straightforward idiom, which nonetheless provides an understanding of his journey particularly

when juxtaposed to his essays and a companion interview with one of his latter tutors. “I learned how to comprehend and a little grammar and history” (Demetrian and Gruner, 1995, p. 43) is how he put it. More specifically, what he learned about was “Black history. When I was in high school they had it, but I thought it was too difficult for me to understand” (p. 45). This was a major topic upon which he focused as he inextricably linked it to his own autobiography. With the support of his tutor he wrote essays about Frederick Douglass, Thurgood Marshall, and Martin Luther King, Jr. I asked him to comment about the importance of African American history. His response was terse, but incisive: “Black people had invented a lot of things and fought for a lot of rights” (p. 48). He then provided short descriptions about the various contributions made by African American leaders, which do not begin to capture the depth of study that he undertook in preparation for the several essays he wrote.

Anthony’s research on African American history is capstoned in a personal essay that reflects a quest for racial integration, but also serves as a powerful critique against the legacy of racism that has marked his personal experience as well. As he put it in

Open Your Mind to a Different Race

Why do the majority of white people think that black people are outspoken when blacks stand up to white people who try to own black people? Some whites don’t want the blacks to stand up for their rights. Blacks are tired of hearing, “that’s a black problem.” Many whites have problems understanding how blacks go through life because they don’t know the black race. That’s why both races have much to hate in society.

We all face difficulties about different races and heritages. We lost hope in the American creed of being equal and the respect for goodness of one another. Luxury and material things are taking the place of goodness and equal rights. Each individual should take a step to make peace by trying not to judge one another by their ancestry.

There will come a day that we will realize all races are equal. We can then live together in peace (Demetrian, 1995, p. 26).

It is very likely that Anthony may have *experienced* some of these thoughts and feelings before entering the program, but without argument, he lacked the capacity to express them in the articulate way he did in this essay and thereby to truly own such thoughts as his own. The growth that he achieved is reflected, in part, in being the person who could utter such thoughts in writing, which sprang both from the depths of his personal life and from his reading of African American history and culture.

Anthony derived much insight from the oral history narratives created at the Reading Center in collaboration with Trinity College of Hartford (Smith, Ball, Demetrian, and Michelson, 1993; Lestz, Demetrian, and Smith, 1994). He chose not to write about his own personal life experience because it was too painful for him. Yet he enjoyed reading about the experiences of other students because “[i]t’s interesting and it’s a learning experience. There are other people like you struggling to survive.” (p. 47).

Comparing the oral history narratives to the type of history encountered in textbooks, Anthony stated that “[t]hey each have their history and someone is writing about it. It’s kind of a neat way to understand their history” (p. 48). Furthermore, “[t]hey have a pattern; like this person had a hard time, the other person may have had good times, but it always came back to the past” p. 48). Whether exploring the oral histories of other adult literacy students or “famous” African American leaders, history was his favorite topic. Through such probing into the past, he was also exploring the archeology of his own life as evinced in the provocative essays he wrote about race, self-perception, and the ardent desire to communicate—to hear and to be understood by others who were important to him.

Anthony also developed important basic skills including the utilization of the computer. For example, he and his tutor spent three months exclusively working on his extensive essay of

Martin Luther King, Jr. In the process he experienced much learning. The work entailed research. Anthony and his tutor used three books as background to put the essay together. He also learned much about editing on the computer starting with notes stemming from brainstorming sessions. As put by his tutor:

I made him write it down. Then we'd put it on the computer. And this was a breakthrough, having him do a lot of this on his own. Because even though it took us months, he had to do this, to read, to write down, and not to copy. That's still a big thing, to use your own words to re-write something. He's becoming much better at that (p. 129).

On the computer Anthony learned to cut and paste, delete, spell check, save, and open a file. In short, through the three-month process of constructing a lengthy essay on Martin Luther King, Jr., he learned much about the Civil Rights Movement and the basic skills of research, editing, writing, and basic utilization of the computer. The essay was more of a summary than a personal analysis, but through such work on King as well as on Douglass, Marshall, DuBois, and Washington, Anthony developed his own voice in expressing the impact of racism on American society as well as on his own personal life. For one who dropped out of developmental courses at the community college several years previously, because the work was too difficult, such accomplishments were no mean feat. Anthony experienced considerable growth.

As put by Dewey (1938), “[n]atural impulses and desires constitute ...the starting point [of learning]. But there is no intellectual growth without some reconstruction, some remaking of impulses, and desires in the form in which they first show themselves” (p. 64). Anthony came to the program with a negative experience at the community college about his capacity to learn which he nonetheless intensely desired. Stimulated by a learning environment more akin to his needs and learning style, Anthony soon developed an appetite, in his words, “[t]o be hungry for knowledge” (Demetrian and Gruner, 1995, p. 44). Through hard work and attention to “means”

as well as to “ends-in-view” Anthony gained a great deal through the program as he transformed impulses into purposes.

He eventually returned to the community college for a semester, this time enrolled in two credit courses, one in art and the other in composition. He attained a grade of B in the composition course with very intensive support from his tutor in helping him to write his essays. After completing the semester Anthony decided, at least for the time, not to continue with college as he sensed how difficult it would be without the strong support of a tutor who would not always be available. Instead, he preferred to remain active in the literacy program that provided him with a securer comfort zone to keep on learning at a pace that he knew that he could handle.

Thus, in a supportive learning environment, with the guidance of a knowledgeable and empathetic tutor, Anthony achieved at least some success within a college setting that previously had proven well beyond his ability. While his independent learning had not risen to the same level of capacity, he nonetheless gained a great deal. Dewey (1938) states that “growth depends upon the presence of difficulty to be overcome by the exercise of intelligence” (p. 79). Based upon this definition, Anthony had overcome a great deal in the quest to reconstruct his life in a manner more satisfactory to his desires, as previous aspirations attained became pivots for further growth in his ardent pursuit of learning and self-enhancement. Though this did not result in a permanent return to college, his educational development at the Bob Steele Reading Center was no small matter. That was in 1996. In 2001 Anthony called me to inquire about returning to the program. As he had moved to East Hartford, I linked him up with the adjacent LVA affiliate, where as of this writing (November, 2002), he works with an individual tutor focusing, in his words, on comprehending what he reads.

Concluding Remarks

Dewey (1916) contends that aims must stem from “an outgrowth of existing conditions.” They appear initially as a “mere tentative sketch” and are tested in the crucible of experience. They may call for revision. They “must be capable of alteration to meet [novel] circumstances” (p. 104). For Dewey, an educational aim or a goal cannot always, or even for the most part, be pre-established before the formal learning process begins, as their working out is part of the experimental work of progressively moving from problems identified to their temporal resolution in what he referred to as warranted assertions. They serve as the “*means* [original italics] of guiding the development of a situation” (p. 175). This was the case with all four of the students highlighted in this section where growth was characterized by “constant expansion of horizons and consequent formation of new purposes and new responses” (ibid). As they were attained, these new achievements become means for the articulation of new ends through novel possibilities opened up in the on-going process of learning for life.

Thus with Derrick, new insight included the discovery that the Reading Center curriculum was not simply about learning to read. It was also about education in a broader sense of expanding one’s own potentialities, for him, in terms of autobiographical writing, becoming a student mentor and advocate for the program, and linking his work as a literacy advocate with his calling as a Christian missionary. For eight or nine years, Derrick poured his heart, soul, and mind into the Reading Center and reaped a broad array of rewards he did not fathom when he began the program.

The Reading Center provided Estelle with a peer network beyond her immediate family that enhanced her sense of social identity as she modestly improved her reading ability. To what extent these accomplishments served as effective scaffolding for new ends at home, work, and in

society would require additional information that I do not possess. I can only attest to the growth I discerned during her stay at the Reading Center and to draw on Dewey's claim that all things being equal, as aims become broader and wider through new learning and enhanced experience, possibilities and potentialities for the future also become more extensive. However, such growth would require a supportive climate for new opportunities to come to fruition. The extent to which this became available to her beyond the Reading Center, and the role of her engagement of our program in facilitating any such growth in her broader socialization toward independent adulthood, would be difficult to discern from available evidence.

Peter experienced advancement through the support of two sensitive female tutors who established a relationship of caring and respectful empathy with him in the working out of the rhythms of his own learning dynamic. Through the instructional support they provided, Peter participated in a learning climate that allowed him to progress from his then current abilities as a virtual non-reader. His slowly expanding potential evolved in a manner that respected the stages of development that he needed to undergo in order to achieve a sense of felt progress that allowed him to perceive that the program was worthwhile. I do not know how the program impacted on Peter's life outside the Center. Nonetheless, within the program, through observation and discussions with Peter and his tutors, I was able to become aware of subtle growth in his slow and gradual mastery of basic decoding ability. To this he attributed a certain level of significance that seemed to have contributed to his desire to persist in his efforts for a two or three-year period. In some ineffable manner, expanding on his initial ability to read in retirement resulted in some reconstruction in Peter's mental image of his own intellectual capacity. This had eluded him during his school years and throughout much of his adulthood. What specifically his emergent reading ability meant to him as a signpost of personal identity is

beyond the available evidence to discern, though he seemed to have derived a certain innate satisfaction from it.

Anthony's growth dynamic is clearly spelled out in the case presentation. As the 2002 follow-up confirms, the capacity to make sense of the world of print was a major source of motivation. So was his need to be in a continuously supportive learning climate, where, through such scaffolding he was able to flourish at a pace and a manner that made sense to him. Within this nurturing climate, Anthony, as an advanced de-coder of texts, explored a wide array of subject matter, including autobiographical and biographical writing. What comes across with Anthony is his intellectual curiosity, where the very confusions in his capacity to comprehend point to sources of his motivation to grasp that which perplexes him in order to move on. Whether, or the extent to which Anthony will be able to advance beyond the support that a program like LVA provides, without such backing he could not have made the gains that he has, which represents the essential launching ground for further development. As Dewey (1916) expresses it, "[a] truly general aim [like the type of education all of these students attained at the Bob Steele Reading Center] broadens the outlook; it stimulates one to take more consequences (connections) into account" (p. 109). However wide was the gap between the mark and the reality, the establishment of such an environment, which allowed for such growth, was one of the main purposes of the program during my tenure from 1987-1996.

Chapter Seven

Humanistic Psychology and Adult Literacy Motivation

This study explores aspects of adult literacy motivation predominantly through qualitative documentation of learner experience and direct observation within a single program. It focuses on those learners who, for the most part, participated in the program for a year or more and who achieved some notable self-defined levels of success. Test scores and life skill achievements provide empirical support to buttress the more intangible aspects of learning and motivation teased out from the self-reported experiences documented in this study.

The findings, largely descriptive, are provisional. They presume to tell only a partial story of adult literacy motivation. They provide snapshot glances of individuals within the context of life histories very much “in process.” What the study fails to examine is also noteworthy. For example, it does not attempt to assess the motivational dynamic of the many people who left the Bob Steele Reading Center before observable significant learning could have taken place. To adapt the terminology of Allan Quigley (1990a), the Center had many “resisters,” for whom its learning climate had limited appeal. A more complete story of the Center would need to explore resistance along with the “success stories” stressed in this study. Nonetheless, considering how many students achieved notable learning outcomes at the Center and the relative paucity of studies that delineate this, it seems appropriate to explore some of the motivational dynamics, which have made this possible.

The View of Mihaly Csikzentmihalyi

This study has alluded to Csikzentmihalyi’s (1990) concept of “flow experience,” as an underlying source of motivation for literacy, which maintains, “the chief impediments to literacy are not cognitive in nature.” Csikzentmihalyi argues, “[i]t is not that students cannot learn; it is that they do not wish to” (190, p. 115). This study takes a similar stance that the vast majority of

non-reading adults have nothing wrong with their “mental equipment,” while not ruling out of court something akin to learning disabilities among a small minority of adults exhibiting a range of reading difficulties. Constance Weaver grants a similar point, although she is compelled to add that “*I cannot help suspecting that many of these so-called ‘dyslexics’ might be considered adequate to good readers if meaning and not word identification were the goal*” (original italics) (1988, p. 397).

Csikzentmihalyi (1990, pp. 124-125) argues that *intrinsic* sources of motivation are the most compelling, which often evolve out of more extrinsic sources of reward. The findings in this essay share a similar accord. Learners who achieved the most success were motivated by certain inner directed goals, whether or not they were always able to clearly articulate them. Many learners at the Center, moreover, experienced an *expansion* of their goals and aspirations as they increased their abilities, while moving toward a more coherent sense of intrinsic satisfaction (which included extrinsic rewards and the acknowledgment of others) once the potential for literacy began to be realized in their lives. A noted social psychologist identifies “efficacy” as a potent source of motivation (Bandura, 1977) that expands as individuals successively realize new objectives through the exercise of their own growing talents. Such efficacy, what Dewey refers to as growth, is congruent with the thesis of Csikzentmihalyi (1990) that at its peak, literacy learning represents a form of “flow experience” that feels “like being carried away by a current, like being in a flow” (p. 127):

This intense involvement is only possible when a person feels that the opportunities for action in the given activity are more or less in balance with the person's ability to respond to the opportunities (Csikzentmihalyi, 1990, pp. 127-128).

In Dewey’s (1916) words, “[i]f education is growth, it must progressively realize present possibilities, and thus make individuals better fitted to cope with later requirements” (p. 56). For

adults who at one time read at only minimum levels, the sense of mastery that can emerge with enhanced literacy once they realize something of its potential, even if only existentially within the sense of their own emerging capacity, is often exhilarating and an important source of intrinsic motivation.

Although Csikzentmihalyi is more vague when it comes to describing how such an ineffable phenomenon as a “flow experience” may arise, he points to the importance of goals. On this he is anything but behaviorist in maintaining that “the goal is not sought for itself; it is sought only because it makes the activity possible” (1990, p. 129). It provides a way of transcending current experience and creating something new. As the cultural critic Giles Gunn (1987, p. 130) puts it:

It is not that we keep experiencing things beyond the ken of our experience; it is only that the ken of our experience keeps enlarging as we discover new ways to construe its components.

According to Csikszentmihalyi’s humanistic perspective, a goal represents a signpost for enhanced life in the quest to realize untold possibilities. I take a similar view in this study in that goals and aspirations unleashed in the process of adults becoming increasingly literate often open up new potential in personal perception that hitherto had been closed. Such experience sometimes releases powerful feelings of personal elation and a corresponding sense of expanded confidence. Whether this might be equated with what Csikzenmihalyi refers to as a flow experience requires more evidence than what is presented here. Still, something akin to Csikzenmihalyi’s humanistic psychology of exhilaration can be discerned in some of the sources of motivation documented at the Reading Center. Csikzenmihalyi concludes that:

A matching set of challenges and skills, and immediate feedback, resulting in a deep concentration that prevents worry and intrusion of unwanted thoughts into consciousness, and in a transcendence of the self, are the universal characteristics associated with enjoyable activities (p. 131).

There is much in this study congruent with this phenomenon. Yet Csikentmihaly's essay raises a concern that needs to be addressed for a more complete understanding of adult literacy motivation. Notwithstanding Csikzentmihalyi's interpretation of illiteracy as a "social phenomena" (p. 119), he maintains that neither "teachers nor the educational system in general can change the way in which rewards are distributed in this society" (p. 124). His sociology of literacy, then, is a conservative one. Based on his rationale, the only tool the teacher possesses to help students increase their literacy is the ability to tap into their intrinsic sources of motivation.

I do not object to this normative observation as it characterized much of the political culture of the Bob Steele Reading Center during my tenure. Despite such conservatism and in accordance with Csikzentmihalyi's phenomenological psychology, the Center was grounded in a Deweyian-like sense of progressive evolution that sought as its primary objective the growth of its immediate learning climate. This, I thought, represented the main theater of operation at my disposal in creating potential for strengthening adult literacy in Hartford and throughout the LVA network (Demetrian, 2000). This indirect sphere of influence, I had hoped, would have resulted in a *residual* effect of increasing the impact of the program, in the words of one student, "beyond these four walls."

There was much about the Reading Center environment that was empowering even if only "moderately" so, as defined within the context of the given political culture in which it was situated. A more extensive impact along the lines of a Freirian political vision would require some fundamental restructuring of both the socio-economic system and culture of the United States. Such change would be essential before adult non-readers in statistically significant numbers would likely find themselves in a position where "the intrusion of unwanted thoughts into consciousness [will be eliminated] and a transcendence of the self" (Csikzentmihalyi, 1990,

p. 131) could be attained. This study of the cycle of motivation as typology focuses on only those individuals who were able to make a sustained commitment toward enhanced literacy within the given social, economic, and political status quo. Even for them, the long-term impact of program participation remained problematic and fluid.

The Reading Center's primary *modus operandi* was to take social "reality" as it was, while attempting to reconstruct it locally by enhancing individual lives and establishing an innovative learning climate that could progressively expand from then current actualities to new potentialities that drew upon any given status quo as essential staging ground for moving forward. Such changes were at best, piecemeal and reformist, although for certain individuals "transformative," at least in the personal sense. They were also transformative for the program in the sense that the learning climate was reconstructed through several incarnations, particularly through its small group program and writing and oral history projects. The Center also had much impact in fostering the organizational development of Literacy Volunteers of Greater Hartford, which in turn, has become a formidable player among the non-profit sector in Hartford (Demetrian, 2000). This all has represented important work. Notwithstanding these noteworthy organizational changes within the Reading Center and LVGH, it essential to keep in mind that in terms of impacting illiteracy at the socio-structural level even within Hartford, the result has been considerably more modest.

Csikszentmihaly's theory of motivation, therefore, may be quite irrelevant to the millions of non-readers who for a variety of reasons cannot or refuse (resist) to participate in the limited underfunded, understaffed and overcrowded literacy and Adult Basic Education programs that do exist. However, it may have applicability for the minority of adult non-readers whose self-esteem and socio-economic status are sufficiently grounded to concentrate intensively on literacy

development for a one-to-three year period that are typically needed to achieve significant and sustained literacy fluency. Even for that population, most of the learners identified in this study, Csikszentmihaly's theory of flow experience lacks much of an interpretive gist on how the various forces of motivation interact to enable aspiring literacy learners to achieve a sustained commitment, often against difficult personal, social and cultural barriers.

Wlodowski's Time Continuum Theory of Motivation

Raymond J. Wlodowski (1985) provides a more systematic interpretation of motivation, which, nonetheless, draws from a similar humanistic framework as that of Csikszentmihalyi. While recognizing that "[a]s a concept, motivation is a bit of a beast," (p. 44), Wlodowski identifies "six major factors that enhance the motivation of adult learners: attitude, need, stimulation, affect, competence and reinforcement" (p. 45). It is the structuring of these "factors" within specific time sequences that makes his theory of motivation particularly potent.

Time sequences are related to learning cycles which may be either of short duration, completed in a single session, or embedded in a much more extensive time frame that could take a year or longer to complete. In either case, the sequences of the factors of motivation remain the same. At the *beginning* stages of a learning cycle, Wlodowski maintains that initial attitudes and needs of learners are the most salient aspects of motivation in their making of the decision as to whether the projected course of action represents a worthwhile expenditure of time, energy, and psychic investment. Providing stimulation and the influence of affect or emotion are most critical *during* or throughout a learning cycle. That is, the initial sense of investment needs to be confirmed while individuals are in the midst of an educational program through its ongoing impact on their lives. This requires a clear perception that what they are learning remains worthwhile through the long period of an adult literacy career. Wlodowski maintains that the

critical *ending* phases of a learning sequence requires a sense of achieved competence, including a sense of reinforcement of the usefulness of what has been learned. Throughout his book, Wlodowski provides an extensive discussion of these factors, along with 68 strategies to enhance motivation throughout a learning cycle (pp. 254-257).

Since his theory is applicable for a learning cycle of any duration, adult literacy tutors or ABE teachers might draw upon it in structuring particular lessons. For the purposes of this study I draw on his framework, less literally than as a heuristic in expanding the discussion of adult literacy motivation at the Bob Steele Reading Center. Certain “factors” like attitude, I will spend less emphasis on because they have been extensively elaborated upon in this text. I will examine others more thoroughly that have not been made as explicit in this text.

Attitude

This study has drawn out the importance of attitude formation for self-esteem, particularly in initial stages of participation in the Center’s program. This factor also remains important throughout the learning cycle. Wlodowski defines attitudes as “a combination of concepts, information, and emotions that result in a predisposition to respond favorably or unfavorably toward particular people, groups, ideas, events, or objects” (pp. 45-46). As we have seen with Willie, Pat and Angelo, attitudes exerted a powerful effect on their initial predispositions to undertake the courageous and, at times, arduous effort toward becoming increasingly literate. While their predispositions were more positive on entering the process, we saw the importance of initial attitudes with Orlando and David as well. With Wlodowski, I conclude that first attitudes adult literacy learners form “(1) toward the instructor, (2) toward the subject and learning situation, (3) toward themselves as learners, and (4) toward their expectancy for success in the learning activity” (p. 73) play a powerful role in determining initial

commitment. In short, attitudes provide an orienting framework that helps to establish the basis for the exertion of effort to take on and stay with a difficult task.

I link Wlodowski's notion of initial attitudes with Fingeret and Drennon's (1997) notion of a "prolonged tension" that adults may experience as a result of limited reading ability. This is combined with the decision to enter a program based on a "turning point" (pp. 68-74) or an immediate crisis or opportunity through which the individual views adult literacy education as a means of improving their lives.

Thus, Orlando experienced the *prolonged tension* of not being able to read, and had *considered* entering a program in order to realize long-term aspirations of becoming an automobile mechanic. Yet, the *turning point*, which merged crisis and opportunity in his mind in a mandate for decisive action, came when he lost his job. Angelo experienced a similar prolonged tension that he confronted particularly at his work in the realization that he might lose it due to inadequate reading ability. For him, a turning point arrived when he saw the write-up of Derrick in the company's newspaper, which required decisive action on his part in seeking out the support of a literacy program. Both for Orlando and Angelo, a combination of need and opportunity fused in the formation of their initial attitude to take a crucial step in coming forward that would either be nurtured or thwarted by their ongoing experience in the literacy program.

Need

The vast preponderance of literacy learners who participated in the Center's program for any appreciable time, were provoked by various set of needs. According to Wlodowski, "[a] *need* [original italics] is a condition experienced by the individual as an external force that leads the person to move in the direction of a goal" (p. 47). Often, at the early stages of program involvement, needs appear diffuse, wherein many learners express a self-evident desire to attain

general reading competency. When pressed during intake to identify specific goals, some learners mentioned a need to fill out job applications, to help their children with homework, or a general desire to get along more effectively in society. Sometimes learners identified more specific goals, such as obtaining a job, or a driver's license. Typically, goal identification at intake in the Reading Center program remained unclear, often expressed in a self-evident yearning to read better as a means of achieving an enhanced life.

A dilemma for adult literacy educators is that particularly lower-level readers often cannot quickly realize even specific articulated needs such as obtaining a GED, a job, or learning to read fluently. Literacy, moreover, represents only one variable in the quest for life enhancement. An important task for the literacy educator, therefore, is to assist learners in clarifying needs along with interests and aspirations and building them into the instructional plan. It also requires setting up realistic time frames for fulfilling and often modifying them and the need to work with students to help them recognize what can and cannot be accomplished through any particular program.

An additional task is to help students deepen their internalization of needs, transforming them into wants and desires (p. 48) that are progressively fulfilled in the process of working on them. Considering the length of time required by many adult literacy learners to attain independent fluency, creating or building upon a desire that views enhanced literacy, *itself*, as an attainable and worthy end, is also valuable. In particular, establishing the sense that becoming increasingly literate is important in itself, can help students sustain the motivation and persistence needed to help establish what Fingeret and Drennon (1997) refer to as a literacy identity. This, in turn, plays an important role in students making "deep and pervasive changes

in their literacy practices” (p. 96), a shift that enables them to draw on this resource in ways that significantly matters to their lives, outside, as well as within, the program.

As Dewey (1916) expresses it, “[t]he criteria of the value of school education is the extent in which it creates a desire for continued growth and supplies means for making the desire effective in fact” (p. 53). In the context of an adult literacy program, improvement of reading ability itself, regardless of specific content is one such manifestation. That is so because such development of new potentialities serves as a critical pathway toward the articulation and the achievement of more desirable ends. Sometimes the most important part of the process is not so much in the attainment, but in the felt experience of continued possibilities that keeps the course of forward-moving action operative, stimulated by hope, achieved progress, and persistence. Nonetheless, in Dewey’s terminology, the “means-ends” continuum flows back and forth. Means that are viewed as valuable are linked to some set of purposes. For example, attaining the ability to read independently may be viewed as both worthy in itself and as a new means in the working toward new ends that hitherto may have been inaccessible. One such example was Orlando’s ability to read materials on automobile mechanics, which fed into his career goals. Means are important as the fuel that supports on-going effort. Ends, or targets, however much they change, provide the source of direction to which means are exerted. In the working toward concrete achievements both means and ends become increasingly refined. As Dewey (1925) states it, “[a]n active process is strung out temporarily, but there is a deposit [of the ends] at each stage and point, entering cumulatively and constitutively into an outcome” (p. 368).

The point is not that this smooth operation between means and ends was typically reflected in the instructional program at the Bob Steele Reading Center. Nonetheless, at its best, as witnessed in the educational program of Orlando, Anthony, and Derrick, it provided a sense of

coherence in an educational program where the on-going activity of learning flows into desirable ends that are temporally achieved even as they are refined or modified in the effort. The result is that needs (Orlando's job crisis) as initial stimulus, are turned into aspirations and desires, which, when built upon, open new possibilities that encourages the pursuit of additional ends.

Affect

Wlodowski points to affect and stimulation as the primary sources of motivation *during*, or throughout a particular learning sequence. I am using the term here as representing a significant period of time after program entry, and before periods of closure set in; a period which may extend from one to three or more years. This study has dealt extensively with the centrality of affect or emotion on adult literacy motivation. As expressed by Wlodowski (1985), “[w]hen emotions are positive while learning, they sustain involvement and interest in the subject matter or activity” (p. 54). I will not belabor this factor here except to underscore the general importance that Wlodowski attributes to it in underlying motivation throughout the course of a student's learning history. Affect includes not only emotion, but the “constant dynamic of thinking, feeling and behaving [which]...puts vitality and humanity into the learning situation” (p. 53). Psychologist Jerome Bruner (1986) argues similarly:

[T]he components of behavior I am speaking of are not emotions, cognitions, and actions, each in isolation, but aspects of a larger whole that achieves its integration only within a cultural system. Emotion is not usefully isolated from the knowledge of the situation that arouses it. Cognition is not a form of pure knowing to which emotion is added....And action is a final common path based on what one knows and feels (pp. 117-118).

Thus with Orlando, it was the continuous reinforcement of his sense that he could learn, linked to significant purposes for learning, which stimulated his involvement while participating in the program. For him, this emerged both in the sense of intrinsic satisfaction that he perceived

while engaged in the program and the sustained support he obtained from his tutors that confirmed and nurtured his sense of expanding capacity and growing intellectual curiosity.

This was similarly the case for Anthony, particularly in the support he received from his tutors in guiding his emergent literacy. They built on what he knew at any given time toward that what he could achieve if his capacities were carefully nurtured. This provided him both with the confidence that he could learn and the bridging that was necessary for him to gain new knowledge, which sustained his motivation to explore areas at the cutting edge of his expanding intellectual life. As described by his tutor, Pat, “I want him to do more independent work, and he is. And he’s getting there. But he needs a lot of encouragement” (Demetron, 1997c, p. 131). As Anthony expressed it in an interview on why he wanted to improve his reading and writing, “I want to comprehend and read better. And I’m hungry for knowledge. I’ll be more independent...I want to be an art teacher. I want to share my knowledge with a new generation (Demetron and Gruner, 1995, p. 49).

Throughout this study, we have reviewed student commentary on the importance of emotion and the student-tutor bond as one of the most compelling building blocks needed to sustain long term, literacy development. As mentioned in Chapter Two, in my travels, I have come across the phrase, “warm fuzzies” as a disapproving term used by individuals who rely on “hard” data, typically standardized test scores, designed to offset the “response bias” of anecdotal testimonials. As is evident in this study, there is more at work here than “warm fuzzies,” personal accounts, valuable perhaps for public relations campaigns, but not to be counted as “real” data in evaluating the efficacy of adult literacy education (Quigley, 1997). As illustrated in virtually all of the case presentations of this study, the student-tutor relationship represents a critical bedrock where the instructor encouraged the learner to link thought and

emotion to a plan of action or set of goals (Dirx, Fonfora, Flaska, 1993). That is, most of the tutors at the Bob Steele Reading Center, working one-to-one or in small group settings, grasped quite well the significance of affect as a critical factor in ongoing student motivation and learning. They were not simply seeking to give students “warm fuzzies.” Rather, in connecting with them on a personal level, they desired to support them in their learning. As one tutor explained the process he utilized with his student:

Students will often struggle with certain words. The tutor might give them a chance to get it right before stepping in. Let them experiment with the letters. If they get it right, they will feel good. It is important to be patient when the student fails to recognize material that you have spent three weeks working on. The student will be just as frustrated as the tutor. When pushing the student, the tutor must identify when the student is being challenged and when the student is becoming frustrated. With the right amount of patience, you can help your student enter the world of literacy (Demetron, 1997c, p. 96).

At its best, students and tutors develop an emotional/cognitive bond which links self-esteem to the particular task at hand; achieving literacy for a certain set of purposes such as Anthony’s quest to integrate autobiographical writing with biographical studies of African American leaders. An upward spiral is established where emotion, cognition, and action continually reinforce each other in the process of becoming literate for the purpose of achieving significant life goals and aspirations (Fingeret and Drennon, 1997). This was evident in Anthony’s detailed essays on Frederick Douglass titled “The Voice of the Black Lion” and Martin Luther King, Jr., titled “A Leader Fights for Justice.” These essays represented the capstone of several years of hard work, where Anthony developed his literacy skills, in part, by expanding his own sense of racial consciousness through a study of African American history. Such spiraling from problems identified to satisfying ends did not always move full circle at the Reading Center, but it represented a pedagogical ideal toward which we strove.

Stimulation

Wlodowski (1985) defines stimulation as “any change in our perception or experience with our environment that makes us active” (p. 51). He alludes to evidence from neurophysiology which “suggests that an actual need for stimulation exists” and argues that “[s]mall or moderate changes in arousal are reinforcing to us and cause us to direct our attention toward those various forms of stimulation” (ibid.). Along with affect, Wlodowski views stimulation as an often, neglected factor required to spark motivation *during*, or throughout a learning sequence.

This factor becomes particularly important in adult literacy where the “during” phase of learning may take three or more years, given, also, the host of extrinsic and intrinsic factors that often act to subvert a long-term commitment to literacy development. Drawing upon Wlodowski’s categories as a heuristic, I will focus on three sources of stimulation that permeated the Reading Center’s learning climate during the period in which this study focuses. These were (1) the environment of the Bob Steele Reading Center, itself, (2) the collaborative dynamic of both its group tutoring program and special projects, and (3) an approach to instruction that drew upon “Vygotsky’s zone of proximal development.” My intent in this section is to draw on Wlodowski’s typology of adult learner motivation in order to explore the broader socio-linguistic culture of the Reading Center, which ultimately impacted on daily instruction.

The Physical Environment

The Bob Steele Reading Center was situated in Hartford’s West Central End, Parkville neighborhood, comprised largely of Portuguese, East Asian, and Hispanic populations. It was located in an attractive, restored factory on Arbor Street that had once housed the Underwood Typewriting Company. The Center was easily accessible from the highway, which made it a

convenient site for the largely suburban tutors who felt safe in this relatively secured building. The Center was also close to major bus lines, upon which many of the students depended. The Center served not only as an important site for adult literacy instruction in Hartford. It was a unique intercultural meeting ground where people with diverse backgrounds participated in common goals and projects. Given the social, racial, geographical, economic, and educational segmentation so pervasive in the United States between diverse racial and ethnic groups, exacerbated by urban/suburban psycho-socio cleavages, such an opportunity for this type of interchange served as an important cultural element in building a dynamic learning climate. As observed by Trinity historian, Michael Lestz, “not only is it [the Reading Center] a site for literacy instruction, it is also a lively learning forum where people from diverse cultural backgrounds collaborate in a stimulating array of learning activities directly linked by design and content, to the teaching of humanities in other settings” (Lestz, Demetrian, and Smith, Vol. I, 1994, p. 4). Through its group tutoring program, its writing and oral history projects, and occasional college internships, the Center capitalized on such energies.

Posters on the wall, eclectic furniture, tall ceilings and the combination of open and closed spaces provided the physical backdrop to an atmosphere of community and informality that sustained students and tutors alike. The accessibility of a full time staff person, a committed group of tutors, many of whom volunteered at the Center for several years, and a well stocked library consisting of materials from the various adult education presses as well as the Center’s own created texts, provided additional support to sustain the physical environment. To borrow a line from the television program, *Cheers*, the Bob Steele Reading Center was very much a place “where everybody knows your name.”

Collaboration

Literacy instruction at the Reading Center was fueled through an intensive collaborative process that served as another critical source of stimulation. In the traditional LVA model, tutors volunteer to work with students, one-to-one, typically two hours per week in various community settings with minimal regular connection with the program. In this way, many people have learned to read who otherwise would not have had an opportunity. While large-sized ABE classes provide assistance to many individuals, LVA's traditional model establishes a critical personal encounter between learner and tutor, which is particularly vital for students at a lower level reading ability who may require such intensive nurturing. This study has provided documentation in support of such a thesis.

Despite its value, the one-to-one model remains limited in at least two respects: it restricts the number of instructional hours a volunteer program can reasonably offer to a student and tends to isolate learners from each other, which student support groups, popular within the LVA network, partially offsets. As reflected in such training manuals as *Reading with Children* (Laminack, 1989) and *Small Group Tutoring* (Cheatham and Lawson, 1990), LVA has embraced the collaborative model as a viable alternative to the one-to-one approach. Generally, this design, consisting of units of one tutor to three-to-five students, is not meant to replace the individual program, but to complement it.

Though the Reading Center embraced this general collaborative vision, in several key areas its small group-tutoring program differed from the model suggested by LVA. First, instruction generally flowed more from materials selected, usually by the tutor, than from identified student goals (Cheatham and Lawson, 1990, p. 19). Second, the groups were more tutor led than student driven as suggested in the participatory model promoted by LVA (p. 4).

Third, the groups became permanent features of the Reading Center, which provided the program with its essential organizing structure (Demetrian, 1999a, 2000). By contrast, the LVA manual notes that groups may exist for shorter or longer periods of time, not necessarily integrated as a vital feature in the overall fabric of an affiliate's organizational culture (Cheatham and Lawson, 1990, pp. 10-13).

Intense collaboration between and among students and tutors was common both to the Center's small group tutoring program and the LVA model. In the Center's small groups, discussion was lively and often thought provoking. Learners felt free to fully express their views, ask questions, and challenge tutors and each other (Demetrian, 1993, pp. 43-47, Demetrian, 1999a). The groups were set up to enable learners to cycle through the Center several evenings per week with different sets of often, team tutors, each evening. Each tutor or team of tutors provided something unique in terms of teaching style and selection of materials. Many of the group participants also worked with individual tutors. Such variability, along with the increased tutoring hours over the traditional LVA norm, occasionally up to ten hours per week, served as a continuous source of stimulation built within the organizational structure of the program. One of the Reading Center's tutor pioneers, who worked with the beginners level Basic Literacy group, offered the following observation:

I very much enjoy the energy and challenge of the group. It's exciting to watch the students interact with each other and develop to the point where they can graduate to the High-Level Basic Reading Group. I love the fact that some of them come early, sometimes just to socialize, sometimes to read silently, sometimes to help each other with reading. The students have not only become friends, but also an informal support group for each other. This phenomenon probably would not have occurred if the Reading Center small groups had not formed (Demetrian, 1997c, pp. 21-22).

Collaboration was also fostered through the various projects that the Center developed, particularly in student writing and in the creation of oral history narratives. (Smith, 1991, Smith,

et. al., 1993; Lestz, Demetrian, and Smith, 1994; Demetrian and Lestz, 1995). Through these texts, community building was no longer only dependent upon face-to-face interaction. Rather, through the spoken *and* written word, learners throughout LVGH were able to develop a sense of shared consciousness and empathy for and among each other. The texts also contributed toward a sense of collective identity among adult literacy learners which helped to transform an amalgamation of isolated individuals into a group of bonded people, linked together through shared experiences, common purposes, and a remembered past. As expressed by one learner when asked to comment on the Center's student-generated texts:

It motivates you, you know? It makes you want to keep going and feel that some way you're going to learn something for yourself. Sometimes you don't feel you can learn until you see other people do it? So that motivates you a little bit. Well, a lot, I might say, a lot (Demetrian and Gruner, 1995, p. 60).

Such an emerging social identity played out at the Center in creative tension with a strong individualistic orientation, which remains a dominant value among many adult literacy students who seek both personal empowerment and a deepened sense of shared identity with others (Fingeret and Drennon, 1997). Several students commented that while they learned how to *read* more effectively through the close attention provided by an individual tutor, the collaborative learning format created opportunities to explore a wide array of topics that students found invigorating, as they did the conviviality of the groups. Through the small groups, the student writing projects, and the program's oral history project, Reading Center participants established a stimulating learning climate by respecting, rather than eliminating the tension between highly personal and richly collaborative sources of motivation.

Scaffolding

A "scaffolding" approach to literacy, which represented the dominant instructional methodology of the Reading Center, served as a potent instructional stimulus (Demetrian, 1993,

1999a). The scaffolding, or bridging concept is premised on the Russian psychologist V.I. Vygotsky's (1978) "zone of proximal development," defined as "*the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined by problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers*" (original italics) (p. 86).

This study has drawn out many examples of scaffolding in the Reading Center's ongoing instructional program. Particularly pervasive were "assisted reading" approaches where tutors worked with students to collaboratively read a text. This approach was based on whole language reading theory precepts that at least a significant aspect of learning to read is caught rather than explicitly taught through practice and unconscious assimilation over time (Smith, 1979). In this way, the tutor provides a bridge through which even beginning level readers can sustain a supportive fluent reading process in working with text in a connected fashion. The scaffolding paradigm, embodied in the assisted reading approach, characterized the dominant student/tutor relationship at the Reading Center as well as the organizational development of the Center (Demetrian, 1993, 2000).

It is important to come to terms with the ambiguity of scaffolding, since it entails, in varying degrees, an element of shaping behavior in certain proscribed directions. It has, therefore, the potential of exacerbating what Hal Beder (1991) refers to as a stigmatic view of literacy. As the eminent educational psychologist Jerome Bruner (1986) reminds us, "there is a hidden agenda in Vygotsky's account, and it needs to be made explicit" (p. 74). Specifically, Vygotsky's "zone" was part of a broader political/cultural project to "modernize" Russian peasants roughly along the lines among the more progressive (anti-Stalinist) tenets of the Russian Revolution. Thus, those "more capable peers" who directed literacy campaigns where

Vygotsky developed his theory, had very much a political agenda in mind in a desire to shape the consciousness of Russian peasants. The example illustrates that a conservative reading of Vygotsky's zone can slide into a rationalization for elitism and ethnocentrism defined by the value system of the more "knowledgeable" adult.

As a corrective to this tendency, advocates of participatory literacy education maintain that learners have the right to exercise "active control, responsibility, and reward vis-a-vis some or all of program activities" (Fingeret and Jurmo, 1989, p. 18) in the areas of instruction and program management. The concern, expressed by Fingeret, is that learners be allowed to draw upon their *own* social worlds in literacy education, however "inadequate" those worlds appear to middle class observers (p. 9). As I have argued elsewhere, respect for learner social and psychic experience should be built into any literacy program, but it also needs to be acknowledged that learners also seek to develop literacy skills, in part, in order to move beyond their current social status and cultural understanding (Demetrian, 1993, p. 33).

There are some delicate spaces that need to be worked out between these two positions. It is all-too-easy to tip the scales toward elitism on the one hand and a romanticized notion of participatory democracy on the other hand, neither of which may serve the learner well. What seems critical in the stimulation of motivation is identifying and grounding instruction at the student's learning cutting edge. This is the pedagogical strategy of Vygotsky's zone, that is simultaneously linked to the most fundamental needs, interests, and aspirations of learners within a broad range of personal, practical, aesthetic, and sociocultural realms that emerge from intense dialogue among learners and between learners and tutors/teachers. Such an ideal was not always realized at the Reading Center. Still, it represented its most progressive pedagogical aspiration,

exemplified particularly in its small group-tutoring program, and in its student writing (Smith, 1991) and oral history anthologies (Smith, et. al. 1993 and Lestz, Demetrion, and Smith, 1994).

A major reason why Vygotsky's zone represented a more dominant pedagogical strategy than participatory literacy education, particularly in its more radical sense, was that the Reading Center was still a place that most students and tutors identified as school. As such, traditional teacher/student roles remained largely operative, particularly that of the instructor in usually initiating and selecting lessons, along with a common sense view among most students and tutors that whatever else literacy development may entail, basic skill building, even among more advanced learners, should play a vital role in the instructional process.

With its own particular slants, the Reading Center program embraced many of the more progressive views of, and approaches toward adult literacy education developed by LVA in the 1990s (Cheatham and Lawson, 1990; Cheatham, Colvin and Laminack, 1993). In addition, the program took some additional leads throughout the LVA network with its extensive Basic Literacy small group-tutoring program, the Connecticut Humanities Council funded oral history project, and in the area of basic research through the various published articles written about the program.

However progressive and student centered inspired, the work at the Bob Steele Reading Center emerged within a learning environment very much shaped by Vygotsky's zone in a place identified as school. It was the creative tension between such a traditional structural framework and a commitment to a humanistic, collaborative pedagogy that served as an underlying stimulus for learners, tutors, and project volunteers at the Center. Sometimes this learning atmosphere was aided by intensive participatory approaches. At other times, direct instruction proved more of an effective vehicle. In either case, respect for the learner, the importance of collaboration,

and a powerful commitment to learning as an intrinsic value in itself, shaped much of the Reading Center program. This learning climate served as a powerful stimulus that infused the daily operation.

Ending Stages of Motivation

This study has stressed more of what Wlodowski refers to as the first two stages of motivation: *beginning* and *during*. It had proven more difficult to identify in as complete a way the *ending* phases, what Wlodowski refers to as “competence” and “reinforcement” at the Reading Center. To be sure, they are far from absent in this analysis, particularly in some of the case presentations in Chapter Three and the sections on outcomes and goals. Additional examples could be added wherein literacy has served as an intervening variable. Such impacts were often subtle, what some may view as modest, the result of incremental change and development through persisting effort, in the capacity, for example, to read road signs, notices from a child’s school, and personal mail. Sometimes the impact is more dramatic, reflected in obtaining a GED or a job, or in Derrick Matthew’s case, completing a 227-page novel titled, *The Prodigal Son of the 90s: A Family History*. There is no need to reiterate their manifestations, though a final example serves to illustrate.

Consider George, an immigrant from Jamaica, who entered the Reading Center program while in his 30s. George had a family that consisted of a girlfriend and two children. It was not simply that he had difficulty reading, which no one in his family was aware, but that he did not want to disclose that to them. Thus, in his interview, he spoke of “excuses” such as being busy, that he gave when his youngest child ask him to read to him. As George put it about his entry into the program, “after a while I just couldn’t find an excuse. So I decided to come here” (Demettrion and Gruner, 1995, p. 82).

As a result of participating in the program, George stated that he was finally able to read to his son and that when he “take[s] him to the park or whatever, at least I know what is what” (p. 85). For George, that was the case also when he went shopping. In looking for various products, he “used to have somebody to show me. Now I can go and find it” (ibid.).

His competency developed in other ways. For example, he reported on being able to go to the library to take out and read books that interested him. As a former boxer, he was especially interested in that sport and was finally able to read books on the topic. Previously he had watched boxing events on television. By also being able to read background information, he stated that as a result, he had a more extensive understanding of the sport that he could not glean simply through television alone. As he expressed it, “I understand more now” (ibid.). He also spoke of reading “storybooks” on Jamaica, which “helps me to get to know about my culture I didn’t [know] before” (p. 83).

George also noted that as a result of his increasing competence he was now able to fill out applications and write letters. He had a son in England with whom previously he could only call. “I can write him now. I never did before” (p. 84). The same thing was the case with his mother who lived in Jamaica. When she wrote him, friends would have to read the letters to him. He would call her, but “never write back” (p. 86). That changed as a result of participating in the Reading Center program.

The cumulative impact of adult literacy education had other effects in George’s life. George had a part time business where he had to write contracts. Previously, he had to rely on others to write them, but stated that as a result of his growing mastery of print literacy that he was able to write them on his own. He also stated that he was able to do the billing on his own (ibid.). He spoke too of obtaining his driver’s license and of the fear he had for “twelve years”

about going for the test. After working on his reading skills for some time, he took and passed the test (p. 84).

Notwithstanding this and other examples that could be drawn upon to illustrate impact, for a variety of reasons, in the Reading Center program, the *ending* stages did not typically serve as pervasive sources of motivation as those that emphasized *beginning*, and especially the *during* stages of affect and stimulation. That is, we have less documentation to illustrate long-term and enduring impact of adult literacy education on the lives of participating students. The length of time required to achieve a reasonable degree of independent literacy was as one such limiting factor. Whether programs should operate on such a general goal of facilitating independent reading ability, which students typically requested as a major source of motivation both initially and throughout their tenure in the program, is a debatable issue. That would depend in no small measure on the reading level of students participating in any particular program and the gap between initial ability and the ultimate objective. It would also depend on the extent to which a program's focus is on assisting students to develop basic skill mastery in reading and writing as a primary goal, or that of gaining useful, interesting, and desirable knowledge on a variety of topics participants deem relevant regardless of specific gains in the first area. As a practical matter, the Reading Center program focused on both, that given its student-oriented, community-based focus, where students participated for a variety of purposes (stated and unstated), this emphasis seemed the only reasonable way to me of operating on a continuous and long-term basis.

Certain competency based and workplace literacy programs emphasize the attainment of specific "life skills," while participatory initiatives stress the centrality of types and levels of literacy (not merely reading) identified by learners, themselves. While both also emphasize

reading, these two, not necessarily contradictory approaches, stress the acquisition of relevant attainment of skills and knowledge that may or may not be directly correlated to increases in reading ability. In our program, the vast majority of learners identified a common sense desire to enhance their reading and writing ability as a major goal. In response, we emphasized general literacy fluency through a wide range of issue/topic areas and approaches linked to the needs and interests of participating students as discerned by students and tutors together in the midst of program participation. In doing so, we focused on the simultaneous importance of basic skills acquisition and specific content information. The latter included a broad array of information on employment, parenting, health, citizenship, culture, and consumer awareness, as well as the reading and writing of autobiographical narratives of adult literacy students.

Our longitudinal data has lead us to conclude that three-to-five years of regular participation is often required for students, particularly at beginning and intermediate levels, to make significant, sustainable progress toward independent literacy, particularly for those who entered the program. Even Derrick, who entered the program at the higher end of our scale, participated for seven or eight years. This concentrated time spent enabled him to achieve some of the more expansive goals in writing and advocacy that he wanted to accomplish (Lestz, Demetrian, and Smith, 1994, Vol. II, pp. 91-96; Demetrian, 1999b, pp. 159-161). We expended considerable energies, therefore, in establishing a learning climate with a strong emphasis on socio-emotional support and intellectual stimulation to help students sustain long-term commitments to the process and adequate, if not high levels of motivation.

Through such a stable, but invigorating environment, many lower and intermediate level students identified the Bob Steele Reading Center as a place where they felt both comfortable and challenged. During my tenure, we placed more emphasis upon building and sustaining such

a learning environment to facilitate incremental growth rather than concentrating on the ending phases of the learning cycle, though as the case presentation materials document, student goals and aspirations (1) were noted, (2) worked upon, and, in more than a few cases, (3) achieved. That the program was limited in its capacity to help students “complete” learning cycles is acknowledged, particularly for the more advanced. However, as discussed throughout this essay, it was more successful in maintaining a climate that nurtured “process” for those many students who required sustained participation to achieve or simply to work on their longer-range goals. Looked at in another way, helping students to enhance their own emerging capacity, itself served as an important goal of the Reading Center program even when long-term impact remained illusive and uncertain.

A second, related factor for the emphasis on the process of becoming literate (the *during* stages) over those of *ending* stages, was the wide gap between the attainment of even moderately fluent literacy and the actual achievement of many desired life goals. In a nineteenth-century study of illiteracy, historian Harvey J. Graff pointed out the many disparities between the promises of literacy on the one hand, to the prospect of social and vocational mobility on the other hand. According to Graff:

...systematic patterns of inequality and stratification—by origins, class, sex, race, and age—were deep and pervasive, and relatively unaltered by the influence of literacy. The social hierarchy..., even by mid-century in the modernizing urban areas, was ordered more by the dominance of social ascription than by the acquisition of new, achieved characteristics (1979, p. xviii).

Through his extensive documentation of the disparities between the promise and the reality, Graff debunks what he characterizes as “the literacy myth.”

According to Allan Quigley (1990b), such myths, which more often serve the policy needs of government than even the *perceived* needs of potential adult literacy learners, have been

pervasive within literacy campaigns of the twentieth century. For example, Forrest P. Chisman, to whom Quigley refers, links literacy development with:

the twenty million-plus adults who are seriously deficient in basic skills [to] become fully productive workers and citizens well before... [a certain] rendezvous [with demographic destiny] occurs. Without their best efforts over the next twenty years, there is little hope for the economic and social future of this country (1989, p. 3).

Presidential goals such as “eliminating illiteracy by 2000” intensify a “crisis” mentality, which reinforces the myth that literacy in itself represents a major solution to a wide range of complex personal and social problems. There is more rhetoric than insight on the depiction of illiteracy in the popular press, which is inundated with statistics, dire forecasts, and stirring anecdotes of individuals overcoming illiteracy, pulling themselves up by their own bootstraps (Quigley, 1997). Yet, without some radical restructuring of the socio-economic life of the United States and of its profoundly anti-intellectual culture, both extremely unlikely in the foreseeable future, high levels of illiteracy will likely remain pervasive as both symptom and partial cause of the deep chasm separating the haves and have nots within the nation.

This study of motivation at the Bob Steele Reading Center points to certain “life improvements” among those who have persisted with their literacy education. The almost elusive quality of self-esteem has emerged as a major benefit of sustained study. As this essay has documented, students have realized specific, concrete objectives such as obtaining a driver’s license or a better job, developing communication skills, learning how to learn in a formal, school-based way, and entering into more advanced adult education programs. For the individuals concerned, these represent tangible, yet limited and often ambiguous outcomes. Their value usually depends on how such attainments lead to other “life improvements,” which may depend on forces beyond their control and well beyond the literacy program to directly influence.

That literacy has a certain inherent value, particularly when linked to specific needs, interests, and aspirations, draws support from this study and provides corroborating evidence for Csikszentmihalyi's thesis that the stimulation of intrinsic motivation represents a powerful incentive toward literacy development. Yet the gap between the myth and reality that there is a direct link between literacy and upward mobility or even that it often changes personal life in profoundly transformational ways (although sometimes it does), makes precise goal setting and a focus on the ending stages of literacy education somewhat problematical. This is particularly so for general community-based programs that serves a broad array of students like the Bob Steele Reading Center. During my tenure in the early and mid-1990s, in our main work on seeking to enhance the program's learning community (Demetrion, 2000), we had not tackled this difficult issue in any sustained way.

The third limiting factor in the program's de-emphasis of the ending stages of motivation was my own proclivity for process in managing the evolution of the Bob Steele Reading Center. This was especially manifest in the seeking of potential for creative areas of growth as the next step forward, whether in the immediacy of the instructional program or within the context of its organizational development. I linked this process focus to a pragmatic epistemology based on the operative belief that "truth" emerges from the anticipatory prospects of actual experience, which needs to be carefully nurtured in order to develop. In the words of the founder of modern pragmatism, Charles Peirce (1905/1966), "[t]he consciousness of the present is...that of a struggle over what shall be" (p. 223). Based on precepts of pragmatic philosophy, this requires, in turn, attunement of something of "the full meaning [which I took as a metaphor for potentiality] of each present experience" (Dewey, 1938a, p. 49) in the working toward a more desirable future. As Dewey (1916) elsewhere expressed it, "[t]his cumulative movement of

action [from any current state] toward a later [more desirable] result, is what we mean by growth” (p. 41). Throughout my tenure, such a pragmatic ethos characterized an operational ideal far from always actualized in practice that gave impetus to an ongoing sense of direction where long-range attainments seemed illusive (Demetrian, 1993, 2000).

In terms of pedagogy, this meant a rejection of the dominant “functionalist” paradigm of literacy as well as of the “counterhegemonic,” “emancipatory” alternative, in favor of more humanistic orientations that remained grounded in the richness, complexity, and ambiguity of the “lived experiences” of program participants (Demetrian, 1997b, 1998). Such a “middle-ground” pedagogy embraced both the normative tendencies of instrumentalism while authenticating as well, intense autobiographical and aesthetic experience as reflected in the immediacy of the instructional setting. These were typically fostered in collaborative learning formats through group discussion and student writing projects.

Within the Reading Center program, reading of other students’ texts and autobiographical writing played a significant role in the instructional program. The latter was less a study of the self in “splendid isolation” than a form of cultural reconstruction and analysis (Smith, Ball, Demetrian, and Michelson, 1993; Lestz, Demetrian and Smith, 1994). Anthony exhibited this convergence in the fusion of highly personal reflections, his sense of race consciousness, and in his study of African American biography. With Anthony and other students, autobiography was supplemented with a profuse study of biography and a wide range of socio-cultural themes. This combination was evident, too, in Derrick Matthew’s novel *The Prodigal Son of the 90s*, along with his poem “Foresee,” quoted in full, below:

To all my brothers and sisters in this world of ours,
I foresee a change in this society
in this country of ours.
The Blacks and Whites must come together as

one race,
 under one name,
 that is brothers and sisters as human beings.
 If we have to judge a person,
 let's do it by the character,
 not by the color of their skin.
 I foresee a new change
 in our way of talking,
 a new way of loving
 and a new way of caring.
 I foresee, your children and my children
 growing up in this new world of ours,
 dating and being married to one another,
 Blacks and Whites being a new breed of people
 under the same rights of freedom.
 I foresee, Blacks and Whites as equal
 in education, at work,
 going anywhere in this country without fear.
 I foresee a new day in this country and in other countries, a new change.
 I foresee, Germany had made a change.
 I foresee, Africa had made a change.
 But we as a country in the United States,
 I foresee a change.
 A singer named Sam Cook had written a song,
 Named, "A Change Going to Come."
 I feel it,
 I believe it,
 and I know it,
 A change is going to come! (Demetrian, 1995, p. 32).

As a student, a writer, a peer tutor, board member of LVGH, spokesperson for the agency, and active member of the Hopewell Baptist Church in North Hartford, Derrick sought to embody this vision in what he referred to as his "mission" at the Reading Center. This blending of autobiography and cultural exploration was informally combined with many other lessons of an overtly less political nature that focused on various topics of general interest, with a good deal of explicit work, also, on basic reading and writing development. At the Reading Center, the instructional program was broadly eclectic, ranging from basic skill development to various functional areas of importance, to themes on family, the self, politics, culture, and aesthetics.

Notwithstanding occasional sessions on political culture, there was little “transformative” in the radical, structural sense at the Reading Center analogous to a Freirian Pedagogy of the Oppressed. Yet the program did push open plausibility structures within the intellectual, social, cultural and emotional worlds of its participants in the working toward more desirable ends for individual students and for the program as a whole. In authentic pragmatic fashion, it accepted the historically given as “a series of opening moves rather than a delimiting or enclosing mode” (Graff, 1987, p. 2) which serves as the baseline through which to create a more desirable future. From this platform education properly focused contributes to the “reconstruction or reorganization of experience which adds to the meaning of experience and which increases ability to direct the course of subsequent experience” (Dewey, 1916, p. 77). In search for creative opportunities for growth, the Center’s pedagogy resonated with the vision of a plastic social universe that held both incredible constraints and untold opportunities in a political culture that affords at most opportunities for modest social reform.

I drew on a pragmatic dynamic also in helping to shape the organizational expansion of the Reading Center in my probing of *potentiality* as a major motivational source of development. My sense of things was analogous to Dewey’s perception of an “open” universe, an “unfinished world,” which seemed, in part, directly connected to the sense of hope and possibility, stimulated among many learners and volunteers via “the literacy myth.” The myth is a double-edged sword. On the one hand, it legitimizes certain social policies and attitudes with an intent toward social control as both Graff and Quigley have documented. On the other hand, it engenders a sense of possibility among students and tutors that growth in literacy is achievable with persistence, along with the expectation that life in some intangible and in various tangible, and often profound ways, can become transformed (Demetrian, 2002). This myth provided much of the energy that

enabled us to reconstruct the Reading Center's organizational culture and learning climate through several significant reconstructive stages over the eight-year history of my tenure. However ambiguous such a myth may have been, it provided an impetus for action that a more cynical or even "objective" orientation might have forestalled.

My reading of the environment was shaped by more than merely optimism. As I sensed it, a sense of closure, reflecting the "iron cage" dystopia of Dewey's European counterpart, sociologist Max Weber, threatened to overwhelm the force field surrounding the Reading Center's environment. The Weberian mode of structural determinism reflected in the postindustrial imagery of the functional literacy paradigm plays a dominant role in many literacy agencies and the broader organizational and political cultures in which they are embedded. At its starkest, it represents a closed world where behaviors and attitudes of administrators, teachers, and students are shaped by the self-fulfilling, self-evident assumptions of competency-based education; namely, that adult literacy learners seek basic education for some rather narrow instrumental purposes only. Through such a dominant ethos, the purpose of literacy becomes defined as the ability "to function proficiently in society."

This is not to deny that there can be, and are creative potentialities for growth within this framework, as many students and instructors have found satisfaction in working from its premises. Nonetheless, an undue emphasis upon such a focus can result in the marginalizing of the many intricate aspects of learning that can be unleashed through other models of adult literacy, including the one highlighted in this study. That was my concern.

This apprehension was perhaps an overly polarized construct in my own imagination in that some bridging between the two perspectives was always possible. Still, I did sense that the somewhat unique cultural/pedagogical framework set up at the Reading Center buttressed

against dominant norms, which held the prospect of sapping up human, intellectual, organizational, and financial resources upon which its vitality depended.

Thus, a functionalist pedagogy, as pervasive in ABE sectors in Connecticut in the 1990s (Alamprese, 1988, 1993; Demetrian, 1999b), becomes institutionally reinforced through evaluation mechanisms based on “hard” data, namely quantitative measurements through standardized testing. This is particularly problematic when standardized testing is unrelated to the curriculum focus of a program (Sticht, 1990). According to Lytle and Wolfe (1989), this form of assessment “fails to capture even a part of the complex interactions of people involved in teaching and learning” (p. 65). Radical scholars interpret the functionalist paradigm as a form of social reproduction that reinforces the many inequalities of race, class, gender, and ethnicity so characteristic, particularly of modern urban experience (Freire, 1970; Bowles and Gintis, 1976; Apple, 1982; Giroux, 1983; Shapiro, 1990, Lankshear, 1993).

As a form of cultural critique, I share much of this view. With the adoption of the Connecticut Adult Performance Program (CAPP), a competency-based adult basic education system modeled precisely after the Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment System (CASAS), the functionalist paradigm would become normative throughout ABE in Connecticut. LVA affiliates in the state were also required to adopt CAPP in order to receive state or federal funding. My concern was that through a variety of institutional interlocking mechanisms, a broad-based functionalist ideology could seep into even the Reading Center environment. At the least, I felt, it could blunt a more dynamic pedagogy based on *its* operating premises from emerging by limiting resources that could be utilized to develop its “peculiar” learning climate. In any event the dominant thrust in Connecticut toward the functionalist paradigm established a

counter-discourse to the Reading Center vision, which required considerable defensive energies to maintain.

Still, there were other more localized energies afoot that provided scope for another direction, including the strong support of the LVGH administration. These were, I believe, more directly linked directly to the needs, interests, and aspirations of the program's students and volunteers, along with my own intellectual passions, which moved in a direction considerably different than that of CAPP (Demetron, 1999b). A peculiar mix of idealism, enthusiasm, realism, and kinetic energy characterized the force field of potentiality out of which I sought to act. Postindustrial macro-forces served as a type of constraint in reinforcing the functional paradigm. Nonetheless, a countervailing force, governed by the gap between any given current reality in the Center's history and the potential of what Freire (1970) refers to as greater "humanization," served as a galvanizing power, inspiring the variety of "transformations" that characterized the Reading Center's organizational culture and learning climate. Stimulated by Dewey's concept of growth and a middle-ground ideal, building on a liberal political culture of democratic capitalism, this vision stemmed from reformist energies of the American pragmatic tradition rather than the radical politics of Freire or his U.S. protégée, Henry Giroux (Demetron, 1997a, 2001a).

This energy field was intensified at least in my mind by the precariousness of the Reading Center project as conceived as something significantly different than the functionalist model. My felt sense was that unless a countervailing humanistic emphasis, which incorporated instrumental values was continuously pressed, the functionalist paradigm would encroach if not actually within the Reading Center in the short term, certainly all around its immediate environment. I felt this dominant discourse had the potential of eroding the Center's distinctive

vision, given the appeal of the functional paradigm in the mid-90s with the popular press, government, business, and within the ideology of the major literacy agencies (Quigley, 1997). I was convinced that a program which tapped into the intrinsic needs, interests, and desires of learners and volunteers provided more viability for a community-based adult literacy program than the abstract canon of competency-based education. In the social conservative climate of Hartford, Connecticut, in a state that defined competency-based education as normative for ABE, in a state and local agency that lacked other viable models of literacy education, it would take considerable energy and persistence to chart out another course as I sought to take the Center in the 1990s.

Concerned about “co-optation,” what I had not given much consideration to was a mediating pedagogy between the CASAS framework and what I was attempting to construct. Rather, I sought to press the uniqueness of what I was attempting to establish. As described throughout this essay, this was based on the pedagogical linchpins of collaborative learning and a balanced approach between basic skill building and context-based instruction stemming from a broad array of topics in the personal, cultural, socio-political, and functional realms. These instructional elements were reinforced by a scaffolding methodology and a view of development based on Dewey’s concept of growth.

The challenge required more than merely *articulating* another perspective. It necessitated its *construction* through a step-by-step buildup of program sturdiness, reinforced by several dramatic breakthroughs, which placed the Reading Center in a new light within its own self-identity and within the organizational culture of LVGH (Demetrian, 2000). The following lines by Dewey (1938a), read as a form of expressive aesthetics in arousing a sense of potentiality,

rather than literally, characterized the underlying dynamic that stimulated the “growth” of the Reading Center or at least my sense of its operating mode:

We always live at the time we live and not at some other time, and only by extracting at each present time the full meaning of each present experience are we prepared for doing the same thing in the future. This is the only preparation which in the long run amounts to anything (p. 49).

Through such a reconstructive process of building on cutting edge possibilities of any given present, the program evolved through a succession of stages. The first major transformation resulted from a grant from the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving. This provided permanent space both for the Center and LVGH to be housed in the same locality. As a result, the program became incorporated into the local agency. In turn, the merger enhanced the organizational legitimacy of both the Center and the local agency (Demetrian, 2000).

That profound organizational and cultural change created the force field that enabled the Center to develop a dynamic small group-tutoring program, which established an intensely collaborative environment. This climate, in turn, sparked a major writing project culminating in *Welcome To Our World* (Smith, 1991). The Center’s group tutoring program also provided the instructional model for my colleague Steve Bender’s Family Literacy Program with sites established in various schools and community agencies in Hartford’s African-American North End and Hispanic South End.

The collaborative environment of the Center and its evolving humanistic literacy program made it an ideal site to engage in an oral history project with Trinity College, culminating in two books; one for the literacy learner, *Life Stories By and For New Readers* (Smith et. al., 1993) and a two volume set, “*Reading the World: Life Narratives By New Readers*. (Lestz, Demetrian, and Smith, 1994). With the creation of these texts, combined with the Center’s emerging research projects, I sought the impetus for another incarnation: the transformation of the Bob

Steele Reading Center into a regional and nationally recognized adult literacy laboratory/research center. This vision did not come to fruition, but it was, to use a Deweyan term, an “ends-in view” that shaped my own projections about the Center and stimulated my research projects on the program.

The underlying point is both simple and complex. By focusing on process and by nurturing the potential resident within our force field at any given time, clearly, on our collective perceptions, we built and transformed the Reading Center program from its fledging and precarious foundings to a major and enduring adult literacy program. Such construction included some cutting edge pedagogical distinctions in the areas of collaborative learning and in the generation of a rich body of published student narratives. Program growth was often accomplished in serendipitous ways, from a germ of a plan to a first rate adult literacy center, even though anything like its “full” vision, at least on my incarnation, did not come to pass.

Internalized in various ways by the participants in its life, the spirit out of which we had operated the Bob Steele Reading Center unleashed creative processes that played a dominant role, particularly in the program’s “psychic” history which led us to emphasize “growth” and “becoming” over that of completion. Consequently, to use Wlodowski’s terms, there was more of an emphasis on the *during* rather than the *ending* stages of the Reading Center’s learning and organizational construction cycle, though far from completely so.

Motivation and the Adult New Reader: Concluding Observations

Methodology

Rather than rigorous in a formal scientific sense, this study builds on an imaginistic construct based upon the available data, my own experience in managing the Reading Center for over eight years, and a learning life-cycle model that I created as a heuristic to narrate this essay.

It utilizes a collage effect of episodic descriptions of many students, along with in-depth portrayals of some in an effort to examine motivation from program entry points to the attainment of implicit goals and aspirations. Its focus is also predominantly on the program rather than the life experience of students, except as provided in narrative descriptions encapsulated in various Reading Center texts.

None of the materials drawn upon for this study were designed for this, or any research project. The student anthologies and collection of student (and tutor) interviews were incorporated in instruction, tutor training, and drawn upon in providing support for assessment and program evaluation projects and reports. These materials were also utilized for public relations purposes as a way of raising consciousness among those interested, or potentially so, in supporting our program, among those who had no first-hand knowledge of adult literacy students. The fact that these materials were created for such purposes and that no information was generated specifically to support this research project—no systematic field notes, no multiple interview of students, no systematic inductive analysis of the environment as a prelude to the writing of the text, and no inter rater reliability through which to check my interpretation—may raise certain issues about the reliability and generalizability of the findings. These are important issues. Yet, as a type of teacher research, these limitations are partially offset by the grounded site-based experience of the writer, along with the organization of the available data through the constructed typology of the learning lifecycle. Nonetheless, in any effort to draw what might be considered authoritative conclusions about such a topic as motivation and the adult new reader, the lack of a fuller range of traditional methodological points to certain limitations of this study.

Even so, the available qualitative data, in particular, was far from insignificant. These included two volumes of student essays, a three-volume oral history collection consisting of 16 students, a two-volume collection of interviews from 19 students, a thick volume of tutor interviews and essays, and an instructional log. The qualitative data was rich, and only lightly drawn upon in this essay. As much of the focus of this research project took place before LVGH computerized its statistical data, very little quantitative information was available. The study is largely limited, therefore, to the qualitative data available on the program.

For any definitive analysis of the overall effectiveness of the Bob Steele Reading Center, much pertinent data is lacking. However, that is not the focus of this study. For a research project on motivation, the available material does provide valuable resources. Even for this topic, there are gaps. For example, in concentrating on students that had developed some continuous history with the program (where there is more available data), the study veers toward, though not exclusively so, to what might be viewed as a compilation of success stories—best case or close to best case scenarios. With some exceptions, the study does not focus on the ambiguity many students experienced as they attempted to make sense of the gaps between what they expected from the program and what they felt they were gaining from it. These limitations invariably skew any study of motivation, which a more rigorous research project would seek to rectify. Nonetheless, given the paucity of in-depth site-based research on adult literacy motivation and the importance of identifying factors that lead to reasonable success, it seemed sensible to go forward with the essay for the purpose of identifying some of the factors operative when effective learning does take place. Moreover, in contributing to the field's understanding of adult literacy motivation, this work does not stand alone. Rather, is intended to complement other studies, those completed and those to be written.

Drawing on available resources and “thick interpretation,” this effort is exploratory, rather than definitive in seeking to disclose something of the lived experience of the learning climate of the Bob Steele Reading Center in the early and mid 1990s. It is an essay and not a rigorous research project, though there is a certain systematic structure in its design. Moreover it represents an effort to illuminate important aspects of best- or near-best case scenarios of learning at one particular site with a broader intent of exploring the topic of motivation that may have applicability in other settings. In embracing insights from the ethnographic, case study, phenomenological, and teacher research traditions, my primary objective is to portray as authentically as I can something of the learning climate and student perceptions of a single program, clearly from my inevitably biased interpretation. As a by-product, I expect that the work will have some comparative value for other studies on this topic. That is, I seek to provide “enough description so that readers will be able to determine how closely their situations match the research situation, and hence, whether findings can be transferred” (Merriam, 2001, p.211) or utilized for comparative purposes.

Thus, I do not claim that my findings are generalizable in any statistical sense to all community-based volunteer tutoring programs. Moreover, other interpretations of the same data that I have drawn upon, which require a broad range of scientific and aesthetic sensibilities for a fuller analysis, are plausible. Noting its limitations, I take a reasoned position that the discussion on motivation in this essay has some bearing beyond the realm of the specific case focus of this study, which a literature review, additional studies of various research traditions, and commentary from practitioners and students might confirm, modify, or disconfirm. This study is far from definitive. In conjunction with other work of various research traditions and

methodologies, the project is designed to extend the dialogue on adult literacy motivation among various constituents, particularly scholars, practitioners, students, and policymakers.

Notwithstanding the limitations of this study, I draw certain conclusions about motivation and the adult new reader as experienced at the Bob Steele Reading Center. Some, or perhaps even much of the following discussion can be extrapolated to other programs, though further research is needed before more authoritative assessments can be drawn. It is to these summary conclusions, implicit in much of which has been already discussed, that we now turn.

Summary Commentary on Motivation

As depicted by Fingeret and Drennon (1997), a “turning point” in which adults drew on the prospect of literacy as a way of resolving a problem or expanding on an opportunity of some significant importance to their lives, served for many as an impetus in making the decision to enter the program. These ranged from very precisely defined needs like coping with challenges of finding a job, helping children with their homework and reading school notices, or being able to fill out insurance, banking, medical, and employment forms and applications. Sometimes they were very specific, like obtaining a driver’s license or passing the citizenship test. Other times they were more global, such as David’s realization that in the United States, “the future has to come with school” (Smith, Ball, Demetron, and Michelson, 1993, p. 23).

Often, such needs were reflected in a self-evident desire to learn to read and write as a way of more effectively dealing with a broad array of life issues. Regardless of specific factors, some personal sense that learning to read and write as an adult was possible, desirable, and essential, represented a baseline of motivation on entering the program. The extent to which this source of motivation was nurtured by the program, and persisted as a focal point of

consciousness, played a significant role in the matter of student persistence in the midst of sometimes difficult circumstances.

Thus, while students had specific purposes on entering the program (implicitly or explicitly articulated), throughout the course of a learning history, needs, goals, desires, and aspirations became refined or changed over time. As students began their work, they had certain perceptions, often vague, of what the program would be like and how their development would progress. As they worked in their groups, studied a broad range of topics, increased their general reading and writing abilities, applied what they were learning to different aspects of their lives, and began to think in new ways about themselves, new motives emerged even as previous ones were often refined or refashioned. As expressed by Dewey (1938b), “activities carried on for satisfying needs so change the environment that new needs arise which demand still further change in the activities of the organism by which they are satisfied; and so in a potentially endless chain” (p. 35). One thinks of Orlando’s newfound interest in traditional school-based topics, Derrick’s passion for autobiographical writing, and Anthony’s desire to study African-American biography. Or as Elaine stated it near the end of her tenure at the Reading Center, “I want something. I want to do something; to have a goal. That’s the motive. To go up in life.” She further elaborated that she wanted to go up “[t]o the top.” When asked where that was for her, she responded, “[t]o be a nurse” (Demetrian and Gruner, 1995, p. 58). As evident throughout this essay, other examples could be provided to demonstrate how new or refined interests, goals, and aspirations emerged in the process learning at the Reading Center.

The central point is that both means and ends, which are mutually dependent, were simultaneously stimulated in the process of internalizing expanded interests, goals, and aspirations. As capacity expanded, so did goals or what Dewey refers to as “ends-in-view.” As

these were re-defined, the search for the means to achieve them was stimulated. The attainment of particularly desirable goals, such as obtaining a new job or a driver's license, may result in a temporary sense of satisfaction until new problems or opportunities arise wherein that which is achieved often serves as means for the attainment of other aims. Thus with David, his ability to read road signs (an early goal) allowed him to take what he viewed as a better job outside the Hartford area. This, in turn, contributed to his broader goal of becoming a mature and independent adult. As illustrated in the case presentations in Chapters Three and Six, both sustained motivation and goal attainment were most thoroughly manifest among those students best able to work through the means-ends continuum throughout their program participation.

As a community-based program consisting of students with varied goals, some articulated, many not, the process did not typically ensue via a precise correlation between subject matter and goals sought. Rather, to use Dewey's concept, some "deposit" of ends sought was embedded throughout the learning process, which enhanced its meaning and contributed as well to the refinement and modification of aims. Thus, a broad range of topics and interests converged that expanded student knowledge in a variety of areas, while stimulating hope and expectations of realizing more extensive goals that had symbolic as well as literal meaning for them. One student expressed it this way:

How could I know about that [African American history]? I couldn't read. You know what I'm saying? I'm interested in learning about everything because I've been blind to a lot of things in my life and I really don't know a lot (Demetrian and Gruner, 1995, pp. 9-10).

Not all students felt that way about themselves. Yet, what was common among those who believed they gained the most from the program was the sense that the learning they obtained was substantial, which they felt they would not have attained on their own. Like this student, those who gained the most out of the program were able to make sense of their efforts

throughout the process of moving toward their sometimes-changing longer-range objectives. Goals and aspirations often became clarified in the process of moving toward them. The means-ends relationship was a critical motivational factor among student in the *during* stage of their participation in the program.

In short, students were motivated by several factors, particularly by their own self-derived purposes for entering the program. Once participating in the program, the growing capacity of their basic abilities, combined with their intrinsic desire to succeed, kicked in as a continuous source of motivation to help sustain them, often, over a several year period. Extrinsic factors were also operative, particularly the establishment of a collaborative learning climate at the Reading Center. This cultural setting provided an ongoing environmental framework for students to work on their short, medium, and long-term objectives, uninterrupted, if they chose, for years, for as much as eight hours of instruction per week. Moreover, the program ran all year long, which provided an additional source of continuity.

Several features that fortified this environment stood out, including the eight-year service of a single program manager adhering to a particular vision of adult literacy education that he sought to institute (Demetron, 2000). Other factors, as discussed earlier in this chapter, included the program's overall collaborative environment, the small group-tutoring program, and the scaffolding paradigm as related to instruction and organizational development. The durability of commitment and the competence of key tutors, particularly in sustaining the small-group tutoring program was a central factor in fortifying the Center's learning climate. This influence on student motivation was pervasive. As one student explained it:

These tutors, wherever they come from or how they come to volunteer, they're really determined to teach us....It's slammin' 'cause it's working. I can look at the teachers when we're doing it [reading]. They're really interested....They're really strong in trying

to get this into you which you got to make come into you (Johnson, Bender, and Demetron, 1996, p. 14).

Many of the themes discussed throughout this study on student motivation, levels of progress, learning goals, the content of instruction, and the importance of basic skill building are reprised in the following description of Jennifer and Suzanne, who co-taught the advanced Basic Literacy group on Thursday evening. Though volunteers, they were far from amateurs, except in the best sense of that term. The experience of these young careerist college graduate suburbanites, who worked in downtown Hartford was not unique. Other tutors shared a similar caliber of competence and long duration within the program. Nonetheless, they were among the program's most effective tutors. What Suzanne and Jennifer brought to their assignment was an intriguing blend of improvisation and quest for structure that meshed nicely with the needs of students and with the broader culture of the Reading Center. They shared a similar view of literacy as "meaning making" which depended for success not only on relevant content, but also on refined skill building even for the advanced students that made up their group. As Suzanne explained it:

I think there's a lot of interest that we've more recently begun to address, about grammar and spelling, things that we initially shied away from because the training is like, "The whole language approach, don't get specific." But I think with an advanced group, sometimes its good to get specific because they're good on a general level, they know how it [reading in general] works, but they need some finer detail and are interested in it (Demetron, 1997c, p. 215).

Related to this "skill" approach was Jennifer's quest for an overarching methodology beyond anything she learned in tutor training or by direct experience at the Reading Center. As she articulated it:

In anything that you learn, maybe there's five essential building blocks. As you master each of the five, you learn how to tie them together. I'm not really sure we know what those five, or however many there are (p. 225).

Notwithstanding this methodological quest and commitment to skill building, both tutors stressed the stimulation of content learning through empathetic cognitive probing and establishing an enthusiastic collaborative environment. They punctuated their tutoring with a strong experiential focus that depended on immediate feedback from the group. They were vivacious and engaging, which in itself added much to the quality of their tutoring in establishing a stimulating learning environment. Their creativity emerged by maintaining a vital tension between their improvisational intuition, their dynamic give and take with students, and their quest for a more precise methodological direction to instruction.

In important ways, they imbibed the collaborative, holistic, methodology of LVA's Small group tutoring manual (Cheatham and Lawson, 1990), notwithstanding their apprehensions that its whole language philosophy shortchanged focused attention on basic reading and writing skill building activities and quest for methodological precision. Consider the range of topics they explored with their group:

We've done quite a bit of history in terms of American history, civil rights, some general black history. We're doing quite a bit of fiction, everything from fables to contemporary fiction. And then, current events—we've done several things on some contemporary social issues. We've discussed the gang violence in Hartford, and we've done a couple of things with crime in general, which everyone's been really interested in because everybody's got opinions on that and they love to discuss it (p. 213).

In no sense did they impose these topics in a “banking” mode, but sought dialogue students, in part, gauging success by the responses and reactions that ensued, but also challenging students toward greater clarity in their verbal and written expression.

In their quest for “Whole Language Plus” (Cazden, 1992), Suzanne and Jennifer expressed certain reservations about uncritically embracing what they perceived as the new doctrine from Syracuse. Like the other group tutors, they assumed a more “teacherly” approach to instruction than that advocated in the LVA training manual where “there is no ‘teacher’ to

give easy answers” (Cheatham and Lawson, 1990, p. 5). It was not that Suzanne and Jennifer became “banking” teachers where the educator’s “task is to ‘fill’ the students with the content of his narration—contents which are detached from reality, disconnected from the totality that engendered them and could give them significance” (Freire, 1970, p. 57). Rather, they exhibited a profound respect for “scaffolding” (a term that they would not have likely known, but a concept they would have easily understood) as an intermediary pedagogy between the “banking” model and the participatory ethos in the strong sense, where direction comes from the group. In the scaffolding model, the teacher serves as a bridge, in order to facilitate new learning students could not achieve independently.

I have argued elsewhere, in such “mainstream” programs like the Bob Steele Reading Center where a stream of traditional and innovative pedagogies intermingle, that such scaffolding serves as an important source of *enablement*, that draws on principles of participatory and traditional approaches to teaching (Demetrian, 1999a). With the former, the scaffolding model builds upon student knowledge, interest, and experience. With the latter, it assumes a strong leadership role for the teacher, but only as it moves *within* the grain of student interest and current learning capacity. It was in search for more effective scaffolding that Suzanne and Jennifer’s quest for enhanced methodology makes sense, not in contradiction to the improvisational focus of their tutoring, but to more effectively shape and discipline it.

This dynamic becomes clear in their discussion of student writing. Commenting on one student’s dilemma, Suzanne observed, “When we’ve been writing with him, he comes up with profound thoughts in the midst of disorganization” (Demetrian, 1997c, p. 218). Pondering the deficiencies of another student, Jennifer commented “that in all of his writing, it seems to be all related to his own personal experiences and they’re all sensationalistic” (p. 221).

Despite a profusion of student essays created at the Reading Center, writing in adult literacy remains difficult where pieces emerge sometimes only after the most laborious of efforts (Demetrian, 2000). Part of the challenge is to help students build on their innate talents and to press toward further development in ways that enable them to construct a writing history. With some minor, but notable exceptions, this had proven beyond the scope of the main focus of the program between 1990-1995.

Yet their group did write. Suzanne noted, “the most success was creative writing or on issues people feel strong about” (Demetrian, 1997c, p. 216). They found particularly effective, story starters that students would complete. This provided an important structure both for the students and the tutors. Notwithstanding this methodology, Suzanne and Jennifer viewed organization and structure as anything but straightforward. With one student, they identified such a need as essential, while for another they perceived that any such “imposition” of discipline would deter his creative process. The broader challenge, which they recognized is to link such supportive scaffolding to compelling areas of interest that build upon more than temporary stimulation. This, in turn, requires a powerful commitment to “the writing process,” including a need to help students identify convincing reasons to engage in such difficult and time consuming work.

The tension between the inner creativity stimulated by the “writing process” and the ability to compose good standard prose was summarized in the “debate” between Suzanne and Jennifer on whether one particular student was one of the best writers in the group. Suzanne argued for the positive based on his provocative ideas. In writing about those who sat-in at lunch counters in the South during the 1960s, this individual could state that “these people were the foundation of the civil rights movement” (p. 222). As Suzanne put it, “those were words that

came out of *his* [emphasis added] mouth” (ibid.) Despite the problems this student had with spoken and written grammar, “the thoughts that he wants to write down and can get down, I think are fantastic” (ibid.) Jennifer took a more skeptical stance. She acknowledged his “unbelievable comprehension of the material,” but argued that “he struggles in getting those thoughts down in a manner that I would not call better writing than some other students” (p. 223). That is, “he still doesn’t have a more advanced ability to record” his insightful thoughts, “in a way that’s effective for somebody who’s reading it” (ibid.) Suzanne agreed, but argued that this student was not *comparatively* lacking in those areas, so that for her, his keen mind carried more weight in her determination of his writing ability. “He has a lot up there, and he really wants to get it down. He has some concepts that he wants to get down” (ibid).

As indicated by this debate, Jennifer emphasized structure and skill building more than Suzanne who focused more strongly on the importance of “meaning making.” Notwithstanding this significant pedagogical difference, they worked well as a team. That was because they appreciated the value in each other’s position, which they viewed more from the perspective of a continuum than as a polarity. They also shared a common socio-cultural background in a similar life style that enabled them to derive a certain sense and value in their work at the Reading Center. This, in turn, resonated well with their students and the culture of the program. Thus, despite differences in emphasis, they shared a broad compatibility in developing a program based on wholistic learning, skill based activities, and participatory literacy education buttressed by a scaffolding paradigm.

While the tutors never “resolved” the sometimes conflicting drives between improvisational learning and the quest for specific methodologies, it led to some stimulating learning sessions. Jennifer and Suzanne built an instructional program firmly rooted in the life

experience and knowledge base of their students while also helping them with more disciplined skill building activities.

Both Suzanne and Jennifer exerted a profoundly interactive learning relationship with their students based on stimulating content material. Both adopted a “teacherly” role within a scaffolding model of bringing students to the edge of their current learning capacity and then providing direct instruction to move them along a continuum of enhanced learning that they would not have mastered on their own. Within these contexts and without creating an oversimplified polarity, the single compelling difference was that Suzanne embraced a more improvisational interpretation of learning while Jennifer viewed enhanced structure as a major missing ingredient in the program's repertoire of instructional strategies.

In essence, Suzanne believed that the road to enhanced learning lie within the learners, themselves, with the teacher’s primary task to facilitate a process of enhanced “meaning making.” By pushing the boundaries of their own frames of reference and current knowledge base, further learning would ensue through discovery processes. For Jennifer, learning was more embedded within systems and specific methodologies that needed to be mastered whether those be “writing skills,” rules of grammar, or step-by step logical analysis of a problem or the specific sequencing of unlocking a learning process. It is important to reiterate that neither Suzanne nor Jennifer polarized these distinctive approaches, but with different emphases, viewed them as critical aspects on a continuum of learning.

In their diverse and complementary teaching approaches, Suzanne and Jennifer embodied the essence of the Reading Center vision in particularly creative ways. Their contribution and those of other tutors played a major role in stimulating and sustaining student motivation in what Wlodowski refers to as the *during* stages of a learning cycle. Though students achieved various

outcomes that might be viewed as the *ending* stages of the adult literacy learning cycle, as depicted in the case presentation of Suzanne and Jennifer and throughout much of this essay, the primary strength of the Bob Steele Reading Center was in the facilitation of the process of learning while students participated in the program.

Epilogue

The framework for such a process orientation stemmed in part from the Center's educational vision which in its ideal construct linked learners' needs, interests, and aspirations within the realm of the personal, practical, aesthetic, and socio-cultural realms, often through autobiographical, collaborative, and sometimes local community contexts. A major purpose often emerging from such a learning environment is a quest for a deepened understanding and fructifying of human experience which resonates with Dewey's thesis "that the educational process has no end beyond itself [since]...the educational process is one of continual reorganizing, reconstructing, transforming" (1916, p. 50).

This study shares affinities with both the advocates of competency-based and participatory learning that education needs to be purposeful. It differs, though, from the competency perspective of focusing on discrete skills necessary to "function proficiently in society" by stressing development through continuous evolution. It also differs from some of the more utopian aspects of participatory education which places educators in the role of facilitators where "there is no 'teacher' to give easy answers. [Instead], each participant [of a group] becomes a teacher for the others and each participant learns from the other members of the group" (Cheatham and Lawson, 1990, p. 5). The problem with this is that the *way* in which learning happens takes precedence over *what* is learned. Thus, notwithstanding its many positive contributions in authenticating learner experience, LVA's participatory ideal expressed in *Small Group Tutoring: A Collaborative Approach for Literacy Instruction* (Cheatham and Lawson, 1990), provides little powerful role for the tutor in assisting literacy students to critically learn from experience. This tendency was partially corrected in the more balanced perspective of

Tutor 7th edition, which defines “the tutor’s role as coach/facilitator” (Cheatham, Colvin, and Laminack, 1993, p. 20).

Teaching, which is more than facilitation, is an important role that progressive adult literacy educators would do well to embrace. Criticizing “Either-Or” educational philosophies of the traditionalist/progressive camps of his day, Dewey (1938a) did not simply elevate experience, “[f]or some experiences are mis-educative” (p. 25). Rather, “[e]verything depends upon the *quality* of the experience which is had” (p. 27). As he further elaborates:

The quality of any experience has two aspects. There is an immediate aspect of agreeableness or disagreeableness, and there is its influence upon later experiences. The first is easy and obvious to judge. The *effect* of an experience is not borne on its face. It sets a problem to the educator. It is his business to arrange for the kind of experiences which, while they do not repel the student, but rather engage his activities are, nevertheless, more than immediately enjoyable since they promote having desirable future experiences. Just as no man lives or dies to himself, so no experience lives or dies to itself. Wholly independent of desire or intent, every experience lives on to further experience. Hence the central problem of an education based upon experience is to select the kind of present experiences that live fruitfully and creatively in subsequent experiences (pp. 27-28).

From a Deweyan perspective, a fundamental role of the educator at *any* level, but particularly so in adult literacy, is both to explore and help enhance the quality of the life experiences of learners in whatever ways possible. In the process, it is also to provide bridges linking current experiences to new potentiality that resonates authentically with actual and emerging life conditions and perceptions of learners. For Dewey (1925), the purpose of both learning and living “is to render goods more coherent, more secure and more significant in appreciation” (p. 408). On this mandate, education, broadly defined, is the royal road to the attainment of such goods through the exercise of intelligence in problematic situations wherein experience sometimes becomes transformed into the “consummatory” phenomenon of art. Thus, for Dewey, there is an aesthetic purpose to his instrumental logic in the creation of a better, more

enduring experience, a process of reconstruction, that, while achieving certain stabilities, never ends. As he states, “[i]f instrumental efficacies need to be emphasized, it is not for the sake of instruments but for that sake of that full and more secure distribution of values which is impossible without instrumentalities” (p. 412). For Dewey, then, “[n]othing but the best, the richest and fullest experience possible is good enough for man” (p. 412). Although this represents an ideal literally impossible to attain, it does point to the importance of potentiality that the learning process sometimes stimulates that helped to motivate and sustain the students described in this essay who sought various forms of life transformation through literacy. Such an orientation is ineradicably participatory even as the teacher brings her or his special insight and expertise to the learning situation.

In the postmodern, postindustrial temper of the early twenty-first century, it is difficult to be as sanguine as was perhaps Dewey about any progressive evolution of selves and society in the forging of the “great community” (Dewey, 1927, pp. 143-184). Dewey realized how precarious was his vision of progressive evolution where “free social inquiry [might become]...indissolubly wedded to the art of full and moving communication” (p. 184). He realized that this represented only a potentiality that might never come to pass. Throughout the pages of *Democracy and Education*, he acknowledged tendencies already present on the fragmentation and alienation of so much of early twentieth century schooling. It is equally clear, however, that he held more than a vain hope that such a condition could become transformed through the exercise of “creative intelligence” within schools and throughout the nation’s institutional life.

Notwithstanding the pervasive influence of various functional perspectives that bifurcate “education for life adjustment” and the humanities, much of Dewey’s founding thought remains

viable at the beginning of the twenty-first century, particularly in adult literacy where at least the *potentiality* for creative, experiential education remains open. Of specific importance is Dewey's insistence that learning progresses from current experience, with the major educational challenge that of enhancing its quality through its transformation. As this study has indicated as well as that of Fingeret and Drennon (1997; Demetron, 2002), whatever adult literacy may not accomplish, it has *at least* the potential of stimulating such growth.

For many of the learners at the Reading Center, this type of development where individuals expanded their life horizons in collaboration and in community with others played a significant, although often uncertain role in the construction of personal meaning and purpose. As Derrick Matthews, the longest continuing student at the Bob Steele Reading Center during my tenure put it:

What are my limits? Right now, I'm seeking to see what this is. If I get into something that doesn't work right I move on to the next thing. I think that's where I stand right now. I don't know my limits, right now. I'm just taking anything I can grab onto and seeing what I can do with it (Smith et. al., 1993, p. 109).

Dewey (1916) reminds us that "A reorganization of education so that learning takes place in connection with the intelligent carrying forward of purposeful activities is a slow work" (p. 137). Much of the pedagogical emphasis at the Reading Center focused on such "carrying forward" *toward* enhanced being through education, even as our efforts were not as carefully planned in the manner called for in Dewey's educational vision. Our emergent Deweyan vision of continuous reconstruction through "growth" remained largely implicit. Its *formal* conceptualization based on pragmatic epistemology, where knowledge gained in the seeking of a more desirable future stems from potentiality resident in any given present, dwelled largely in my mind, which I have sought to articulate in a series of published articles (Demetron, 1993, 1997, 1998, 1999a, 1999b, 2001). I identified my major task as the cultivation of such growth

wherever possible. I discussed with program participants as it seemed useful, some of the formal theory that drove my pedagogical and organizational vision, which I sensed was inherent in much of their practice. My larger purpose was in working out of its premises in practice as a pedagogical methodology and as a framework for thinking and acting in the realm of organizational development.

As many commentators have pointed out, Dewey did not sufficiently take into account the role of power, particularly that of corporate consumer capitalism in influencing both mass behavior and the institution of schooling itself in facilitating social reproduction. A similar critique can be made against this Reading Center vision. In certain fundamental ways, Dewey's pragmatic vision of the "great community" emerging through progressive education, failed in its key acid test: it did not actually provide the pathway for reconstructing twentieth century life. Vocationalism became split from academic preparation in twentieth century schooling and a large gap between current experiences of children and youth and the curriculum remains endemic.

Yet such radical educational scholars like Michael Apple (1982) and Henry Giroux (1983) maintain that Weber's "iron cage" of social determinism is not the final word. While fully acknowledging the hegemonic force of corporate consumer capitalism on all major institutions, including schooling, they identify certain counter-spaces that students and educators can carve out for themselves in local settings that speak of a more liberated vision of human experience. Through solidarity with like-minded others, these radicals identify the potential of a broader social vision that can exert some influence on the reigning ideology of liberal capitalism.

The historian James T. Kloppenberg argues similarly from a neo-pragmatic perspective. Unlike Apple and Giroux whose critique is grounded in a radical, critical analysis of American

society, Kloppenberg, who is far from uncritical, works from the more “reconstructive” energies of the pragmatic temper of William James and John Dewey. Although he recognizes the *historical* failure of early twentieth century progressive thought, which is informed by philosophical pragmatism, he draws on its underlying perspective in keeping alive the possibility that a more vigorous democracy may yet take hold even in the postmodern, considerably more cynical temper of the present era. As Kloppenberg (1986) states it:

What is accomplished today may be undone tomorrow; what is left undone today can be accomplished tomorrow. The indeterminacy of democracy offers no basis for complacency or even confidence that progress toward positive freedom and genuine equality will continue, yet it always leaves open the possibility of such progress. Fortified by determination, that confidence can sustain hope (Kloppenber, p. 415).

Whether or not a more vigorous democratic ethos will permeate the political culture of postindustrial, postmodern America is, as Kloppenberg states, an open question. Yet, its very potentiality plays an indelible, though difficult to measure role in shaping perceptions, attitudes, and action throughout the body politic. Such an expectation of tempered democratic potential represented the broad canvass that gave the Reading Center vision its power during the early and mid-1990s. The Center’s energies were predominantly local, emerging out of the potencies resident within its immediate milieu. Yet its ethos was shaped in no small part by a broader vision of tempered optimism, grounded in an intellectual universe of pragmatic experimentalism in a social setting both constrained and opened. Although far from realizing anything like the full import of Dewey’s ideal of perpetual growth, certain expansive pathways were opened up at the Reading Center that provided a foundation for its ongoing development, including its continuous flourishing seventeen years after its founding in 1986.

Faced with a future that is simultaneously precarious and replete with opportunity, the Reading Center has not yet achieved what it may yet become. Its history had provided a certain

direction during my tenure, which I have sought to narrate (Demetrian, 2000). Invariably certain connections will continue to be drawn between the Center's past and its always-emerging future, now almost some seven years after my departure in 1996. In any event, under new leadership, the Center inexorably moves into that open future which will prove the ultimate determinant of what the program will become and even, in fundamental ways, what it has been, since our understanding of the past routinely takes shape through a continuously moving present:

For we live not in a settled and finished world, but in one which is going on, and where our main task is prospective, and where retrospect—and all knowledge as distinct from thought is retrospective—is of value in the solidity, security, and fertility it affords our dealing with the future (Dewey, 1916, p. 151).

To state it in radical terms, what is at stake is not only an issue of epistemology, how and what we know, but that of ontology or being, what we actually become.

Except in an extremely limited sense as it had emerged as a topic of study within its instructional program and shaped its learning and organizational climate, it has been beyond the purview of the Reading Center to interact in a more complex manner with the broader dynamics of democratic values and institutions that influence public life in the United States. Yet the manner in which democracy unfolds in the larger body politic cannot but play a critical, albeit indelible role on the Center's continuously emerging organizational and learning climate. For its more complete unfolding, Dewey's vision of progressive enlightenment through education requires a political culture that nurtures both individuals and communities to realize their best "selves." Such a vision did not come to pass in the early twentieth century. It is certainly not upon us now at the beginning of the new century. Yet as long as optimism itself and a pragmatic temperament remain salient to the American identity, however disfigured in the postmodern, postindustrial era, the open quest for becoming through what Dewey refers to as "growth" will endure. This quest served as a defining ideal of the Bob Steele Reading Center.

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