

Participatory Literacy Practices:
Having a Voice, Having a Vote

by

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Education
Graduate Department of Adult Education
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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research was to study participatory literacy practices in five adult literacy programs situated throughout Alberta. The research was guided by the following two questions:

- (1) What are the individual and group experiences of students and literacy workers who are involved in participatory literacy practices?
- (2) What changes do students see in themselves and in their programs as they become involved in participatory literacy practices?

The study followed the naturalistic research paradigm and was conceptualized as a dynamic, democratic research process whereby the participants had an opportunity to share and develop knowledge collectively, which in turn, was used to transform individuals, as well as the social practices and relations within institutions and programs.

The data were collected through individual and group interviews, journals, fieldnotes, photostories, document analysis and a questionnaire.

This study created possibilities, rather than conclusions or results. As such, participatory literacy practices created possibilities:

- ! for a rehearsal ground in which students could learn the dominant language which often excludes them from participating in meetings, in conferences and in the wider community.
- ! for students to move from silence into speech. Students emphasized the oral aspects of literacy and seldom, if ever, spoke of the visual aspects of literacy such as reading and writing.

- ! for students and literacy workers to come together in a new context -- a social context, as such, opened up a new way of being and learning together.
- ! to challenge the hierarchical social relations that govern literacy programs and create borders between students, literacy workers and board members -- borders which distinguish us as educators from *them* as students.
- ! for literacy workers to examine their social identity in relation to that of their students. It was a chance to move beyond descriptors such as *student* and *literacy worker* and to look at how class, gender and race constitute social identity.
- ! for literacy workers to question their pedagogical approach -- an approach that rested on social relations more than methodology.

The possibilities that emerged from this study are significant because they point to the need to reconceptualize participatory literacy practices, adult literacy, literacy programs, and literacy education.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am happy to have the opportunity to acknowledge my family, friends, and colleagues, all of whom have provided support in so many different ways.

First, I would like to thank Professor Grace Malicky from the University of Alberta for supporting me throughout the research and writing of the dissertation. Although she was not an "official" member of the committee, she acted as my sounding board. With Grace, I shared the high and low moments of this research. She was always willing to listen and to read the first drafts of the dissertation. Thank you Grace.

Secondly, I would like to thank my committee members, Professors Budd Hall, Barbara Burnaby and Kari Dehli. To Budd, thank you for providing me with the freedom to be creative throughout the research process and the writing of the dissertation. To Barbara, thank you for continually providing positive feedback. You have a way of making people feel confident in themselves. To Kari, thank you for your wonderful insights which served to push the edges of my thinking.

I would also like to acknowledge the two Professors who joined the committee prior to the defense. I am grateful to Professor Angela Miles for her questions and ideas, which served to elicit a stimulating discussion during the defense. As well, I appreciate the interest which Professor Michael Collins took in the participatory aspects of the research and for his editorial eye.

Throughout the doctoral program, there were three women who influenced me through their writing and their courses, workshops and retreats. I would like to thank Professor Kathy Rockhill, Deborah Barndt and Jenny Horsman. Their writing influenced the way I think about adult literacy.

I wish that I could name the literacy workers and students who participated in the main study and opened their programs, homes and hearts to me. These people were so trusting and generous of their time. I appreciate the risks that they took to become involved in this research. I learned so much by working with them and it is my sincere hope that they will benefit individually and collectively from this study.

I would also like to thank the students and literacy workers at the Learning Centre in Edmonton for participating in the pilot study. A special thank you to Mary Norton for assisting me with the photography and publication of the photostory.

I would like to acknowledge the Northern Alberta Reading Specialists Council for funding the four photostories that were developed with the students and staff who participated in this research.

I am fortunate to have so many wonderful friends who supported me through their words and their actions. Thank you to Barb Jacobson, Susan Belcher, Wayne Logus, Allan Rocku, Joanne Snyder, Maria Turner, Flo Brokop and Alex McGregor for believing in me. I would like to thank Jody Hanson for continually reminding me that 'this too shall pass'. Thank you to Mary Norton, Susan Devins and Bev Burke for helping me to keep my perspective by joining me in moments of hiking, swimming and running.

As well, a special thanks for my aunt and uncle, Helen and Ben Pawluk and my niece and nephew, Andrea and Craig. They helped me to find and furnish a home when I moved to Toronto.

Lastly, I thank my parents and my sisters Bonnie and Susan. Their love and encouragement sustained me.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

In Canada, presumably a democratic society, the principle of equality and rights, opportunity and treatment is enshrined within the **Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms**. However, as Miller (1990) points out, this "equality - this recognition of rights - is true only in principle for millions of people in Canada" (p. 6). She argues that low literacy skills may prevent millions of adults from enjoying and exercising their social and political rights to the fullest extent. It is difficult to participate in the community and political arena and to become involved in decision-making opportunities when the majority of such events are linked to written communication. The National Anti-Poverty Organization (1992) recommended that "efforts must be made to protect the human, citizenship, social and economic rights of people with low literacy skills and to foster their full participation in society" (p. 94). This leads to the question, "How can their full participation in society be fostered?".

If adults with low-literacy skills have limited experience with exercising their social and political rights, could adult literacy programs become a forum for these individuals to begin learning about the democratic process? Could adult literacy programs create openings for students to be involved in decision-making with respect to their program? Could the skills and processes they learn move beyond the literacy program and into the wider community?

During the 1990s, literacy workers across Canada began to encourage adult literacy students to get more involved in literacy programs and activities. This study examines student involvement, hereafter referred to as participatory literacy practices, in four rural and one urban literacy program in Alberta. As a reference point, this study followed the growth and development of student groups and student associations within these adult literacy programs.

Purpose of the Research

The purpose of this research was to study participatory literacy practices in adult literacy programs. The research was guided by the following two questions:

(1) What are the individual and group experiences of students and literacy workers who are involved in participatory literacy practices?

(2) What changes do students and literacy workers see in themselves and in their programs as they become involved in participatory literacy practices?

Relationships

This study embraced the naturalistic paradigm and, as such, recognized three important relationships: (1) the researcher and the questions; (2) the questions and the field of adult literacy; and (3) the subject matter and the research process.

The Researcher and the Research Questions

One of the axioms of naturalistic research is that "inquiry is value-bound" (Lincoln and Guba, 1985, p. 38). The choice of research questions, therefore, is influenced by inquirer values. In this study, the two major research questions were influenced by my changing values with respect to the roles and relationships between adult literacy students and adult educators.

Like the majority of Canadians, I was educated in an hierarchical system where educators and administrators made the decisions which affected students. During my six year tenure as a literacy worker, I continued to follow this hierarchical model, making decisions with my board which consisted of educators. It never even crossed my mind to consult with students about decisions relating to their needs and interests, such as the hiring of staff, the ordering of books, the setting of program hours, and so forth. Within this hierarchical model, there

were rigid divisions between the roles of, and hence, relationships between, students and educators. I was ensconced within a liberal ideology and corresponding value system. Consequently, the question of power and the notion of inequitable power relations did not enter my realm of thought; I did not question how relations between literacy workers and students were constructed.

During my doctoral studies, the opportunity arose to examine and question my ideology and subsequent values as an educator. Through reflection and questioning, the notion of participatory practices began to take shape at a conceptual and cognitive level and I began to formulate questions that would enable me to work with others in an effort to promote participatory literacy practices. The two guiding research questions were based on the following assumption which, in turn, were underscored by my changing ideology and values:

Social relations structure literacy programs. Participatory literacy practices are the locus for transforming roles of and relationships between literacy workers and students. In turn, a transformation in roles and relationships may serve to change the structure of literacy programs.

The Question and the Field of Adult Literacy

In Canada, the theory and practice of participatory literacy practices is gaining momentum in the field of adult basic education. Despite this growing interest, there is a paucity of research and literature on the subject (Fingeret, 1990). Jurmo (1989) stated "that without an understanding of what is meant by participatory literacy education, it is unlikely the practice will be strengthened or that the participatory approach will be a significant force in the literacy field" (p. 82). This study, through its exploration of literacy workers' and students' experiences with participatory literacy practices, will strengthen the theory and practice of adult literacy.

Information regarding the benefits of and barriers to student involvement may lead to discussion among literacy workers, students, administrators and policy-makers and, possibly, to changes in the rationale for, and assumptions behind, student involvement in literacy programs. As people examine their rationale and assumptions, they may begin to transform their practice. Information regarding pedagogies with respect to student involvement may be useful for understanding the changing roles of literacy workers and students as they begin to work together in ways that challenge the traditional stereotypes of "teacher" and "student." The information on pedagogies may also be useful in designing support systems for students who are learning new ways of "being" with each other and within their programs. Finally, the information on social relations within literacy programs may serve to assist people in examining their identity and its role in structuring relations with others.

The Subject Matter and the Research Process

This study focused on participatory literacy practices and, consequently, I employed a research process that was congruent with the subject matter. *Participate*, as it is defined in the Oxford dictionary, means "to have or take a part or share in something." This study created opportunities for the participants (literacy workers and students) to take part in the study itself; the participants were able to ask questions about participatory practices and work together towards finding answers to their questions. The knowledge they generated resulted, in some instances, in personal and structural transformation.

Definition of Terms

For the purposes of this study, the following definitions of terms were used:

Literacy program - A program in which students are matched with paid or volunteer tutors. The tutors and students work together on a one to one basis or in small groups. A literacy coordinator administers the program.

Participatory literacy practices - The active involvement of students in the operation of one or more components of an adult literacy effort. In this study, I primarily studied the involvement of students in a literacy program's student group and/or association.

Literacy Coordinator - A person who administers a literacy program.

Literacy Worker - A broad term for a person that works with adult students with low-literacy skills. Literacy workers include literacy coordinators, teachers and tutors.

Photostory - A book that combines photographs with text.

Student group - A group of students registered in a literacy program that uses volunteer tutors. The students meet on a regular basis. Each student group is responsible for establishing its purpose, based on its needs and interests.

Student association - A group of full-time students registered with a literacy program that uses paid tutors. The students meet on a regular basis. Each student association is responsible for establishing its purpose, based on its needs and interests.

Adult literacy student - A person, over the age of 18, who registers with a literacy or adult basic educator program with the intention of developing literacy skills.

Delimitation of the Study

The study was limited to participatory literacy practices within four rural and one urban literacy program in Alberta. Three of the four rural programs were full time programs using paid tutors. The remaining rural program and one urban program used volunteer tutors. This sample of programs may not be representative of literacy programs throughout Alberta.

Organization of the Dissertation: An Overview

In this first chapter, the introduction, purpose of the research, relationships between the researcher and the research questions, the question and the field of adult literacy and the subject matter and the research process, the definition of terms and a delimitation were presented. Chapter 2 establishes the context for this study; historical information on the development of participatory literacy practices in Alberta is presented. As well, Chapter 2 provides information on the literacy programs that were involved in this study and their respective student groups and/or associations. Chapter 3 provides a description of this study's methodology and concludes with reflections on my role as a researcher. Chapter 4 presents the findings of the study, linking each finding to relevant literature. Chapter 5 presents a summary of the study, possibilities and implications, followed by recommendations for further research.

CHAPTER 2

Setting the Context

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to establish the context for this study. The chapter unfolds with a historical overview of the development of participatory literacy practices in Alberta. This overview is followed by a synopsis describing the history, demographics, organizational structure, learning environment and participatory literacy practices of each of the five literacy programs that were involved in this study. Finally, background information is provided on the student groups and/or associations that formed within each of these five literacy programs.

Historical Overview of Participatory Literacy Practices in Alberta

Although efforts to provide educational upgrading opportunities to adult Albertans began in the 1960s, extensive programming and support for adults did not flourish until the 1980s. Today (1994), there are approximately 13,000 students registered with adult basic education programs offered by post-secondary institutions, school boards, further education councils and volunteer literacy programs.¹

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, participatory literacy practices in Alberta's adult basic education and literacy programs occurred on an ad hoc basis; students were spokespersons to the media and participated in organizing social events. In the 1980s a few literacy programs and projects invited students to serve on their boards and/or advisory committees. International Literacy Year, 1990, was a milestone year in Alberta with respect to the active involvement of students in policy formation and learner events such as conferences and

¹ Alberta Advanced Education. (1990). Highlights of the report on the Alberta literacy inventory. Edmonton: Author.

workshops. What events led to this sudden increase in student involvement at the local and provincial levels?

By the late 1980s student involvement was being encouraged by national and international literacy organizations. At the international level, a "Declaration on Involving Learners" was developed during the third meeting of International Council for Adult Education's International Task Force on Literacy in December, 1988. This declaration stated that its principle aim was to build a student movement; it provided practical suggestions for involving students at the international, national and local levels. At the national level, the Movement for Canadian Literacy (MCL) sponsored the Learners' Action Group of Canada in 1987; its main goal was to advocate for and to support learner organizing, both regionally and nationally. Curt Lindblom, a student, represented the Alberta Association for Adult Literacy on the MCL's Learners' Action Group. Moreover, the National Literacy Partnership Strategy, a cost-sharing program established by federal and provincial governments in 1987, expressed an interest in funding literacy projects that promoted student involvement.

In the early 1990s, the notion that students have the right to participate actively in literacy programs and efforts continued to gain momentum at the national level. In June, 1991, a national symposium, sponsored by the Literacy Branch of the Ontario Ministry of Education and the National Literacy Secretariat of Multiculturalism and Citizenship Canada, was attended by over 100 adult literacy practitioners, researchers and government officials. At this symposium, during a session on learner participation, the following statement was made: "After recognizing learner involvement in the literacy process itself, it goes without saying that learners have the right to participate in the literacy debate."² Although the symposium participants verbalized students' right to participate in the "literacy debate", students were not invited to participate in this symposium. In 1992 the concept of student

²Ontario Ministry of Education. (June 17-20, 1991). Proceedings of "issues and options in adult literacy: A national symposium." Toronto: Author. (p. 105).

participation in program planning and advocacy efforts surfaced, albeit briefly, in federal documents that identified key issues in adult literacy.³ The culmination of these forces served as an impetus for provincial and territorial adult literacy organizations to lobby for student participation within the literacy community.

By 1993, the majority of provincial and territorial adult literacy organizations recognized the need for student participation. The Saskatchewan Literacy Network and Literacy B.C. included statements about learners in their organization's purpose statements, with the former organization promoting literacy by "representing the interest of learners and practitioners" and the latter organization promoting literacy by "encouraging leadership and involvement of students in all literacy activities."⁴ Three Atlantic provincial organizations, the New Brunswick Committee on Literacy, the Newfoundland and Labrador Literacy Coalition and the Nova Scotia Provincial Literacy Coalition, had goals, mandates and/or objectives that focused on learner participation in issues that affected them. For instance, the Nova Scotia Provincial Literacy Coalition wanted "to ensure that adult learners [were] consulted on the development of programs."⁵ Four organizations, the Ontario Literacy Coalition, the Literacy Workers Alliance of Manitoba, the Alberta Association of Adult Literacy and the Yukon Literacy Council, supported learner leadership development through events and structures such as regional conferences, a learners' institute, student support networks and newsletters. The Literacy Partners of Quebec and the Northwest Territories Literacy Council were the only two organizations that were not actively addressing learner participation, although it should be noted that two students served on the board of the former organization.⁶

³See Darville, R. (1992). *Adult literacy work in Canada*. Toronto: Canadian Association for Adult Education and Chang, K.C. (1992). *Adult literacy in Canada in 1992: Initiatives, issues and imperatives*. (A report for the prosperity secretariat). Ottawa: Steering Group on Prosperity.

⁴Movement for Canadian Literacy Newsletter. 1993, 3(2), pp. 16 & 20.

⁵Ibid, p. 8.

⁶Movement for Canadian Literacy Newsletter, 1993, 3(3), described provincial and territorial adult literacy organizations. These two organizations did not include learner participation in their mission statement, mandate, objectives, issues and activities.

The Alberta Association of Adult Literacy's (AAAL)⁷ active promotion of student participation began in 1989. Approximately two years after the federal government's National Literacy Partnership Strategy (NLPS) began, a five year project consisting of a \$110 million fund to be used toward pilot or demonstration projects, was launched. There appeared to be a relationship between the AAAL's active promotion of student participation and the NLPS, as the participation of students in events such as conferences and workshops between 1989 to 1992 was financially supported by over \$80,000.00 in NLPS funding.⁸

In 1989, Mary Norton was elected to the AAAL board as a representative for the Movement for Canadian Literacy (MCL). In this capacity, and in support of the Movement of Canadian Literacy's efforts regarding student involvement, Mary was directed by Kathy Chang, the AAAL president, to promote student involvement through the AAAL. Mary actively responded to this opportunity and was "quite keen" to work on student involvement as part of her MCL role.

During a AAAL teleconference, held on April 17, 1989, Mary Norton was asked to strike a AAAL learner involvement committee; its goal was to "promote the involvement of learners in literacy organizations -- and in organizing -- at local and provincial levels."⁹ This committee initially comprised literacy workers. One of its first tasks was to promote learner participation in a AAAL conference held in Grande Prairie during the fall of 1989. Seventy-five students attended a session in which they shared ideas about student involvement and heard about the National Training Event which was going to be held in Candle Lake, Saskatchewan.

⁷The AAAL was formed in 1981. Its mission statement reads as follows: The mission of the Alberta Association for Adult Literacy is to promote the increase and development of appropriate literacy and basic education opportunities for all adults in Alberta. Its membership includes 600 individuals and/or organizations.

⁸The NLPS granted the AAAL \$19,200.00 in 1989, \$27,300.00 in 1991 and \$37,300.00 in 1992.

⁹Correspondence from the AAAL Learner Involvement Committee to AAAL Regional Representatives, February 4, 1990.

The involvement of students in AAAL initiatives sparked a growing awareness of, and interest in, participatory literacy practices among Alberta's literacy workers and students. This awareness and interest was primarily aimed at organizing learner events such as meetings, workshops, conferences and rallies at the regional and/or local level, rather than directly supporting student participation at the program level. For instance, 75 learners participated in the AAAL Grand Prairie conference, 130 learners participated in the Fairview literacy workshop and 10 learners participated in workshops held in Lethbridge. The purpose of these events was to provide opportunities for learners to meet other learners, talk about common issues and interests, and talk about ways and reasons to continue meeting/communicating.

On April 5th, 1990, the AAAL sponsored a public forum in Edmonton entitled "Involving Learners in the Literacy Movement" in conjunction with hosting an MCL board meeting. This event was not attended by literacy students, although their participation was encouraged. Ten literacy workers attended the forum. This event marked the first collective opportunity for Edmonton's literacy workers to discuss learner involvement in the literacy movement.

In the early spring of 1990, the AAAL sought nominations for student delegates to the national training event sponsored by the Learners' Action Group of Canada. This event, held during May 17-21, 1990 and attended by four learners and one support person from each province and territory, was intended to develop learners' skills in organizing and facilitating groups and networks in their provinces. The AAAL sponsored four student delegates -- two males and two females -- to attend the National Learners' Training Event for Literacy at Candle Lake Provincial Park in Saskatchewan. In order to be sponsored, the AAAL stipulated that delegates must be committed to working with students in Alberta for a full year following the event.

The National Learners' Training Event's participants developed a mission statement¹⁰, which was intended to lay the foundation for strengthening the adult student/learner voice. It contained the following points about the learner's voice within the literacy movement:

- that the 50/50 partnership for adult student/learner involvement existing in 1 to 1 tutoring be extended by 1995 to include all levels of literacy organization including programs, boards and networks, to ensure that we get the most out of what is available to help the largest number of people. This is to include representation on executive, personnel, and finance committees, etc.;
- that programs build in financial and moral support to adult student/learners who want to be involved;
- that adult student/learners be consulted on how they are taught;
- that qualified adult student/learners be equally considered when paid literacy positions become available;
- that adult student/learners and literacy workers exchange information about conferences and meetings;
- that all literacy funding proposals have a component for adult student/learner involvement in clear language and that reporting requirements respect adult student/learner rights.

These six points stress the need for programs to provide opportunities for student involvement in the instructional process and, moreover, for student representation in decision-making activities related to the planning, development and evaluation of programs.

The four Alberta students who attended the training event, formed a Student/Learner Group which met two or three times per year from 1990 to 1992. On March 20, 1991, the AAAL passed a motion that the board "accept the request of the Student/Learner Group to be an ad hoc group within the AAAL, and to use 'AAAL' in their title."¹¹ This group took increasingly greater roles in planning and facilitating student participation in provincial AAAL conferences. This group's activities also included the development of a response to the Learners Action Group of Canada's (LAGOC) Mission Statement. The Student/Learner Group developed a plan for student participation in the AAAL which resulted in the election of Cindy Williams, one of their student members, to the AAAL board in 1991.

¹⁰Taken from AAAL newsletter, 1990, p. 6.

¹¹Taken from minutes of a AAAL board meeting held on March 20, 1991.

The October, 1990 AAAL conference, entitled "The Literacy Conference", marked the second time that students were actively encouraged and supported in attending a provincial literacy conference. Many of the fifty students who attended stated that they preferred attending a conference with literacy workers as opposed to attending conferences organized only for students. At a board meeting following the conference, the AAAL responded to the students' preference by passing a motion to include students in future provincial conferences. The AAAL also initiated a student/learner membership category in its organization and designated pages in its newsletter for student news. By 1993, 10 percent of the AAAL's membership consisted of students.

The resurrection of the AAAL Learner Involvement Committee which had been formed in April, 1989 occurred after "The Literacy Conference". Again, it was comprised of AAAL board members and literacy workers. They were responsible for securing government funding and organizing regional student meetings to respond to Alberta Advanced Education's draft policy entitled "Foundations for Adult Learning and Development Policy." This committee disbanded after fulfilling its responsibility. In February, 1991, 115 students attended meetings in five centres.¹² These students were highly critical of the stereotyping that occurred in the draft policy. Their written response to the draft policy contained the following comment:

Policy usually includes a 'picture' of the people that the policy is intended to help. In our meetings, we talked about how accurate this picture was, because we knew that if the picture was not right then it would be likely that the policy would not be right! Our picture is different from the one in the draft policy. We believe that it is wrong to present a picture that suggests we all had the same difficulties in life. Some of us still hear negative comments from some people who aren't very well informed.¹³

¹²The meetings were held in Edmonton, Calgary, High Level, Lethbridge and Grand Prairie.

¹³Alberta Association for Adult Literacy. (1991). The responses of students and learners to the draft 'Foundations for adult learning and development policy'. Edmonton: Author, p.6.

The students also raised the significant point that the policy should state that adult basic education is a right. The final version of the government policy was released in November, 1991; the students' comments and concerns were not integrated into the policy. In fact, there were virtually no changes in the wording of the policy in that regard. This raises the question, "Why did the government encourage and financially support citizen participation?". Loney (1977), a critic of participation schemes funded by the state, would respond to this question by stating that the government's interest in citizen participation "must be viewed at least in part as a program of social control" (p. 446). If one were to adopt Loney's position in his analysis of the state and participation, one could suggest that the state supported student participation in policy formation because the channeling of students' energies towards a written response to the policy served as a strategy to direct their energies away from lobbying.

The Student/Learner Group, which still consisted of the four students who attended the national training event, met in the fall of 1991 to initiate plans for a provincial leadership development event for students. The goal of this event was to build a strong network of adult basic education and literacy students within the AAAL. The objectives of the leadership development event were as follows:¹⁴

- to encourage students to get other students involved
- to provide a chance for students to share experiences
- to provide examples of ways to involve students
- to help students develop skills for working with others
- to help students build confidence
- to support students' rights to have a say in things that affect their education
- to promote the AAAL Student/Learner Group and recruit regional representatives

The underlying purpose was to broaden the base and to facilitate local developments. The event was entitled "Building a Network/Learning to Lead" and occurred during March 20-

¹⁴AAAL Student/Learner Group, Learner Involvement Committee, Report to the AAAL January, AAAL board meeting.

22, 1992. The Student/Learner Group had initially planned this event for the 1991 provincial AAAL conference, but postponed it because of funding delays.

The event was attended by thirty-six students from across Alberta. The weekend ended with the appointment of fourteen regional representatives; these students volunteered to be a contact person for students in their region. Many participants left with an interest in forming support groups in their geographical region. The nature and purpose of these support groups were discussed but were not "carved in stone". Students walked away from the meeting with a general sense of what a support group could accomplish. For instance, there was a consensus that there is power in numbers and that a support group could provide a vehicle for getting the students' message across to others, be it politicians, the media or literacy workers. Before leaving this event, each of the students wrote a goal relating to the promotion of student involvement in their region; this goal was placed in a sealed envelope, to be opened by them at the AAAL's fall conference in Red Deer.

While living in Toronto, I expressed an interest in attending the "Building the Network/Learning to Lead" event in Alberta and was invited to attend and document the proceedings. Throughout the three days (March 20-22, 1992) of these events, I was struck by the group's energy and enthusiasm, and upon my return to Toronto, I knew that student participation would be the focus of my doctoral dissertation.

The 36 students had expressed interest in meeting at the AAAL's 1992 fall conference in Red Deer, a one day event was planned for them by the Student/Learner Group and Mary Norton. Thirteen of the original 36 students attended this event. Although the students had been informed that they could invite their instructor or program coordinator, only one literacy worker attended the event. The day began by having the students open the envelopes containing their written goal. Several students had met their goal, which was to form a

support group, and others expressed disappointment in their lack of success. The students were then instructed to break into small groups to discuss the following:

- Some things I did with students since March.
- Some things that I wanted to do but didn't.

Then, the large group reunited to report on the small group discussions and to discuss the support they needed as individuals in order to promote student involvement in their region and/or program. The students stated that they needed training and support in how to run a group and how to get around "roadblocks" that prevented them from reaching their goals. At the end of the day, the group focused on building a student network through the election of regional representatives and the formation of a AAAL student steering committee whose job would be to provide leadership for the regional representatives. The AAAL student steering committee served to replace the AAAL Student/Learner Group.

The AAAL student steering committee met in December 1992 to form its goals, purpose and guidelines. The purpose was "to encourage students to get involved in the Group and in their own programs (to promote students having a say)."¹⁵ As well, the steering committee developed a job description for a facilitator who would work with the group as Mary Norton, who had facilitated the group voluntarily up to that date, had handed in her resignation from the AAAL board. A facilitator was not hired until May of 1993, and this delay inhibited the group's activities.

At the 1993 AAAL conference, which was held in Edmonton, a special day was set aside for students one day prior to the conference. This event was open to interested students and focused on student advocacy.

With the election of the AAAL board at the 1993 Annual General Meeting, Florence Brokop was requested to take on the responsibility of assisting the student steering

¹⁵AAAL Student Group Steering Committee minutes, December 10, 1992.

committee. On February 4th, 1994, at a AAAL board meeting, Florence submitted her first report on the student steering committee. She commended the AAAL's efforts to promote student involvement. She then read the following statement from her report:

[The efforts] have, however, been very much a "top down" approach to encouraging involvement. With the inevitable decrease in funding for AAAL projects, will the organization be able to sustain student involvement in this "top down" approach? It is my feeling, that a grassroots movement of students will lead to greater student involvement in the AAAL. This movement of students must be supported and promoted by local literacy workers. These local student groups may initially meet for purely social purposes, but I believe that by creating a community of students and by allowing students to have a voice in local literacy programs, the political lobbying promoted by AAAL in its historical student involvement initiatives will come about.

The board accepted Florence Brokop's report, granting her permission to write a proposal for a student participation project that would encourage literacy program coordinators to develop student groups and/or support existing groups within their programs. This project would provide financial assistance to literacy programs. For instance, literacy workers would be reimbursed for the time they spent developing and/or supporting student groups.

In summary, AAAL's promotion of student participation has evolved during the five year span of 1989 to 1994. The AAAL has been a significant force in promoting student involvement at the provincial and regional levels and the government has supported the AAAL's efforts through funding. In this time of fiscal restraint, the future of student involvement in Alberta will ultimately depend on the support of literacy workers and the interest of students.

The Literacy Programs

Introduction

This section provides historical and descriptive information on the five literacy programs that were involved in this study and an overview of the literacy programs' student groups and/or associations. Four of the five literacy programs, ALFA, and The Literacy Network, the latter of which sponsored three programs, were located in rural Alberta. The remaining program was located in a large urban centre in Alberta. Pseudonyms are used for these literacy programs and their geographical locations as well as for the students and literacy workers who participated in the study.

Adult Literacy for Action (ALFA)

In 1986, the Saratoga Family and Community Support Services Board developed a needs assessment to determine whether the County of Saratoga was in need of a literacy program. The assessment indicated such a need and the Saratoga Further Education Council was approached for Alberta Advanced Education funding. The council received the funding and ALFA, the newly created literacy program, opened its doors to the public in late 1987, serving the communities of Saratoga, Faber, Lansing, Alton, and Eagle Lake.

In 1991, ALFA became a registered society, governed by an eight member board of directors. The board consists of one representative from each of the five communities, one student and two members at large. Although ALFA has not developed a mission statement, the program's principal objective is "to provide a basic educational service by addressing adult literacy needs in the County of Saratoga [and] to provide a one to one learning situation for adult students, catering to their individual needs."¹⁶ The program's remaining objectives relate to training volunteer tutors, advocating for students, promoting community awareness and acting as a literacy resource centre.

¹⁶Taken from ALFA's by-laws.

ALFA serves a geographical area of approximately 1700 square kilometers.¹⁷ The population base of the five communities varies, with Saratoga serving less than 6000, Faber serving less than 4000, Lansing and Alton serving less than 2000 each, and Eagle Lake serving less than 1000 people.¹⁸ The economy in this region is primarily supported through agriculture, natural gas, and petroleum industries.

ALFA is staffed by Barb, a part-time literacy coordinator, who works 28 hours per week and Lois, a part time tutor-monitor, who works six hours per week. Barb's office is based in Saratoga while Lois's office is based in Lansing. Every year they match approximately 50 students with volunteer tutors. The primary mode of instruction is through one to one tutoring. This year, Barb also initiated computer classes in the evening.

In a given year, approximately 50 students register with the ALFA program. At any one time, there are usually 30 to 40 students matched with volunteer tutors. During the time of this study, 39 percent of the registered students were male, and 61 percent were female. For 67 percent of the students, English is their mother tongue, while for 33 percent of the students, English is their second language. Educational levels range from no formal schooling to some high school, with the majority of students (83 percent) having at least a grade 7 education. The students are between 19 to over 56 years of age, with the majority (81 percent) of students being between the ages of 20 to 55. Forty-five percent of the students are either employed or self-employed while 17 percent are seeking employment. Twenty percent of the students work in the home as homemakers. A small percentage (11 percent) of the students attend school on a full-time basis. The remaining students (7 percent) are retired.

¹⁷ Approximations are used for geographical areas and populations in order to protect the identities of literacy programs.

¹⁸ These statistics are based on the 1991 census and are rounded to the nearest 100.

Since 1991, there has been a steady increase of student participation in the program. In 1991, Donna was elected to serve on the board as a student representative. Barb introduced a student newsletter in 1991, and the students' role in this new venture consisted of writing the stories and assisting in its distribution. For the past four years, ALFA has sponsored students to attend the annual Alberta Association for Adult Literacy (AAAL) conference. The students also participate in a verbal evaluation of the program on an annual basis. With the exception of one student, they have not participated in media interviews. In 1992, ALFA started a student group and, for the past year, the students have been very active in planning program events and activities.

ALFA's Student Group

Origin

According to Barb, the coordinator of ALFA, the "beginnings of the [student] group, the germ or the seed started a long time ago." Barb informed me that the previous coordinator of ALFA "was already talking about a student/learner group." Therefore, in the ALFA program, the idea of forming a student group had been circulating for at least three years. Rather than immediately forming a student group, Barb concentrated on two student-oriented initiatives: she began publishing a monthly student newsletter and she began inviting students to social events. Both initiatives provided an opportunity for students to get to know each other. The students informed me that they enjoyed "meeting" others and getting to know "who was who" through the newsletter and social events. As we discussed the origins of the ALFA student group, Barb told me "that was sort of the beginnings of it - - tutors [and] students coming together, newsletter type thing. And then the AAAL had this student learner meeting in Edmonton."

The AAAL student workshop which Barb was referring to was held March 20-22, 1992 in Edmonton. This event provided an opportunity for literacy students from across Alberta to share information about themselves and their programs and to learn leadership skills. In

order to attend the AAAL workshop, students were requested to fill in an application form stating information about their literacy programs, their past experience in working with student committees and their reasons for wanting to attend the workshop. Barb sent a notice to ALFA's students about the AAAL workshop and four students, (Barry, Peggy, Donna and Lois,) expressed an interest in attending it.

Of the four students who attended the AAAL student workshop, Peggy was the most interested in forming a student support group. She stated in her application form that she "would like to learn how to work with other people in planning and forming student groups." Peggy wanted to "start a student support group that would meet once a month because we just don't get together enough." One of the discussion topics during the three day workshop was on student support groups. The four ALFA students expressed interest in forming a student group, but during the AAAL workshop they informed me that they were not sure about how to proceed. When these students left the AAAL workshop, they approached Barb with the idea of starting a student support group. Barb was supportive of the idea and the first ALFA student meeting was held in April, 1992.

Recruitment

The ALFA students were notified about the first meeting by Barb through a written notice and/or by telephone. Whenever possible, Barb liked to phone the students because she believed in the "personal touch". After the first meeting, Donna assisted Barb with contacting students about the monthly meetings.

The students who attended the meetings differed in terms of gender, race, age, educational ability and competency in speaking English. During this study, the attendance rate grew from six to nine and the same people tended to show up for meetings. Six people attended the first meeting and Barb told me that the students "were so disappointed. I think they thought there would be this massive influx of people." Barb thought that "it was pie in the

sky to get every student in your [program] to become part of the student group." Compared to the students, Barb was not as concerned with low attendance and thought "that if we have nine people or six people or eight people that it's working for, then that's worthwhile." According to Barb, "there's been a core of nine that have showed up all the time." There were approximately 40 students in the ALFA program, so a turn-out of nine represented approximately 25 percent of the student population. The majority of the students who attended meetings lived in Saratoga, while the remainder lived in Faber. Next year, the student group plans to carpool to the different communities with the hope of recruiting more students to meetings.

Group development

In the early stages, from April to December of 1992, the student group met on a monthly basis to discuss their "ideas, feelings and opinions about different subjects." In our first interview, Barb told me that "they're still groping." She added, "We're trying to find out who we are. You know, like, and I think that's the beginning of any group." Initially, Barb used verbs and verb phrases such as "groping," "searching," "feeling our way," and "trying to find out" in her descriptions of the student group meetings. The students and Barb told me that the group was very new, and that they were searching for common ground.

During the first two meetings, the student group did not have elected officials nor did it follow an agenda. At the third meeting, Barb introduced the idea of formalizing the group through nominating officers, following agendas and taking minutes. The students discussed the idea and decided that they wanted "somebody to take charge." Consequently, an election was held; Peggy became president and Donna became Secretary.

Although Barb was cognizant that the student group needed time to coalesce, she was concerned that the students might stop attending meetings if there wasn't some purpose to them. Barb told Peggy and Donna: "We have to start having other things at meetings

because we cannot just meet for meeting sake. Five minutes, she's read the minutes of the last meeting and now what are we going to do?".

During the spring and fall of 1992, the student group enjoyed the social aspects of the group, being together with each other, sharing and learning from each other. Gradually, the group expressed an interest in getting more involved in program activities. Barb stated that the students began "to think that it's a little more than that [socializing], that they can help out in the program." They began to look for "activities that will interest as many as we think possible in the group and bring them to the meeting."

During the fall of 1992, the group formulated one goal -- to spread the word about the importance of adult literacy -- which they then pursued. In order to meet this goal, they designed pamphlets which they delivered to small businesses such as hairdressers and laundromats, and public institutions such as libraries and hospitals. As well, they hung posters throughout their respective communities. They also wanted to visit elementary schools and talk to the children about the importance of literacy. Interestingly, this goal had been a topic of discussion at the AAAL workshop; students had worked in groups and learned how to develop action plans to spread the word. So, in the beginning the ALFA student group used a goal that was generated in the AAAL workshop, rather than forming their own goals. Barb remarked they "have set goals but they're really what they heard at AAAL. And now they have to set some of their own, their very own for their own program."

In January, 1993, the student group became actively involved in planning and organizing a number of activities. They organized a Reader's Theater and presented the production during tutor appreciation evening. In February, 1993, they organized an international pot luck dinner that was attended by tutors, students, board members and their respective families. The students also began to share their skills during their meetings; one male student gave a presentation on growing and grafting roses. As the confidence in their

abilities grew, they committed themselves to larger undertakings. Towards the end of this study, the student group decided to organize a regional student conference for May, 1994.

By January, Barb also noticed that the group was "starting to show signs of taking a little control over their group, or wanting to take control." As an example, Barb related an incident whereby Donna read some ALFA correspondence to the student group. Barb then went to photocopy the letter, and when she returned, she was informed that "the other students in the group thought that when Donna received a letter [relating to ALFA], they should also receive a letter, because it was directed towards all of them, and they wanted to have it where they could read it over when they got home." This was a minor request which came from the group, but it reflected an increased sense of ownership towards the student group and ALFA.

Action Read

In the late 1970s, a steering committee consisting of representatives from educational and community institutions was struck to initiate a literacy project to develop and assess the provision of literacy education by lay tutors.¹⁹ In the early 1980s, Action Read achieved 'program' status and Alberta Advanced Education became the primary funding agency. In 1990, Action Read incorporated and became a registered association governed by a six member board of directors. The board consists of three volunteer tutors and three members at large who bring specific skills to the board such as accounting and legal expertise. The association's mission statement reads as follows: "The Action Read Association is a community based, volunteer organization that provides literacy development opportunities for adults in order to enhance community participation and quality of life."²⁰

¹⁹Approximate dates are used in order to protect the identity of literacy programs.

²⁰Taken from an Action Read document titled "What are our goals?"

Action Read is situated in an urban community, with a population base of approximately 600,000 residing within a geographical area of less than 700 square kilometers. The program is largely a one to one volunteer tutoring program. However, since the early 1990s, Action Read has been offering small group instruction in math, writing, paired reading and family literacy.

Action Read is staffed by a full-time coordinator as well as one full-time and two part-time staff members. Jody, the full-time literacy coordinator, is responsible for the administration of the program and Shelley, the full-time staff member, is responsible for programming related to students. Lisa, a part-time employee, is responsible for programming related to tutors. Isabelle, the remaining part-time employee, provides clerical assistance.

In a given year, approximately 170 to 200 students register with the Action Read program. At any one time, there are usually 90 to 100 students matched with volunteer tutors. During the time of this study, 47 percent of the registered students were male, and 53 percent were female. For 69 percent of the students, English was their mother tongue, while for 31 percent of the students, English was their second language. Educational levels ranged from no formal schooling to some high school, with the majority of students (66 percent) having at least a grade 7 education. The students were between 19 to over 56 years of age, with the majority (51 percent) of students being between the ages of 20 to 35. Sixty-two percent of the students were either employed or self-employed while 19 percent were seeking employment. Of the remaining students, 10 percent worked in the home as homemakers, 6 percent were full-time students and 3 percent were retired.

Since the late 1980s, Action Read has sponsored "Working Together", a program providing a volunteer tutoring service to adults who are "mentally challenged". At this time of this study, 24 adults with mental handicaps registered with the program and were matched with a

tutor. Since the early 1990s, there has been an integration of the two program's staff, space and services.

Historically, there has been minimal student participation in Action Read. Prior to 1990, participatory practices primarily consisted of public awareness; students were involved in newspaper, television and radio news coverage. Some students received national coverage when they appeared in a Canada Post documentary about adult literacy. Students also participated in two educational/training videos. Apart from participating in public awareness and education, students participated in annual social gatherings such as picnics and open houses and in program evaluation.

By 1990, the program was beginning to consider student participation in program governance and one student was appointed to the board when the program became a registered association. This student resigned shortly thereafter, and since that time, students have not served on the board.

When Jody was hired as program coordinator in the early 1990s, she began to circulate the Action Read newsletter to students; this represented one of her first initiatives to involve students. As well, students continued to be involved in program evaluation and public awareness. By 1991, Action Read was providing financial support which enabled students to attend literacy conferences. During this study, Action Read began to involve students in program planning. For instance, students were invited to participate in the planning of math modules. As well, when Jody wrote a proposal to develop a family literacy program, she allotted budget funds towards student participation. These funds covered students' transportation and babysitting costs, thereby reducing the economic barriers that might prevent them from attending planning sessions for the family literacy program.

Action Read's Student Group

Origin

In February 1992, Jody, the coordinator of Action Read, contacted Maria and Linda, two students registered with Action Read, to see if they were interested in attending the AAAL student workshop. Maria was approached because of her long history with the program and Linda, who recently joined the program, was approached because of her outgoing personality and her well developed verbal skills. Maria and Linda were willing to attend the workshop and completed the necessary application forms.

During the workshop, Maria and Linda participated in a session about student support groups and became interested in starting a similar group at Action Read. Immediately following the AAAL workshop, Maria approached Jody and asked for permission to start a student support group.²¹ Jody, in turn, brought the idea to the board for approval. The board approved the idea and the first student meeting was held on October 22, 1992. At the AAAL workshop, Maria also learned that programs such as Action Read were governed by a board. Consequently, she communicated to Jody that she was willing to serve on Action Read's board.

Since Action Read employed four staff members, a decision had to be made about who was going to work with the student group. The staff decided that Shelley would facilitate the student meetings since her major job responsibilities and interests were student-centred.

Recruitment, composition and format

The student group had difficulty coalescing because of its constantly changing composition and lack of consistency in attendance. This tendency, in turn, made it difficult for the staff to foster leadership among the students. Consequently, each of the four meetings had a

²¹ After the AAAL student meeting, Linda became very ill and withdrew from Action Read.

distinctively different format which in part, reflected the different interests of those who attended.²²

Shelley notified the Action Read students about the first meeting by telephone as there "was not enough time to let students know about the meeting through the newsletter." Four students -- Maria, Jacob, Daniel and Patrick -- attended the first meeting. The four students were interested in talking about their personal lives for the first hour and then they brainstormed new programming ideas such as peer tutoring.

The next meeting was scheduled for November, 1992, which meant that there was enough time to advertise the meeting in the program's newsletter. At the October meeting, Daniel offered to write a notice and he delivered it to Action Read the following day. This notice went in the newsletter, generating the interest of three new students, Geoffrey, Bill and Ted, all of whom attended the November meeting. Unfortunately, three of the students who attended the October meeting--Maria, Jacob and Patrick--did not attend the November meeting for the following reasons: Maria's son was hospitalized, Jacob was experiencing family difficulties and Patrick dropped out of the program and could not be reached by phone or mail.

At the second meeting, Shelley noted that she "took a more vocal role as facilitator this time with the intention of mobilizing them to do something rather than discussing the injustices of life." The theme which pervaded the meeting was the low attendance. There were approximately 100 students in the Action Read program, so a turn-out of four students represented 4 percent of the student population. The students talked about possible reasons for the poor attendance and generated ideas to increase attendance. Their ideas were two-fold: they examined ways of recruiting students and then they generated an array of social activities that would attract students. In her journal, Shelley recorded that "the students

²²It should be noted that I was able to attend the last three meetings.

[also] felt it would be important to do some type of a survey to identify what most people would want in a student group." Coincidentally, during the first week of January, 1993, Jody, in a telephone conversation with me, also suggested the possibility of developing a questionnaire to look into why students were not attending meetings. On January 25, 1993, Maria, Geoffrey, Jacob and I began meeting to develop an Action Read Student Involvement Questionnaire.

During the second meeting, I explained my role and interest in their student group. As well, I introduced the idea of producing a photostory at a later date as a means of documenting and sharing their experiences in the student group.

The third meeting was scheduled for December 10, 1992 and Shelley continued to notify students by telephone. This meeting was attended by Geoffrey, Daniel and Bill, all of whom had attended the November meeting. However, Ted did not return to this meeting. In the third meeting, the group did not pursue any of the ideas that were generated during the second meeting. Instead, Shelley started the meeting by stating that we would be discussing the upcoming AAAL conference and that I would be sharing my experiences with the student groups in rural Alberta. Shelley presented information about the conference and invited the students to attend a conference planning meeting in January, 1993. Shelley closed the meeting after an hour, and another meeting date was not set. Maria was the only student who attended the AAAL conference planning meeting in January, 1993.

The fourth group meeting was advertised in Action Read's newsletter and was held on March 1, 1993. This meeting turned out to be the final student meeting before the program closed for the summer. Geoffrey, who had attended two previous meetings, and Maria, who had attended the first meeting came to the March 1st meeting. As well, Ernie, who had not attended the three previous meetings, was present.

Two staff members, Jody and Shelley, attended this meeting. The meeting began a bit awkwardly and I later learned that Shelley was expecting Jody to facilitate and vice versa. Without a facilitator, the meeting lacked focus and direction. Therefore, I decided to step in and suggest that perhaps now was the time to work on a group photostory about our experiences in trying to form a student group. The students and staff were enthusiastic about this idea.

In the course of the next three months, Shelley, Geoffrey, Maria, Jacob and I met three times to develop the photostory. So, although it was not my intent, the photostory became the focus of the student group. After the completion of the photostory, neither the staff nor students made formal plans to meet again. The staff did not want to continue the student group because of the low student attendance at meetings. Maria was still interested in serving on the board, but the board decided that it would have to increase its size if students were to be involved. This would entail changing the by-laws and a sub-committee was struck after their Annual General Meeting in June, 1993 to undertake this task.

In summary, it appears that Maria's attendance at the AAAL conference and her subsequent interest in forming a student support group, along with my involvement as a researcher at Action Read, was the "spark" that initiated the student group. Moreover, my continued presence and interest in the student group was the "burr" that kept the group alive. Although the staff and students spoke positively of the research and the staff began to support participatory practices above and beyond the student group, I think that, to some extent, the research was *done* on the staff, students and board members, rather than *with* them.

The Literacy Network began as a community initiative in the late 1970s, when the citizens in Virden and Creston formed a literacy council which was based in Virden and affiliated with Laubach Literacy International. This council submitted a proposal to the local Further Education council and it funded The Literacy Network until 1980. At that time, the Alberta Department of Advanced Education provided funding for a one year pilot project which enabled The Literacy Network to hire a part-time coordinator and to pay a small honorarium to the tutors. The pilot project was administered by an educational institution and by the early 1980s, The Literacy Network became a permanent outreach program, serving a geographical region of approximately 30,000 square miles. In 1983, Creston formed their own literacy council, as the "community felt that there should be a council promoting literacy in [their] area."

The Literacy Network has continued to maintain a sense of community ownership through the active cooperation and involvement of many agencies, groups and individuals. For instance, in Creston, a joint community-institutional advisory committee with members appointed by the educational institution and community is a forum for sharing information and raising concerns. As well, the literacy councils continue to support The Literacy Network. Both the advisory committee and the literacy councils have student representation. At the time of this study, the educational institution was administering and sponsoring literacy programs in the communities of Haines Junction, Creston, Virden and Little Valley. The purpose of these programs is to serve the needs of adults who need to develop or improve their literacy skills.

The economy of Haines Junction, Creston and Virden relies on forestry, the oil and gas industry and agriculture. The three communities that participated in this study serve a small population base, with each of Haines Junction and Virden serving a population of less than 3000, and Creston serving a population of less than 5000.

The three Literacy Network programs that participated in this study are staffed by a full time literacy coordinator and ten full-time paid tutors. Liz, the full-time literacy coordinator, is stationed in Haines Junction and her primary role is the administration of The Literacy Network. In each community, there is a ratio of approximately one paid tutor to every four students; each tutor's primary role is to tutor the students through individual as well as some small group instruction. In the context of Alberta's literacy programs, The Literacy Network is based upon a unique programming model, one that relies on individualized tutoring in a classroom setting. The number of students registered with each literacy program varies, with nine students in Haines Junction, nineteen students in Creston and eleven students in Virden.

Of the nine students registered with Haines Junction, six were female and three were male. They ranged in age from 19 to 54 with the majority of students in the age range of 20 to 35. Of these students, two were Mennonite, six were Native and one was Caucasian. For seven of these students, English was their second language, while for two, English was their mother tongue. The eleven students registered with the Virden program were Native and spoke English as a Second Language. Of these eleven students, six were male and five were female.

Of the nineteen students registered with the Creston program, thirteen are female and six are male. All of the students are Mennonite, with English being their second language. Educational levels range from no formal schooling to grade nine, with seventeen students having less than a grade six education and two students having a junior high education. The students are between 20 to 55 years of age, with nine students being between the ages of 20 to 35 and ten students being between the ages of 36 to 55. All of the students, with the exception of one, attend school on a full-time basis. Of the nineteen students, three are self-employed, four are seeking employment and twelve are homemakers.

Students are involved in the The Literacy Network in a number of ways. In terms of decision-making, students have opportunities to serve on their local literacy council and on the community-institutional advisory committee. Cameron, a Creston student, serves on the council and advisory committee; he acts as the students' representative, bringing their issues forward to the committee and council. For instance, the students have "been involved in the blue-prints...and the planning" for a new educational facility; Cameron shared their ideas at the committee level. Finally, students also participate in program evaluation "where they have a lot of input and can speak their mind on what [they] want and what [they] don't want [in the program]."

The students are also involved in program activities such as fundraising and planning social events. During this study, the students became involved with the staff's monthly professional development (PD) days. The programs use a rotation system which enables all the students to attend the PD days at least once or twice a year. The Creston students volunteered to cater these lunches so that they could earn extra funds for their field trips. The other programs also use money earned from fundraising ventures for field trips, as well as for sponsoring students to attend the annual AAAL conferences.

Two of the three Literacy Network programs that were involved in this study had either formed a student association or student support group. During this study, the Haines Junction students separated from their upgrading student association and formed their own student association and the Virden students decided to form a student support group. Finally, the Creston students decided that rather than forming a student association, they would prefer to keep meeting on an informal basis.

The Literacy Network's Student Groups

Haines Junction

Haines Junction was unique in comparison to other literacy programs because the literacy and upgrading students who attended full-time classes had formed a student association prior to the AAAL workshop. In early September, 1992, the upgrading students began their classes and decided to form their own student association. In late September, the literacy students started their classes and learned about the upgrading students' decision. The literacy students informed me that "by the time we got back we found out they wanted [to] separate. It didn't really hurt us because of the troubles we had last year. We were actually kind of happy." The "troubles" surfaced whenever the upgrading students wanted to spend student association funds on field trips. The upgrading students seemed to have "more free time" than the literacy students to go on field trips, whereas some of the literacy students couldn't "do as much" because they had children that could not be left alone during overnight field trips.

The literacy students decided to form their own student association; Jean was elected president, Jennifer was elected treasurer and Susan was elected secretary. Jean had also been elected by her classmates to attend the AAAL student workshop in March, 1992. In her application form, Jean wrote that she wanted "to learn more of what a student union really is. This might make it easier for me to know more of what to do when being in a student union, and how to set up new ideas, to get people interested in a student union."

The student association met on an ad hoc basis throughout the school year, with Jean calling meetings whenever there was an issue of importance to discuss or differences to resolve. Then, the nine literacy students (three men and six women) would "get together and make sure everyone else is satisfied with whatever and then [they'd] just go ahead with [it]". The student association was used as a space to "discuss and support each others' ideas," as well as a space to plan activities and events.

The student association dealt with two main issues during the 1992-93 school year. For one of the issues, the students used their association as a forum to discuss the pros and cons of attending a two hour parenting workshop scheduled during school hours for seven weeks. They decided that since the facilitator was younger than them and was "talking about little babies", the workshop would not meet their needs. Nonetheless, four students decided "to check it out" just in case "they were missing out on something good", but in the final analysis, the four students felt "it just wasn't for [them]." The second issue was explored through the photostory, and due to ethics, cannot be discussed.

The student association raised funds, primarily through a janitorial contract in which they were paid for cleaning the school. The \$1,200.00 which the students raised was used to fund celebrations and the purchase of leather school jackets.

Virden

Prior to forming a student support group, the eleven full-time literacy students and two paid tutors would call meetings when necessary. Aside from these meetings, Paul, a literacy student, informed me that "there was nothing going on" and people just came to class and then went home. In March, 1992, Paul was chosen to attend the AAAL student meeting. When he returned, he "got the ball rolling" and initiated a student support group to "plan field trips" and to "give everybody a chance to speak." According to Paul, the students did not speak during staff-student meetings that were held prior to the formation of the student support group. In his application form to the AAAL workshop, Paul stated "when the students and tutors have a meeting the tutors usually ask a question but us students hardly say anything so sometimes the tutors have to answer their own question." Therefore, in Virden, the student support group provided an opportunity for the students to speak "on their own."

During the first student meeting, Paul was elected to be president and Dorothy was elected secretary of the group. The purpose of Virden's student support group was to "give everybody a chance to speak" and to pursue goals such as field trips and purchasing books for beginning readers. During the school year, they went on one field trip to another community.

Like Haines Junction, the Virden student support group raised funds through a janitorial contract. As well, they organized a bingo and a moose stew and bannock dinner for additional revenue.

Creston

The Creston literacy program sent Harold, a literacy student, to the AAAL student workshop in March, 1992. Upon his return, Harold attempted to initiate a student support group and found that his classmates "didn't seem interested." His peers talked about the advantages and disadvantages before dismissing the idea. The students felt that they already received "support" from their families and from their classmates, so a support group was unnecessary. Sylvia, the program's paid tutor, stated that the main reason there was no interest was "because these people think 'we're doing Ok, we don't need anything else, we're satisfied.'" Clearly, the literacy program was serving their needs, which was primarily to improve their literacy skills.

Although the students enjoyed social activities, they did not use a formalized structure to organize and plan them. Instead, they met informally during coffee and lunch breaks to discuss ideas and make plans. Since there was an informal structure, group leaders were not appointed or elected. Nonetheless, Cameron, a Creston student, was viewed by students "as [their] leader" because everyone felt "comfortable with him."

The students were very active in terms of fundraising. Once a year, they raised \$1000.00 by catering a noodle supper in their community. These funds were used towards a field trip. As well, they catered the lunches for The Literacy Network's professional development days.

CHAPTER 3

Design of the Study

Introduction

This chapter positions the study within its methodological framework. After a brief description of this framework, the chapter describes the two pilot studies. This is followed by a description of the ways in which knowledge was recorded and documented, shared and analyzed. Next, there is a section that focuses on credibility. This chapter concludes with reflections on my role as a researcher.

The Methodological Framework

This study was conducted within the naturalistic research paradigm (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). I viewed this study as a dynamic process whereby the participants had an opportunity to share collectively and develop knowledge which, in turn, could be used to transform individuals, as well as the social practices and relations within institutions, programs and/or associations. In this study, the participants were invited into the process. As I worked with the participants, particularly the students, I emphasized that by engaging in this process, we were creating history. For example, whenever possible, I used pictorial timelines to illustrate our place in the history of participatory practices in the province, and discussed how this study and their participation in it had the potential to shape this history.

Pilot Studies

Introduction

Two pilot studies were conducted; the first study was conducted over a one month period in February 1992, and the second over a five week period during mid-March to mid-April, 1993. The two adult literacy programs that were involved in the pilot studies operated under similar mandates to those programs chosen for the main study in that they supported participatory practices and provided literacy opportunities for adult students through small

group and/or one-to-one instruction from volunteer tutors. The participants who were involved in the pilot studies did not participate in the main study.

The First Pilot Study

The first pilot study explored the experiences of four adult students who were engaged in participatory practices in The Read/Write Program²³, a community-based literacy program situated in Toronto. The objective of this study was to document the experiences of students who were involved in the management and governance of their literacy program in order to gain a deeper understanding of this phenomenon. However, in terms of being a "pilot study", the purposes were two-fold: (1) to practice and gain expertise in interviewing people; and (2) to practice and gain knowledge about analyzing data.

The four students who participated in this pilot study were past and present board members of The Read/Write Program. Of the three active board members, two were English-speaking males, born in the Caribbean, and one was an English-speaking female, born in Guyana. The past board member was a Canadian-born, white English-speaking male.

The interviews were conducted in the privacy of a small room at The Read/Write Program. The male participants were interviewed for approximately one hour and the female participant was interviewed for 30 minutes. After chatting with each participant about how he/she became involved with The Read/Write Program and/or on the board, the following request was posed to each participant: "Tell me about your experiences on the board." The content of the interviews was shaped by the male participants, resulting in an interview which was longer than the female participant's. For instance, the three males made interesting detours which touched upon the topic of literacy and how it affected their lives.

²³In order to protect the identity of the program and its participants, the names of the program and the students have been changed.

Consequently, some general questions about their experience(s) on the board needed to be asked so that the interview would meet my needs, as well as theirs.

Each interview was audio-taped and transcribed. After transcribing the first interview, emergent themes were identified which served to guide my questioning during subsequent interviews. For instance, a significant relationship between the first participant and The Read/Write Program was noted. Therefore, the question, "What does The Read/Write Centre mean to you?" was posed in the remaining interviews. After completing the first round of interviews, member checking (Lincoln and Guba, 1985) was employed with the two male participants who spoke a Caribbean dialect. Member checking provided an opportunity to check my interpretations of some of their forms of speech as well as to pursue some of their responses in greater depth.

During the first phase of the data analysis, the transcripts and field notes were read and a coding system with approximately 90 codes was developed (Bogdan and Biklen, 1992). A second reading enabled me to refine these codes. In the second phase of the analysis, the codes were clustered into 10 categories. Then, a color-coding system was used to highlight and match the 90 codes identified throughout the transcripts to their respective category. In the final phase of the analysis, matrices were developed for each of the 10 categories. Each matrix was structured with participants' names forming the top horizontal border and the codes forming the vertical border on the left side of the page. In developing the matrices, I combined some of the codes, resulting in a reduced total of 40 codes. The 10 matrices were completed by writing in the page and line numbers of the transcripts which corresponded to each participant's name and code. The matrices enabled me to identify patterns among the categories; this resulted in the establishment of five major themes that pertained to this pilot study.

Knowledge gained from the first pilot study

With respect to the first purpose, I learned that interviews were restrictive in that they did not allow the participants the opportunity to make use of visual, non-verbal modes of communication. For instance, one student probably realized that I was not tapping in to his communicative strengths and left the room to fetch a picture book which had been published by The Read/Write program; these pictures provided a stimulus for further discussion. This student's action prompted me to explore the concept of using visual tools to share and elicit information in the main study.

Also, with respect to the first purpose, it became apparent that the students, particularly the female, preferred a semi-structured interview rather than an unstructured interview, as the students appeared to welcome questions. Therefore, I realized that I should bring a semi-structured interview guide to each interview in the main study. Secondly, it became clear that participatory practices cannot be studied in isolation since the male students voluntarily talked about their illiteracy, their families, their work, their history, their hopes and their dreams during our interviews. Therefore, I became cognizant that in the main study, I needed to allow time for students to talk about matters of importance to them.

In relation to the second purpose, I gained experience in data analysis. Several authors guided my work in the analysis of transcripts (Bogdan & Biklen; 1992; Kirby and McKenna, 1989; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The process of coding, categorizing and developing a set of matrices enabled me to identify five themes: student involvement, the board, board members, supportive environment and empowerment, and personal development. However, I found these themes to be superficial, and I realized that, in terms of data analysis, I would need to probe deeper for the main study.

The Second Pilot Study

The purpose of the second pilot study was to gain knowledge and practice in producing a photostory. The Learning Centre Literacy Association provided me with the space, time and material supplies to develop a photostory with their students.²⁴ This program, which operates as an open access model, is located on the edge of Edmonton's inner city. Social assistance is the main source of income for students who attend this program. At the time of this study, the students generally worked in a one-to-one learning environment, although some group work had been initiated. Therefore, the photostory provided a relatively new opportunity for the students to work within a group setting. The students and I met for four 2-hour sessions over the course of five weeks.

Preparation for the production of this photostory included gathering information about the participants, taking a beginner's course in camera usage, examining published photostories such as **My Name is Rose** by Rose Doiron and reading literature on producing photostories. With respect to the latter point, the only publication that could be located through a literature search was **Getting There: Producing Photostories with Immigrant Women**, by Barndt, Cristall and Marino. In addition, I met with Bev Burke, the editor of **English Express**²⁵ and she walked me through the stages and steps of producing a photostory. Finally, I developed a one hour warm-up exercise for our first session.

Since the students had few opportunities to work in group settings within The Learning Centre, the primary purpose of the warm-up session was to have them participate in a non-threatening exercise that would ease their transition into group work. This session, held on March 18, 1993, was attended by three female students -- Mary, Helen and Joyce -- and four male students -- Ben, Harry, Terry and Ken -- and two female tutors. These students were Caucasian, with the exception of Helen, who was Native. After a set of brief

²⁴The Learning Centre is the actual name of the program. The staff and students provided me with written consent to publish their photostory in this dissertation. (See Appendix H for consent form).

²⁵English Express is a newspaper written in basic English. It is distributed to English as a Second Language and upgrading programs in the province of Alberta.

introductions, I explained that each person in the room was an important part of the Learning Centre's history and that we were going to spend the first hour in the development of a historical "people" timeline.

The warm-up activity unfolded with Helen's taking a Polaroid picture of each student in the group. (All of the students, with the exception of one, agreed to having their Polaroid taken.) As the Polaroids were developing, I asked the students to physically line themselves up in terms of "when" they started at The Learning Centre. Terry was the newest student, and therefore was positioned at one end of the line whereas Harry was a "veteran" student and consequently, was positioned at the opposite end of the line. As they positioned themselves in a line, they began to talk to each other in order to determine where they should stand. I taped a long piece of brown paper across the entire length of one wall, using a black felt marker to draw a "historical timeline" through its median. Then, I asked the students to tape their pictures to the appropriate position on the historical time line. Beside their picture, I instructed them to print their name and the year they started at The Learning Centre and to write or draw their first impressions of The Learning Centre. After completing this exercise, each person took a turn in verbally sharing what they wrote or drew. This exercise served to break the ice and the group became quite animated, continuing to talk about their personal experiences as learners. We talked for the remainder of the two hours, and I commented on the common experiences and emotions shared by the group.

This warm-up exercise appeared to be successful because it met the following criteria:

- (1) Everybody had a chance to participate.
- (2) The students' experience was the starting point for this exercise.
- (3) We gradually moved from working in isolation (recording personal impressions and experiences on paper) to working as a group (sharing and discussing).
- (4) Students had choices. For example, they could write *or* draw their impressions *or* if desired, they could just write their name.
- (5) We spent time talking about patterns in our experience, and the students began to

recognize that they were not alone in experiencing certain emotions.

This session ended with a brief explanation of the photostory we would be producing. I handed out examples of published photostories and we discussed possible topics for their photostory. The group unanimously wanted to write a story about The Learning Centre and we generated the following outline for our photostory:

The Learning Centre

- History
- First Impressions
- What We Like
- What We Do
- The Future (Our Hopes and Dreams)

We realized that in order to write about The Learning Centre's history, we needed more information than our group could provide. Therefore, Harry invited Sister Beryl, the founder of The Learning Centre, to attend our next session.

This second session, held on March 25, 1993, was attended by two students who had not attended the first session -- Ken and James. Terry and Joyce, who had attended the first session, were absent. In planning for the second session, I realized that the students might become restless since they would be sitting for two hours. Also, since many of them were smokers, they might become fidgety. Therefore, I brought in some play-do and invited them to play with it as a means of occupying their hands while we talked. This proved to be a good idea, and served to create a relaxed atmosphere.

As the group members asked Sister Beryl historical questions such as "How did the Learning Centre start?", I recorded her responses on flip chart paper. Helen took it upon herself to copy the notes from the flip chart paper into a work book. By the end of this

session, we had written five pages of historical information for later use in the photostory. This session was enriched because Sister Berryl also spoke about her upcoming trip to Mexico. She explained that she was going to visit the refugees in Mexico and record their stories before they returned to their homeland. We wrote a group postcard, reflecting our support for their journey.

The third meeting, held on April 8, 1993, was attended by two students, James and Lester, who had not attended the first two sessions. Mary was absent from the third session due to illness. Preparation for this meeting entailed taping approximately 30 pages of prepared flip chart paper on the four walls of the room. (See Appendix A for a template of how each piece of flip chart paper was prepared). We began by extracting the key points from the five pages of history and transferring them on to the flip chart paper. Then, we worked our way through the outline of the photostory in the following manner. I simply turned each point in the outline into a question which the group would then answer. For example, I asked them "What were your first impressions of The Learning Centre?" and "What do you like about The Learning Centre?" Then, I recorded their responses on the flip chart paper.

The story rapidly flowed from the students, creating a challenge to record all of their words on paper. Although we attempted to follow our outline, the story took several twists and turns. In an effort not to miss anything, I recorded everything and did not attend to the sequence of the storyline. When necessary, I asked for clarification or at times, I tried to probe deeper by asking simple questions such as "Why do you feel comfortable here?" or "Why were you nervous when you started?" At the end of the session, we concerned ourselves with "sequence" and rearranged the flip chart papers to improve the storyline.

Quite often, in narrating the story, a certain comment would act as a trigger, leading the students to engage in a discussion about their personal experiences. For example, two students, one male and one female, talked about the physical and sexual abuse they suffered

in public school. This led to a heated discussion of previous educational experiences. As well, we talked about the general public's view(s) of people who were living on social assistance. Sometimes, I moved the discussion from a concrete to a more analytical level by asking "why" questions such as "Why does the general public have a negative view about people living on social assistance and what needs to be done to start changing their perceptions?" At the end of the third session, James stated that he felt really relaxed in the group and we talked about the possibility of continuing the group after the completion of the photostory.²⁶

The fourth meeting, held on April 15, 1993, was attended by all students who had been involved with the project to that date, with the exception of Terry and Joyce. In this session, we completed the story, edited some text and generated some ideas for photographs to accompany the text.

The last section of the story touched upon the students' hopes and dreams. They focused on collective "hopes and dreams", rather than individual ones. They wanted to continue meeting as a group, to change the public's image of people on social assistance and to share their knowledge with the next generation. In editing the story, they omitted lines such as "We come to the centre to drink coffee and eat cookies." because they thought that might leave a negative impression on the general public.

Finally, we discussed the photographs that would accompany each page of text. We were able to think of appropriate photographs for most of the text, but we struggled with pieces of text that needed a photographic image depicting character traits and social identities. The students were getting restless, making it difficult to facilitate the discussion. Looking back,

²⁶After the completion of the photostory, I continued to meet with the group until June of 1993. We brought in resource people to talk about issues such as tenants' rights and the rights of people who lived on social assistance, both of which surfaced during the production of the photostory. During 1993-94, I continued to be involved with the centre, facilitating a women's group on a regular basis. A "student group" has continued to meet with another facilitator. This group has organized social activities and takes part in political events in the community.

I should have simply ended the meeting and scheduled another one. However, I was feeling anxious to complete the story as my research still required the development of three more photostories within the next two months! Nonetheless, by the end of the fourth session, we had identified a series of photographs that needed to be taken for the photostory. All of the students, with the exception of one, consented to having their picture(s) published both in the photostory and in this dissertation.

Helen volunteered to type up the photostory on the computer. As well, Ben, Helen and Mary volunteered to work with me on the final editing. I assumed the role of photographer, using my father's old K1000 Pentax. It appeared as if the photography lessons were a dismal failure, as the first two rolls of film could not be developed because they were improperly loaded into the camera! The students were patient, posing again for the pictures which were taken by Mary Norton, the coordinator of the centre. The students still like to tell the story of my attempts at photography.

On April 21, 1993, Ben reported on the photostory project at the Centre's annual general meeting. His report read as follows:

We gathered information to go into a book so other people can read it and find out what the Learning Centre is all about. Photos, pictures, and stories of the past, present and future are going in the book.

We learned a lot more about the Centre than we had known before. I communicated better with the other students in these group sessions. The people were friendly with each other. We felt comfortable together. We all got to know each other a lot better. And I hope we keep meeting as a group.

Mary Norton assumed the responsibility of publishing the final product. In June, 1993, the photostory was distributed to the students at their annual picnic and displayed at a fund-raising dinner sponsored in part by The Learning Centre. The photostory is now used as one means to introduce new students and others to the program. (See Appendix B).

Knowledge gained from the second pilot study

With respect to the purpose, I gained experience, knowledge and confidence in producing a photostory. Specifically, the experience served to raise the following four issues and/or concerns that I needed to resolve before engaging in the main study: (1) voice; (2) photography skills; (3) time; and (4) dual roles.

In working with the students at the Learning Centre, I became conscious of the manner in which I addressed the group. Specifically, I am referring to the "voice" I used with the students, and its relation to social identities. By voice, I am referring to the use of "we" versus "you" and "I". On one hand, I was an "insider" in relation to the *program* since my involvement with it dated back to 1985. On the other hand, I was an "outsider" in relation to the *students* because we did not know each other and, moreover, we did not share similar social identities in terms of class and education. Having worked in the literacy community for many years and having developed a good rapport with the group, I wanted to use the word "we". Yet, I felt awkward using "we" when we discussed poverty since I had never lived in poverty. As well, it didn't seem appropriate to use the term "we" in discussions about the future of the centre since, at the time of the study, I was not part of this future. Yet, when I used "I", I felt separated from the group. In working with this group, I found myself continually switching voice, and moving from "we" to "you" and "I".

The photostory highlighted my weak photography skills. Since there was little time to practice before the next photostory, I decided to use two cameras at all times. As well, I invited instructors to bring their cameras and to assist with the photography. For the Action Read program, I hired a photographer to take some of the photographs.

Through the pilot study, I learned the approximate length of time needed to produce a photostory. Although there was enough time to produce photostories with the Action Read and The Literacy Network students, I only had one day with the ALFA students. Therefore, I began to strategize how the students and I would complete the text of the ALFA photostory and take the accompanying photographs in this short time period.

Finally, I came to realize the difficulties of simultaneously being a group facilitator and a researcher. On one hand, I was guiding the group, asking questions, probing, and writing down their narratives. On the other hand, I was trying to absorb the scenario -- observe the group dynamics, capture snippets of off-side conversation, watch people's body language. This pilot study informed me that I should use a video-recorder or at least a tape recorder to document the photostories in the main study.

Recording and Documenting Knowledge

Interviews

Student groups, literacy workers, students and board members participated in semi-structured interviews that contained open-ended questions based on the major purposes of the study (Bogdan and Biklen, 1992).

In each literacy program, the first interview was held with the student group. I began the interview process by briefly describing the research and responding to their questions. Once the group was familiar with the purpose of the study, I asked them if they were interested in becoming involved. If they expressed interest, I asked them to think about how the study could benefit their program and student group. Then, I moved into the semi-structured interview, which focused on the experiences of the student group. (See Appendix C).

After interviewing the group, I conducted individual interviews with the literacy workers, board members and students. Due to time and distance, the first set of student and literacy

worker interviews for the rural programs was scheduled immediately after the group meeting and/or the following day. In the urban program, which was located in close proximity to my home, the first set of student and literacy worker interviews was scheduled during the following month. The second set of student and literacy worker interviews was conducted towards the end of the study. I conducted one set of interviews with board members towards the end of the study. In total, I interviewed 18 literacy students, seven staff members and three board members between October of 1992 and May of 1993.

I asked each of the 28 participants for permission to tape record the interview. They signed a consent form, which was read to the students (See Appendix D). I informed each participant that the transcript would be returned to them, and I would be willing to make changes to it, if they so desired.

For the students, each interview began with an informal chat about how they got involved with the program. Following this, I assisted them in completing a Student Information Questionnaire, which contained questions relating to demographics (See Appendix E). After completing this questionnaire, we began the semi-structured interview. (See Appendix F). All of the interviews, with the exception of three, were conducted at the program site. The remaining participants chose to have their interviews either at a school, a conference or a library. Each interview ranged in length from 30 to 60 minutes.

For the staff, each interview began by asking them to describe either their program or student involvement within their program. Then, we began the semi-structured interviews (See Appendix G). Each interview ranged in length from 30 to 90 minutes.

For the board members, I began the interview by providing background information on my research and on student involvement in Canada and in their program. Although the questions for each interview varied, I primarily focused on their thoughts about student

participation on the board and in the program. The interviews ranged in length from 30 to 45 minutes.

Journals

During the group interview, I asked the students and staff if they would be willing to keep journals about their experiences with the student group and/or association. In total, two staff members and two students kept journals.

Fieldnotes

Between August of 1992 and June of 1993, I kept fieldnotes on the study which were written after participating in the following events, activities and/or meetings:

- (1) telephone and face-to-face conversations
- (2) photostories
- (3) Action Read Student Questionnaire
- (4) student association and/or group meetings
- (5) interviews

These fieldnotes described the preceding events, activities and/or meetings. As well, I kept a record of my impressions, reflections and questions within the text of these fieldnotes.

Photostories

Photostories were used as a means of generating knowledge and recording information about participatory practices. I chose this method because it involves a group experience that employs visual and verbal modes of communication. As well, it is a fluid process which creates a "safe" space to express desire(s) for change, both at the micro and macro levels. At the micro level, we continually changed the text of the narrative as our analysis deepened. At the macro level, the photostories had the potential to transform social relations and structures. These photostories provided a means for the students and staff to resolve issues and to plan ahead. The students and staff at Action Read, Haines Junction and ALFA participated in the production of a photostory. As well, a pilot photostory was conducted at The Learning Centre. All of the participants signed a consent form to allow their picture to be published in the photostory (See Appendix H).

The process for the development of the photostories was similar to the process used in the pilot study. The only difference between the process used in the pilot study and the main study was the inclusion of a historical timeline focusing on participatory practices in Alberta. This timeline enabled students to see how their photostory would connect to the wider context of participatory practices within the province. I used a pictorial timeline to depict the history. (See Appendix I).

In order to decide the content of the photostories, I asked the students what they would like to share with other people in the province. The students at Haines Junction decided to focus on a critical incident which needed to be resolved. The students at Action Read decided to describe the process of initiating a student group within their program. Finally, the students at ALFA decided to describe the nature of their student group.

During the production of the photostories, I assumed a dual role: facilitator and researcher. In my role as facilitator, I was an active participant who was responsible for guiding the

process. In my role as researcher, I *wanted* to detach myself from the process in order to observe and analyze it. It was difficult to maintain both roles, so I decided to videotape the process for later analysis. However, I was only successful in videotaping the production of the Haines Junction photostory. A copy of this videotape was given to the students. Although I set up video equipment to tape the production of the ALFA photostory, the event was not recorded due to technical difficulties. I decided to audiotape rather than videotape the production of the Action Read photostory because the event took place in a small room and the video equipment would have been obtrusive.

Document Analysis

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), "documents and records are singularly useful sources of information" (p. 276). In this study, I collected minutes of student association meetings, materials related to board meetings, program newsletters and by-laws. As well, I obtained the minutes of the Alberta Association of Adult Literacy, in order to learn about the history of student involvement in their association.

Questionnaire

In an effort to determine whether Action Read students were interested in participating in the program and the student group, I worked with three Action Read students to develop an Action Read Student Questionnaire. (See Appendix J). It should be noted that this technique differed from the preceding techniques in that it was not part of my original methodological design. The idea for the questionnaire came from the Action Read students and staff.

Sharing the Knowledge

Hall (1981) believes that the trend towards the democratization of research "represents an important force for increasing the chance that research will serve those whom it is intended

to serve" (p.449). Throughout the study, I attempted to engage in a democratic process whereby I shared the knowledge with the participants (Kirby and McKenna, 1989; Hall, 1981).

After the first set of interviews, I wrote letters to the staff and letters written in basic English to the presidents of the student groups, outlining my findings and impressions to date. During student group meetings, I shared information about student involvement in the other programs that were involved in this study. At the conclusion of the study, I invited the literacy workers and students to participate in an Alberta Association for Adult Literacy conference session that was to be held in the fall of 1993. Finally, I attended a full-day Alberta Association for Adult Literacy student steering committee meeting at the Mustard Seed Mission in Calgary during June, 1993. At this meeting, I shared my findings with the hope that the student steering committee could utilize them as they promoted student involvement in the province.

Analyzing Knowledge

After letting the data "sit" for two months, I began data analysis, with the goal of identifying themes. In order to reach this goal, I engaged in a process that was guided by qualitative research literature (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Kirby & McKenna, 1989; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

The transcripts, field notes and documents were coded. After the initial coding, I let the data sit for a week before coding it again. Then, I grouped these codes into categories. However, I was not satisfied with these categories as they seemed to be at the surface level. Therefore, I decided to re-read critical, feminist and postmodern literature, looking for ways in which the categories related to the concepts presented in the literature. The literature helped me to

identify themes which the categories could fall under. For instance, many of the categories fell within the themes of pedagogies and social relations.

The next stage in this process was to use visual devices to explore these themes (Bogdan and Biklen, 1992; Kirby & McKenna, 1989). The themes and their corresponding categories were recorded on pieces of bristol board. This helped me to identify connections among the categories.

Matrices were developed as a means of organizing the data. Each theme was represented on a piece of bristol board. Across the top horizontal border, I wrote the participants' names and across a vertical border, I wrote the categories' names. Then, I proceeded to write the page and line number of the codes which corresponded to the participant and category. My next step was to physically sort the data through the "cut-up-and-put-in-folders approach" (Bogdan and Biklen, 1992, p. 177). Large envelopes were used to hold the data for each category. Then, using the information in the matrices, I used scissors to cut up the data and place it in its respective envelope. Although this was time-consuming, it was very helpful when I began to write the findings chapters.

The process of data analysis continued as I began to write up the findings. At times, a new category would emerge and I would sort through the data, looking for information that fit within it. During the writing, one of the themes, entitled "roles", was integrated into the remaining two themes, entitled "pedagogies" and "social relations".

Credibility

In order to establish credibility, triangulation occurred throughout the research and member-checking occurred towards the end of the study. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), the member-check is a process "whereby data, analytic categories, interpretations and

conclusions are tested with members of those stakeholding groups from whom the data were originally collected" (p. 314). In this sense, member-checking was used to ensure that my interpretation of the data corresponded with what the participant intended to communicate. Member-checking was pursued with the following four staff members: Jody, Shelley, Liz and Barb.

Whenever I engaged in member-checking, I would forward a written version of my findings to the participant. She would read it and make written suggestions in the margin of my written version. Sometimes we would meet for lunch or coffee to review the material. Sometimes, I fretted over my interpretation(s) and their response to it, particularly in instances where I had explored contradictions between the participants' words and actions. A week would pass, and if I had not heard from the participant, my mind would start thinking the worst and I would wonder if she was going to withdraw from the study! After this process was completed, each individual always remarked on how pleased they were to be given the opportunity to respond to my interpretation. Although I aged somewhat in the process, I was pleased with the feedback they gave me and found that it made the study stronger and more credible.

Triangulation, a process that also improves credibility, was used in this study. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), triangulation is a process whereby a piece of information derived from one source or method should be checked against other sources or methods in order to validate the accuracy of specific data items. In this study, triangulation was achieved through multiple sources such as interviewing several participants in one literacy program and multiple data collections methods as interviews, document analysis, journals and photostories.

The Researcher's Role

I played a significant role in initiating and promoting Action Read's student group, partially because I lived in close proximity to the Action Read program, a factor which allowed me to spend a considerable amount of time with the program's staff and students. In comparison, I played a smaller role in promoting ALFA's and The Literacy Network's student groups and/or associations, since these groups were initiated prior to this study. Furthermore, the geographical distance between myself and these programs reduced the amount of time I could spend with the staff and students. Therefore, I would like to briefly comment on my role in initiating and promoting the Action Read student group.

In my final interviews with Shelley and Jody, I asked them to reflect upon the impact of my role as researcher. They provided the following reflections:

I think the research actually helped formalize and put some structure in place for reaching the students, and maybe even just stirring up the idea among them that it's possible to get something going if they're interested. So, it may have been a spark to light the fire. [Shelley]

I have to try to be really honest about this. I think because we were being researched, we were probably more conscious of the whole process. You know, we were conscious of being researched, and therefore, in some ways, it would have been, it would have been easy to drop it when it seemed that things weren't getting going. Those questions, why are we doing it? It would have been easy to probably drop it at that point, but the fact that you're involved, and again, it's hard to separate out. It's partly the fact that we were being researched, but also partly the fact this it was action research and you were involved. If you'd been simply observing, I think probably it would have been easy to drop. But because you were there and available and willing to take things further, I think that's definitely had an impact. That kept the momentum. [Jody]

Throughout my involvement at Action Read, I often felt intrusive. The staff was so busy and overworked, that I felt as if their involvement in this study was just adding another weight to their workload. For that reason, I never asked Shelley to participate in the development and

analysis of the Action Read Questionnaire. As well, I limited the number of articles or publications that I passed on to Shelley and Jody. Finally, aside from our interview sessions, Shelley, Jody and I did not spend a great deal of time discussing participatory practices and related issues such as pedagogies, gender and identity politics.

McTaggart's (1991) article on "Principles for Participatory Action Research" describes the distinction between "involvement," which means to "entangle" and to "include" and "participation," which means to "share and take part." In reading this article, it suddenly occurred to me that although the staff and students at Action Read were involved in this study, they did not participate. Interestingly, I had unintentionally used the verbs "involvement" and "participate" in the preceding paragraph without realizing the significance of their meanings. Reading McTaggart's (1991) description of the implications of the two terms helped to clarify my feelings of intrusiveness:

Authentic participation in research means sharing in the way research is conceptualized, practiced, and brought to bear on the life-world. It means ownership - responsible agency in the production of knowledge and improvement of practice. Mere involvement implies none of this and creates the risk of cooption and exploitation of people in the realization of the plans of others. ...People are often involved in research, but rarely are they participants with real ownership of research theory and practice (p. 171).

During our final interview, I mentioned my feelings of intrusiveness to Jody, stating that "I felt quite intrusive, through the year, like, that I was sort of a pain." Jody replied, "Well, I don't know, maybe it needs that little burr in the side. Because you know, the desire was certainly there, but when things don't seem to move, it's really difficult to know how far to push it." Later, she added, "I think the fact that you were there, and you were an extra pair of hands, was a benefit and made a difference."

Chapter Summary

This chapter positioned the study within the naturalistic research paradigm (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). This was followed by a discussion of the two pilot studies, with an outline of their purposes and the knowledge gained from each study. The next section listed the ways in which knowledge was recorded and documented through interviews, journals, fieldnotes, photostories, document analysis, and a questionnaire. This account was followed by a description of how the knowledge was shared with the literacy workers and students who participated in this study. The next two sections provided an account of the processes used to analyze the knowledge generated in this study and to establish credibility. The last section dealt with the researcher's role in this study.

CHAPTER 4

Participatory Practices within the Programs and Student Groups

Introduction

This findings chapter is divided into two sections. Part A presents and discusses two major themes related to the participants' perspectives on participatory practices within the literacy programs: benefits and barriers. Part B presents and discusses two major themes that arose within the student groups. Within the first theme, entitled pedagogies, the following three concepts are presented: (1) top-down versus bottom-up; (2) leadership; and (3) to be versus to do. Within the second theme, entitled social relations, the following two concepts are presented: (1) identity politics; and (2) working across differences.

The presentation, discussion and interpretation of the findings are highly subjective and based upon my ideology or worldview, which is influenced by critical theory, feminist studies and postmodernism. Said (1981) underscores the link between ideology and interpretation within the research process:

All knowledge that is about human society, and not about the natural world, is historical knowledge, and therefore rests upon judgement and interpretation. That is not to say that facts and data are nonexistent, but that facts and data get their importance from what is made of them in interpretation (pp. 154-156).

The facts and data that emerged from this study, and my interpretation of them, were dependent upon the questions I posed, which, in turn, were also shaped by my ideology.

Part A: The Benefits and Barriers of Participatory Practices

Benefits

This section describes the benefits of participatory practices such as student groups and/or associations from the perspectives of students, staff and board members. The benefits are presented and discussed under the following five themes: (1) creating community -- in

community; (2) moving from silence into speech; (3) personal development; (4) having a voice and a vote; and (5) reducing borders. Within the first theme, entitled creating community -- in community, the following two concepts are presented: sharing knowledge and solidarity. Within the fourth theme, entitled having a voice and a vote, the following two concepts are presented: representation and ownership. Although these five themes are presented as separate entities, it should be acknowledged that they form a gestalt, and as such, are intertwined, interconnected and interrelated.

Creating Community -- In Community

Interactive knowledge makes human community possible. Without a common stock of knowledge of this kind, it is not possible to form social solidarity capable of mutual support and common action. Conversely, it is in community that we come to understand other human beings. It is by sharing, on a daily basis, mundane routines, lofty visions, joys, anguish, conflicts, accords, struggles, and successes, that we come to know one another as feeling beings. It is through talking to one another and doing things together that we get connected...(Park, 1993, p. 6).

The term "community," according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, stems from the Latin word "communis," meaning the abstract quality of fellowship, the sharing of common relations or feelings. According to Jurmo (1987), a common benefit for students "involved in participatory activities is that of an increase in 'community-mindedness' towards others both within and outside of the program" (p. 315). When questioned about the benefits of the student group, Peggy, the president of ALFA's student group, provided a response that supports Jurmo's statement. Peggy viewed the student group as a place where students could "cooperate, I don't know what you call it, but be able to speak together, working together with other people, helping other people." Peggy was describing a community of fellowship -- a place where people come together to speak, to work, to cooperate and to help others.

The findings indicated that all of the Action Read and ALFA students whom I interviewed, four and five students respectively, shared a desire for community. They were trying to create a community within their student group and program. With the exception of one student, the nine Literacy Network students whom I interviewed did not view their student group and/or association as a potential or current community. This difference is probably due to the learning environments in which the students were situated; The Literacy Network students were engaged in daily interaction with other students whereas the ALFA and Action Read students lacked the opportunity to interact with other students because they were in a one to one tutoring situation. Therefore, the findings suggest that the students in the latter two programs wanted to reduce the isolation that came from being in a solitary learning context by creating opportunities to interact socially with other students.

Interestingly, of the seven staff members and three board members whom I interviewed, only one person tended to view creating a sense of community among the students as a principal benefit of participatory practices. Barb recollected how the ALFA students were "jealous of the fact that [college upgrading] students had so much interaction." Barb understood that one of the students' goals was social interaction and she strove to create a sense of community within and outside of student meetings. Whenever possible, Barb organized social events with and for the students and tutors. She recalled that one of the first things she did "was to have a potluck supper where the tutors came along with the students because I thought you know [the students] would be a little afraid at first to come on their own. So we had that and that was fun and they loved that."

In her journal, Barb often referred to the fellowship, comraderie, laughter and discussion that occurred during meetings. She believed in the politics of inclusion and made great efforts to widen the circle of students who attended the student group. Barb told me that one of "the highest moments of [her work in] student involvement" occurred when a student,

who had been registered with the ALFA program for two years, and had refused to meet anyone except his tutor, came to a student meeting.

During the study, the Action Read students were in the process of trying to create a community within and beyond their student meetings. During my interviews with the students, they emphasized the importance of sharing knowledge in the student meetings. During the student meetings, and during the production of the photostory and the student questionnaire, they emphasized the importance of organizing social events so that students could have an opportunity to meet others. The students thought that once people got to know others through social events, they might be more willing to attend student meetings and to become more involved in the program.

The ALFA student group gradually developed a community through the course of the year, and by the end of the study, the students gained a sense of solidarity. The ALFA students were similar to the Action Read students in that they valued the opportunity to share and create knowledge with each other during the group meetings. As well, the ALFA students valued the social interaction within and outside of student meetings and had become "really good friends." In summary, the ALFA and Action Read student groups sought community through the sharing of knowledge and social interaction. By the end of the study, the ALFA student group were 'in community' and had gained a sense of solidarity through their student group.

Sharing knowledge

The titles of Action Read's and ALFA's photostories indicate that a primary *raison d'être* for their groups was the sharing of knowledge: Action Read's photostory was entitled "Sharing our Knowledge" and ALFA's photostory was entitled "Learning Companions". During the interviews, the students indicated that they enjoyed the student groups because they

provided an opportunity to work together and learn from each other. The notion of meeting with other students to share knowledge is reflected in the following statements:

And I like to talk with other people [about] how they came here and how they do it and...you have to find out how everything works. [Heidi, an ALFA student]

And when it's a group it seems like it's easier to talk about things because what one person is stumped on, the other isn't and then others come up with different ideas...And this is why I think that they [the staff] actually have these meetings is because of this simple reason. [Geoffrey, an Action Read student]

I would like to work with other students because I think I could teach them a lot of things...I know what it's like to be a single parent on a fixed income. [Maria, an Action Read student]

Like a lot of times, some students just don't know where to go or what to do if they have trouble with let's say social assistance, and a lot of other students they've gone through it and therefore, they know what to do. [Geoffrey, an Action Read student]

We cancelled the parent workshop. Jean said that we could do that here. Like we could come together and talk about the things that we have problems with and we could talk about it over here instead of going over there. [Heather, a Haines Junction student]

In this last statement, Heather explains how her student association resisted the banking approach to education in which "students are the depositories and the teacher is the depositor" and suggested an alternate approach, one in which knowledge is created by the students, since they are, indeed, the parenting experts (Freire, 1970, p. 58). These students are advocating for a context where they can participate in an informal exchange of information; a space/place where they can create and share knowledge and challenge the oppression that results from isolation.

Hall (1982) recognizes the necessity of sharing and creating knowledge within a social context and summarizes one of the central materialist concepts about knowledge:

Knowledge is essentially a social product. Although knowledge is built up by individuals, it is built up by individuals working in co-operation, depending on one another, communicating their experiences and ideas. An individual acting alone, cut off from contact with other people and relying only on himself [sic], could acquire scarcely any knowledge at all - and that only of particular facts (p. 287).

Ziva, an ALFA student, would concur with Hall as she found that she learnt better in a group setting than in isolation. She told me that "we sit together and learn many things. Because maybe with the group I learn more than by myself or with my tutor." The findings indicate that the students supported the concept that the construction and development of knowledge occurs within the sphere of social relations.

Solidarity

Solidarity, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary* is the "fact or quality on the part of communities, etc. of being perfectly united or at one in some respect, especially in interests, sympathies or aspirations." The five ALFA students whom I interviewed gained a sense of solidarity from their student group. Rather than feeling alone in the world, the student group helped them to feel united. In their photostory they stated that "you feel as if you are not alone. You don't feel like you are the only one in this position." During the interviews, four of the five ALFA students whom I interviewed stated that a sense of solidarity was an important benefit that they gained from meeting with other students:

We're not feeling alone. It's all over the world, [people] have the same problem, you know. [Donna]

I think when the students find out they're not the only one they won't be so shy about it. They won't feel so bad that they're not the only one. [Bev]

I think just being together with the other, with everybody and talking things out at our meeting and that makes it. Cause I know I'm not the only one now, there's other people out there. [Peggy]

I think just to be with them and just to talk how they feel here and how they find a new life and you can share some feeling[s] that other people don't understand. [Heidi]

Ziva, the fifth ALFA student whom I interviewed, viewed the student group as a place to reduce the isolation in her life. She described a lonely life: "I sit in the house [for] many hours, just watch[ing] TV. I [have] been in Canada [for] one year in the same house, nobody [has] come to visit." Ziva thought the student "group should get together more, not just for a meeting." The notion of increasing opportunities for students to interact was woven throughout Horsman's (1990) study on women and literacy. Horsman purports that "unless opportunities to interact with other participants are structured into [literacy] programs, women remain isolated in the home and denied social contact and the opportunity to discuss their lives critically" (p. 224). Although Ziva did not directly state that the student group provided a venue to share common feelings and problems, it was clear that she wanted to diminish her isolation and considered the student group to be an important link to the outside world.

The Action Read students did not develop a sense of solidarity to the same extent as the ALFA students. This is probably because the group met infrequently and the composition of the group kept changing. Yet, the Action Read students who did attend the meetings and those whom I interviewed were adamant about their desire to socialize with other students. As well, the results of an Action Read Student Involvement Questionnaire that was developed by myself and three students -- Maria, Geoffrey and Jacob -- indicated that the majority of respondents preferred activities where they could interact with their peers. This questionnaire was mailed to 83 Action Read students and 39 (47 percent) responded. The results of the questionnaire indicated that 29 (74 percent) of the respondents wanted to be involved in student-centred activities such as student get-togethers and welcoming new students into the program whereas a smaller number of students (19) wanted to be involved in program-centred activities such as evaluating the program, choosing library books, *planning* social activities, serving on the board and training tutors. A mere 7 (18 percent) of

the respondents wanted to be involved in outreach activities such as public speaking, fundraising, planning conferences and talking to the media.

Moving from Silence into Speech

A Litany for Survival

...and when we speak we are afraid
our words will not be heard
nor welcomed
but when we are silent
we are still afraid.

So it is better to speak
remembering
we were never meant to survive.
(Lorde, 1978, p. 32).

They're afraid to express themselves, they're afraid to make any kinds of movements because they figure if they say the wrong thing, right now they're going to blow it.

(Geoffrey, an Action Read student)

Sometimes I just don't know what to say.

(Heather, a Haines Junction student)

You want people to listen to what you want to say.

(Peggy, an ALFA student)

Several female students registered with the Haines Junction and Virden programs, all of whom lived in rural settings, spoke of the isolation in their lives. Jean, the president of the Haines Junction student association, directly connected her isolation to her fear of speech. Jean recalled that "before all I did for so many years was just be at home with my children, and the only time I was in the public is if say I went into town for groceries to or to get my mail." In the same breath, Jean narrated her gradual movement from silence into speech:

We [the students] all get together and I wouldn't say anything. If they asked me something, I would just keep quiet and go along with what everybody else was saying and doing. [I] couldn't talk for myself, couldn't even you know stand up for myself, like even if I didn't know, I couldn't say no, I ain't going to do this. But, now I just about can. Maybe by next year I'll be able to.

During the interviews, in addition to Jean, three female students from ALFA, two female and one male student from The Literacy Network and one male student from Action Read, emphasized their difficulty in speaking and/or other students' difficulty in speaking. For these individuals, their involvement in the student group and/or association and on their program's board was providing a forum and an opportunity for them to speak and be heard. In the following excerpts, these students describe how they and others have moved from silence into speech through their participation in the group meetings:

But speaking, it's getting better I think. Well, I had to practice at the board meeting now then with the students I had you know practice a little. [Donna, an ALFA student]

I talk a lot easier now and I think just being together with the other with everybody and talking things out at our meeting and that makes it... I think I've changed a lot. I've really, I'm more outspoken. I can, I don't know. [Peggy, an ALFA student]

I didn't want to join the group because I'm not a very good talker...I don't talk very much sometimes. This is my first time. But now but now I'm getting used to it now. Like they say, practice makes speech. [Paul, a Virden student]

Students are starting to speak up. [Paul, a Virden student]

In comparison to Jean, these three students did not provide a reason for their reluctance and the reluctance of others to speak in groups and unfortunately, I did not question their reluctance to speak.

While the students emphasized their movement from silence into speech, none of the seven staff members and three board members whom I interviewed, with the exception of Liz, viewed the movement of silence into speech as a *direct benefit* of participatory practices and/or student groups. It should be mentioned that two of The Literacy Network's paid tutors, Sylvia and Bonnie, noted that the students were becoming more vocal. Bonnie, who worked in the Haines Junction program, told me that after Christmas, the students "got quite vocal about their opinion with council and advisory meetings." During her speech to the students and staff at The Literacy Network's year-end awards ceremony, Liz "talked about

how students have learned to have a voice and speak up for themselves. And how this was good" (Fieldnotes, April 17, 1993).

Like the staff and board members, I too did not consider or envision the movement from silence into speech as a benefit of participatory practices. Consequently, during the first set of interviews, I did not listen to students as they shared their difficulties in speaking to others. The following excerpts, taken from my first set of student interviews, illustrates how I did not attend to the students:

Jean: Cause a lot [of students] are afraid of like they can't talk or they don't understand something.

Pat: Ok, um, does this staff have a role in the student group, when you call a meeting?

Paul: I'm not a good talker.

Pat: Oh, you're pretty good.

In the first excerpt, I bypassed what Jean was trying to tell me in my effort to fulfill my own agenda, which focused on learning about the staff's role in the student group. In the second excerpt, I felt uncomfortable with Paul's admission and chose to adopt the role of supporter rather than to probe deeper and challenge his statement. Looking back upon these interviews, I realize that, ironically, I was silencing the students as they attempted to express their thoughts about talking.

Anderson and Jacks' (1991) article, entitled "Learning to listen: Interview techniques and analysis" sheds a light upon my behavior during the interviews. According to Jacks, interviewers need to be "especially attentive to the influences that shape what we hear and how we interpret" (p. 18). In using the term "influences," Jacks is referring to prevailing theories and dominant standards. Although the subject of participatory practices in adult

literacy has not reached the point where a set of prevailing theories and dominant standards exists, I was still influenced by the literature on participatory practices. Rather than shedding my preconceptions, I was preoccupied with my agenda or line of questioning, which was influenced by the existing literature. This literature, which uses the framework of *advocacy* to stress the students' "right to speak" and represent themselves both inside and outside of their literacy program(s), presumes singular, essential, authentic and stable notions of identity among the students rather than multiple identities and positions which, in turn, inform who speaks and who listens. In other words, problematics such as social positions and power relations which underscore the "right to speak" have not been touched upon within the framework of advocacy. (The next section, entitled "Having a Voice, Having a Vote" discusses the students' right to speak and represent themselves.) Perhaps, like myself, the staff and board members were influenced by the discourse which highlights the students' right to have a voice. The production of the Haines Junction photostory was a turning point in my awareness of the students' fear of speech. This photostory raised my consciousness, and enabled me to question my preconceptions and assumptions about the benefits of participatory practices.

Jody stated that the students "don't have a voice," viewing this as a factor in their reluctance to get actively involved in the program. Shelley did not cite the movement of silence into speech as a benefit, rather, she lamented the students' lack of speech, stating that she had "hoped they would be stronger voiced." Shelley's frustration about the students' reluctance to speak their mind is woven throughout the following narrative:

The student won't come out and say, well, 'I don't feel comfortable in this', or they'll agree and come along with an idea up until they have to participate and then they'll leave you high and dry. But, all along they may not have been really committed or interested...I don't want this to sound really negative, but either they lack the social skills, they lack the confidence, they lack the articulation to say that they don't really think that this is a good idea or they don't want to do it.

Shelley is frustrated by the students' reluctance to speak their mind and state their opinion(s); she attributes their reluctance to speak to a lack of confidence and social skills. Yet, in listening to the accounts of students, a different perspective emerges, one in which students talk about their fear in speaking up and taking a stand. Giroux (1983) would probably respond to these different perspectives by stating that Shelley is ensconced in a liberal approach to education, a view in which "powerlessness is confused with passivity" (p. 55). Perhaps, as educators, we need to shift our gaze away from the individual to look at how systemic factors such as race, class and gender play a significant role in silencing people.

In the text of the ALFA photostory, the students stated that "some of us used to be so shy we could not even speak to people." As well, the Haines Junction students emphasized a link between shyness and not speaking during the production of their photostory. Geoffrey, an Action Read student, also connected a reluctance to speak in groups with shyness. As Geoffrey was speculating about the benefits of the student group, he informed me that "it would help [students] learn to speak. It helps them to get away from their shyness to talk around others. See, it only starts with a group that they know, but then after a while speaking comes naturally." Hooks (1988), however, views shyness as a socially constructed phenomenon, placing silence within the larger sphere of social relations, hooks asks the question: "Can their fear [to speak] be understood solely as shyness or is it an expression of deeply embedded, socially constructed restrictions against speech in a culture of domination, a fear of owning one's words, of taking a stand?" (p. 17). In the interviews, I often sensed the students' fear of owning their own words when they would utter apologetic phrases such as "I don't know what you call it" and then go on to provide a fully comprehensive description of a concept or idea that only lacked the concept label such as "community" or "needs assessment." Others, such as Jean and Jennifer, told me how they were afraid to take a stand. The data indicate the validity of hook's view that students' shyness or fear of speech may come from past experiences where, as working class, non-

academic people, they were not heard because they did not speak the dominant language of academics and professionals such as doctors, teachers and social workers.

In two instances, the student leaders took it upon themselves to tell me about their colleagues' fear of speaking. Jean, the president of the Haines Junction student association, told me that "a lot are afraid like they can't talk." Cameron told me that the Creston students are "not comfortable speaking English and that's why they don't express themselves." This raises the question, "Why are students not comfortable with the act of speaking?" Cameron then added: "They generally tell me what they want to say." This last statement provides a possible clue to my question. In the case of the Mennonite culture, there appears to be a tradition of men being the spokespeople. Lind (1990) points out that "many more men than women communicate in the official language due to patriarchal traditions of men being the 'spokesmen'" (p. 4). Heather, a Mennonite student, confirms Lind's statement: "Like, with our religion, it's more that men go [to meetings], like we [the women] discuss things at home, but usually it's mostly men. But then they're not such, they're not important meetings." If men are the spokespeople, and attend the meetings, the process of oral language acquisition for Mennonite women is difficult because they have fewer opportunities than men to practice their oral literacy skills.

It should be noted that although Cameron was the designated spokesperson, he still felt "nervous" about public speaking, and prior to his involvement with the Creston program, he had never participated in group meetings. Nonetheless, the invitation to participate in group meetings precipitated Cameron's movement from silence to speech. In addition to her staff responsibilities, Sylvia chaired the local literacy council; she commented on the changes she had witnessed within Cameron since he joined the council. She stated that "he's gaining a lot more confidence in speaking out. At first, he was sitting mainly and listening."

The theory and practice of adult literacy emphasizes the visual aspects of literacy such as reading and writing while the oral aspects of literacy such as speaking and listening are often neglected. Yet, in this study the students seldom, if ever, spoke of the visual aspects of literacy. Instead, they spoke of their difficulties in overcoming their fear of speech. Others spoke of a "need to talk more." Feminist writers (Anzaldua, 1990; hooks, 1988; Lorde, 1984) give credence to the importance of speech and state that for the oppressed, moving from silence into speech is the expression of a movement from object to subject. The central theme within the Haines Junction photostory was the students' movement from silence into speech, which, as hooks suggests, mirrored their movement from object to subject. As well, the findings indicated that, in the other programs, the student group provided a safe and secure place for students to move from silence into speech.

Personal Development

The students' personal development has been heralded as a major benefit of participatory practices by several educators and researchers (Duff-McCracken & Fretz, 1992; Campbell, 1992a; Norton, 1992; Jurmo, 1987; Balmuth, 1987). However, in this study, personal development did not emerge as one of the key benefits among the students or the staff. Instead, the majority of students viewed "community" and "moving from silence into speech" as the primary benefits of their student group. This study was limited in that I only interviewed 18 students over an eight month time period. Perhaps if I had interviewed more students over a longer period of time, personal development would have emerged as a key benefit.

According to Fingeret (1990), participatory practices "appear to provide opportunities for personal development as students move into new roles, experience their own authority, and develop critical thinking and leadership skills" (p. 40). Personal development encompasses technical skills such as typing and taking minutes and planning agendas, leadership skills such as problem solving and decision-making and personal growth in self-confidence and

self-esteem. The findings from this study indicate that students who were elected secretary within their student group and/or association benefited by learning technical skills. The student presidents, with the exception of Jean, did not cite the acquisition of leadership skills as a benefit, possibly because they were still in the process of learning leadership skills. Barb was the only staff member to view the development of leadership skills as a benefit of participatory practices. The ALFA students and Barb cited an increase in confidence as a benefit resulting from their participation in the student group.

The student group and/or association secretaries -- Donna, Sally and Susan -- cited acquisition of technical skills as one of the benefits of their involvement in the student group. Donna, the secretary of ALFA's student group, learned how to use the photocopier, a skill which she had already transferred over to her other volunteer work at a local hospital. In her efforts to take and distribute accurate minutes, Donna was also learning how to type and spell. Sally, the secretary of Virden's student group, found that her writing was improving through taking minutes of the meetings. Finally, Susan, the secretary of the Haines Junction student association, also informed me that she had learned how to type through her position as secretary.

Jean was the only student who cited leadership skills as a benefit of her involvement in the student group. In fact, the term "leadership skills" or ancillary terms such as problem-solving, decision-making, etc. were never used by the students during the interviews. The only students who alluded to leadership skills were the presidents and even they used the word "it" in reference to leadership skills:

It's kind of good to learn *it* here because who knows maybe somewhere down the road you could end up anywhere, even in your work. [Jean, president of Haines Junction student association]

I don't know how to do *it* right. [Peggy, president of ALFA's student group]

I'd never done *it* before, so I wasn't sure how to go about *it*.
[Paul, president of Virden's student support group]

The naming of leadership skills as "it" points to a need for more discussion among students and educators on the nature of leadership. Barb recognized the need for future leadership workshops and stated that "one of the primary reason for doing this [promoting student involvement] is teaching them leadership."

During the production of their photostory, the ALFA students cited increased confidence as one of the benefits of their involvement in their student group. They stated that "now that we have more confidence, we are doing more things by ourselves and with our group." Peggy explained how the group's encouragement increased her confidence in her ability to achieve her personal goals:

It [the group] gives you a push, it makes you wanna...Sometimes you get down on yourself, but this is kind of an upper...[The group] gets you really hepped up and you want to do more stuff for yourself...You want to get you know, do it. But if you're by yourself, you're kind of a little afraid...I have a lot more confidence in myself.

Peggy had entered an upgrading program in a local college during her tenure as president of the student group. She was appreciative of their support in her new role as a college student and, in turn, the students were "encouraged" because "Peggy [was] going to the college." Rather than having an individualistic and competitive attitude towards others, the ALFA students were highly committed to the welfare of their colleagues.

Having a Voice, Having a Vote

In programs with little student involvement, students have frustrations because there is no way for them to have a say [a voice].²⁷

Student participation creates opportunities for students to have a voice and possibly a vote in the shape and structure of their programs, which may, in turn, result in a more effective literacy program (Duff-McCracken and Fretz, 1992; Goldgrab, 1991; Jurmo, 1987; Mayer, 1984). Students can "make the program more *responsive to their own real needs and interests* by serving on program boards of directors and advisory committees, in staff orientation and training, and in program evaluation and goal-setting" (Mayer, cited in Jurmo, 1989, p. 25, my italics). Student participation has the potential to create a new terrain, one in which programs may re-direct their focus on the need to read to an emphasis on the needs and interests of individuals who cannot read.

In this study, students had opportunities to make their program more responsive to their needs and interests through voicing their thoughts, opinions and ideas in program evaluations, at student group and/or association meetings, advisory meetings and in the case of ALFA, at board meetings. The findings indicated the Haines Junction and Creston students viewed their respective student association and literacy council as vehicles for making the program more responsive to their needs and interests, whereas only two of the ALFA students and two of the Action Read students viewed their student group in a similar manner. The remaining students, three ALFA and two Action Read students whom I interviewed, were satisfied with their program and did not see the need to change it. In other words, there was a match between the program's goals and objectives and students' interests, needs and expectations.

²⁷ Ontario Ministry of Education. (1991). Think tank thoughts: Report from OLC's think tank conference. Toronto: Author, p. 18.

The six staff and two board members whom I interviewed emphasized how participatory practices provide students with opportunities to represent their interests and perceived needs by having a voice and, in the case of ALFA, a vote in the shape and structure of their programs. Barb, Liz and Jody agreed that students might feel a stronger sense of ownership in the program if they had opportunities to voice their ideas and to participate in decision-making.

Representation

Third-person representation of 'illiterates as other people' always runs the risk of stereotyping, and is inadequate, by itself to describe the decisions and contexts implied by any individual or group taking steps to claim education for themselves. For a fuller understanding of the attitudes and social experience both of illiteracy and literacy, we need, instead, authentic voices, speaking from their own experience, on their own terms. ...Authentic representation depends as much on who is making the statement as on what they are saying (Mace, 1992, pp.19-20).

The findings indicated that two ALFA students thought that their views should be represented at some level within their programs. In my interview with Bev, she immediately saw the benefit of the ALFA student group and stated: "If *they* don't know what *you* want, how can they do anything to help you?" Peggy also thought the students "should have some pull and we should be able to say what we have to say because nobody really knows what we're thinking...We could maybe help with our say." Barb and Roger, the chair of the ALFA board, were in agreement with the students. Barb thought that "if there are things they don't like about the program or there are things that they really like or things that they want to put into the program, then they should voice that to the board." Roger believed that student participation would "give the decision makers an opportunity to get another viewpoint -- the important viewpoint -- from the recipient of the whole effort." Roger's statement is significant because, quite often, decision-makers overlook that "policy issues are often defined by the assumptions and priorities of the privileged. [Therefore], specific representation for oppressed groups interrupts this process, because it gives voice to the

assumptions and priorities of other groups" (Young, 1993, p. 309). By providing spaces for students to express their viewpoint, and to become "involved in decisions on how their program should progress", the program may eventually "evolve" and "change."

Heather liked the Haines Junction student association meetings because "everybody has a chance to speak their mind or to say what they think about this or that. " As well, Jean enjoyed the student association meetings and said that "this getting together thing is kind of good that ways cause at least we could get to talk about and really see how we feel about it you know." Rather than having bureaucratic decisions imposed upon them, the students appreciated the chance to make program-related decisions: they decided how to spend the money they earned from fundraising; how to celebrate their year-end graduation; and whether or not they would attend parenting workshops. When asked how participatory practices would benefit the program, Liz's reply echoed that of the students. Liz stated that "the program likely would be a program that really represents what they want in the program." At the end of the study, Liz commented that the students were beginning to learn that "they can have input into the institution and change things. That's the biggie I hope that really develops [from student involvement]."

In Creston, Cameron served as the student representative on an advisory committee and literacy council. Sylvia informed me that Cameron was "the type of person that will easily say if this isn't what the students want. He'll come out and express the students' point of view, which is a big help to the council in order that *we* stay with what *they* want instead of going *our* own way." Sylvia's statement parallels those of the other staff members I interviewed in this study: they agreed that the students' perspective may be different from theirs and, consequently, may steer the program in a new direction.

Maria stated that there should "be more students on the board...[be]cause the program is based around students like literacy people...the students should have a say on what goes on

in the program [and the program] should have [the] insight of the student." During the production of the photostory, Geoffrey and Maria declared that "the program exists for students, so they should be involved in making decisions about the program." Vicky, an Action Read board member, and Jody and Shelley made statements that corresponded with Maria and Geoffrey's statements. Jody thought, "in general, [student involvement] is a good thing. [I think] it is only right that students should be involved in many ways in programs, because after all, the programs exist for them." This being the case, Jody, Shelley and Vicky concurred that the students' views should be represented at the board level so that the program served the "interests of the people who need it." Rather than having "just *us* speaking for *them*", Jody believed that participatory practices would create a "stronger program" and because students would be "speaking on their own behalfs."

By the end of the study, Shelley thought that perhaps the student group would function better and be "real", as opposed to superficial, if it was an advisory group to the board. This might give the student group "more of a reason to exist." The student group could "make decisions, inform their spokesperson and that person [student] would liaise to the board." Shelley thought that the staff should "encourage [students] to participate in the part of the program that really matters." That is, the students should participate in decision-making activities and have "input" into the program.

Vicky acknowledged the "possibilities of having that *different perspective*" at the Action Read board level, stating that "try as *we* might, and empathetic as *we* try to be, I don't think *we* fully understand what it's like to be in *their* position." Young (1993), an advocate of specific representation for oppressed groups in the decision-making process, also reminds us:

Unless confronted with *different perspectives* on social relations and events, different values and language, most people tend to assert their perspective as universal. When social privilege allows some group perspectives to dominate a public while others are silent, such universalizing of the particular will be reaffirmed by many others. Thus the test of

whether a claim upon the public is just or merely an *expression of self-interest* is best made when those making it must confront the opinion of others who have explicitly different, though not necessarily conflicting experiences, priorities, and needs. As a person of social privilege, I am more likely to go outside myself and have regard for social justice when I must listen to the voice of those my privilege otherwise tends to silence (my italics, p. 311).

Jody conceded that a literacy worker's claim upon the public might be merely an expression of self-interest. Jody stated: "If I'm speaking for them, I'm just protecting my job." Jody added that if students became "more involved in advocating on their own behalf", the policy-makers and funders might be more "likely to take the program seriously." Moreover, Jody believed there should be "more [educational] opportunities for students", and that she didn't "think that was going to happen until they can speak for themselves."

Of the 18 students whom I interviewed, Geoffrey was the only one who talked at great length about the benefits of student participation in terms of representation of the students' interests, which, in turn, would make the program more effective. In the following conversation, we also touched upon social relations between staff and students:

P: What would be the benefits of student involvement be to the program?

G: It would be good to the program because this way here like you take like you or Shelley or somebody like that, if you've got a student on a program, they have the students' idea whereas if they're sitting there and you're trying to find out what is the students' ideas, how do they feel, what is this, but you get students there, and they know how the other student feels, they know what their problems are, so therefore, it benefits both halves. See, like you're not trying to dig and hit the wrong territory and they're out there and they can sort of give you the answers and talk to the other students and get the stuff out.

P: Be like a representative to the other students.

G: It's just like your union and then you've got your rep. Now, the rep he talks to the union and to your boss, you get to know them and therefore they can bring up the other stuff.

P: Right, so that the students ideas are right there, you don't have to guess. You know what their ideas might be, you've got them right there.

G: Right, and then they can get through to other students, whereas sometimes some of the others they can't.

P: Right, there might be a block or something there.

G: Yup, they say 'Well, I can talk to this student cause they're at the same category as I am, you know. That's what I find anyway, it's just it's like vice-presidents and presidents and stuff like that and then you're a normal local worker you know. Like the president, he don't actually know what they're doing down there, what are these guys like, but the guy that works there, he knows. So, he's got their view. He knows what they're thinking, what they're saying, where the president, he sits up in his office, he's got other things to do, he can't be down there.

Young (1993) believes that "the privileged usually are not inclined to protect or advance the interests of the oppressed, partly because their social position prevents them from understanding those interests, and partly because to some degree their privilege depends on the continued oppression of others" (p. 310). Although Geoffrey is not critical of individuals who hold positions of power and authority, he realizes that these individuals do not always understand the views, thoughts and ideas of those holding subordinate positions such as employees or students. Therefore, Geoffrey sees the benefit of having student representation within literacy programs.

Within postmodernism, the term "representation" is widely used to call attention to the ways in which the "other" is positioned and represented by dominant sectors of society. Quite often, the "other" (as in the case of literacy) is presented as part of a dualistic framework in which they (the other) are the problem. Therefore, they (the other) are not invited into the conversation/dialogue and are represented by dominant groups who believe that they have the solution to the alleged problem.

Universal theories, according to postmodernists, usually "subsume the particular history, struggles, voices, knowledge and sensibilities of those who are not privileged enough to

enter into this kind of discourse" (Shapiro, 1991, p. 121). Kohli (1991) appreciates postmodernism because it reminds her that not all people are included in these universal theories and therefore she "must remember that [she] cannot speak unwarily for 'them'" (p. 42). hooks (1990), who situates herself as one of the "them," states that "we fear those who speak about us, who do not speak to us and with us. We know what it is like to be silenced" (p. 152). Kohli and hooks, like other postmodernists, emphasize the *who* as much as the *what* and the *why*. Some postmodernists even believe that *who* speaks is even more important than *what* is said (Lather, 1991). Postmodern writers speak of the need for the dominant sectors of society such as intellectuals, educators and researchers to open up spaces so that the 'other' can position themselves and possibly transform these spaces (hooks, 1992; McLaren, 1991; Kohli, 1991; Anzaldua, 1990). In terms of literacy, participatory practices also hold the potential for students to reposition themselves in these spaces. As Barb stated, this may cause programs to eventually "evolve" and "change."

Ownership

Among the literacy workers, the findings indicated that Barb was the most adamant that student participation was "important" because it would precipitate "a sense of ownership in the program" among the students. A corollary theme was that "once you have ownership you become more involved and more interested and more conscientious about your studying." Throughout our two interviews, Barb made nine references to ownership. According to Barb, "the nice thing about the student-learner group is that if we can get this to grow is the program begins to belong to them...In the past it has been something that we have *done* for them. Now it's going to become something that is theirs." Barb believed that ownership would occur when students became involved in the administration of the program, and became "involved in decisions on how their program should progress." Taylor (1991) also argues that "feelings of ownership are enhanced when participants are included in decisions that effect them" (p. 207). Barb hoped that if students increased their sense of ownership "by becoming involved in the actual administering, the actual planning

of the program, that they [would] become anxious to make it successful because it is their program that they have helped to produce." Barb thought that their involvement would "improve their commitment to the total program...because unless one has a real involvement in something it doesn't mean as much. "

To a smaller degree, Liz and Jody viewed ownership as one of the benefits of participatory practices. Interestingly, Jody's words were very similar to Barb's, although her rationale for student ownership was different. Jody stated: "I think they should do and not just be *done* to...When we're just doing to them all the time and giving to them, it's that concept of charity." Liz thought that student participation would give students " a sense that they have control over their program and what they're doing and ownership in it." This, in turn, might "make them feel more powerful in their school lives and in their lives outside of the school." Jody shared a similar viewpoint, stating: "I think if you involve them in the program and I hate to use that empowerment word, but, you know, I think that is what it comes down to. Enabling people to take more charge and more control of their lives."

Interestingly, the students never talked about ownership; rather, three of them viewed student involvement as an opportunity for them to enter a reciprocal relationship where they could demonstrate their appreciation for their program by offering the program their time, service and support. Peggy firmly believed that literacy "programs do work." Consequently, she was willing to spend her time "put[ting] our posters and stuff for other people to see [so that they could] get started in the program....[She] wanted them to have the chance to come as far as [she had]." Peggy also informed me that "the students have put a lot of work into everything [program activities] too, to help Barb out." Heidi confirmed Peggy's sentiments: "I think they [the program] do so much for you and then I think you have to do something back for them, too." Ted, an Action Read student, thought it would "be a good idea" to raise money for the program because he wanted to "help the program."

In summary, Liz, Barb and Jody agreed that one of the benefits of participatory practices was that it would create a sense of ownership in the program among students. However, each literacy worker has his/her own particular twist on the importance and rationale behind ownership. Barb believed that ownership results in students having a stronger commitment towards the program and their learning. Liz and Jody agreed that the control and power that came from ownership in the program might transfer to the students' lives outside the program. This viewpoint also appears in the literature on democratic education. Castles & Wustenberg (1979) pose the rhetorical question: "How can you educate people to be capable of running society, if you give them no say in the running of their daily lives while learning?" (p. 31). Wood concurs, adding that "when individuals participate in decisions that directly effect them [within their educational institution], they both develop the confidence that such action is possible as well as the desire to participate in even broader public debates" (p. 181). Finally, Jody thought that student ownership might help to shatter the template that views literacy education as charity.

Reducing Borders

A benefit that simmered beneath the surface of the findings dealt with reducing the borders that serve to separate students and staff. Literacy programs, like other educational institutions, have invisible borders which serve to demarcate the roles of and relationships between students and staff. Three literacy workers and two board members thought that student participation had the potential to reduce borders which, in turn, could redefine the roles of students and educators and the relationship between them whereas only one student talked about how the edges of these borders were beginning to soften through her involvement on the board.

Although Liz works in a hierarchical setting, she still thought that student participation could smudge some of the borders that structured the roles of students and staff. In the following statement, Liz relates how, through student participation, students can move from

being passive recipients of an educational service to active participants in the educational process and how staff can move from being authoritative figures to being collaborative figures:

I think we're going to be more in tune, like just in tune with students and I think it's sort of the whole thing of how we can all get from A to B together versus in an hierarchy, even though it is a[n] [educational institution] that I work in, like I think we can do things quite collectively here. So, it means that we can sort of work together to do things and discuss things together versus one person like me saying this is the ways it's going to be. [Then], likely they'll enjoy it more. They'll get more out of it.

Barb was quite pragmatic about how difficult it was to become less authoritative and more collaborative. She stated that it was hard to "just give over the power, give over the controls and say do it" because staff are so used to "mak[ing] the decision; we're just so used to it." Barb recognizes that the borders that pre-determine roles are cemented in history and that the erosion of these borders requires time.

Changing roles also has the potential to change the face of education. Jody explained that:

if [students] are kept on the fringes or, merely as sort of recipients of charity, which I think is, you know, can sometimes happen, it's not a healthy situation. ...I think if students are more involved, there's a greater chance of education, any kind of education being viewed as an issue of social justice, rather than one of charity.

Quite often, marginalized sectors of society are 'fringe participants' or 'non-participants'; they are 'objects' rather than 'subjects' because they are denied access to power, making it difficult for them to intervene and act upon activities or events that shape their lives (Kirby and McKenna, 1989; Sauve', 1987; Fingeret, 1983; Kindervatter, 1979). In the preceding statements, Barb, Liz and Jody perceive how student participation can change roles and possibly change how education is viewed.

On a different note, Barb and Liz had witnessed how student participation was beginning to erase the invisible borders that define the relationships between students and staff. Sometimes, these borders create situations where, as educators, we try to keep our relationships with students at a 'professional' level, in keeping with our roles as professionals. Barb found that through the involvement of students in ALFA, she got to "know them better and they got to know me better." At the end of the photostory, Liz noticed that students who had never crossed the threshold of her office were coming in to talk. She told me how Jennifer "came in the office and talked quite a bit and shared a lot about herself with me." For these two staff members, a benefit of student participation is that relationships between students and staff are moving to a more personal level.

On the other hand, only three students referred to student-staff relationships. Rather than focusing on the need for more personal relationships, they focused on the need to have more equitable relations. Paul, the president of Virden's student group, had attended an advisory meeting over a year ago; he distinctly remembered feeling "out of place." When asked what would have made him feel more comfortable, Paul replied: " If they don't play big shot. Cause you know like [they] think we're way down on the bottom, they [are] way up there. They just look down on us." Paul's experience, unfortunately, strongly indicates that some attempts at participatory practices do not necessarily guarantee more equitable relations among staff and students.

Maria thought that participatory practices should extend to having students on staff. She thought that "it would make her feel more comfortable to have students as staff because they would be more equal, she would feel more equal with them and they would know where she was coming from and how she felt." (Fieldnotes, March 12, 1993). This suggests that Maria views the borders between students and staff as quite rigid, and that a way to get around these borders would be to have students holding staff positions.

In the following statement, Donna, an ALFA student, expresses how the edges of these borders were beginning to soften through her involvement on the board:

Wow. The first meeting I went to, oh my gosh, all these professional people you know. They were you know all teachers and lawyers. And just me, but as time went on, we got more relaxed you know because everybody is a human being you know. It's just that they have more qualifications...And they're making [me] feel welcome you know. They overlook that you're a student like I guess you would say.

Clearly, Donna's experience on the board was positive. In time, Donna perceived that the relationship between her and the board members became more equitable.

Henrietta, the chair of the Action Read board, wanted to sustain the border between board members and students. At Action Read, two students wanted to serve on the board: they wanted a role in decision-making. Their request was met with resistance from Henrietta. According to Henrietta, the by-laws would need to be modified before students could serve on the board. However, the Action Read by-laws clearly stated that "any member in good standing is eligible to be nominated to the Board of Directors." Since the by-laws classified students as associate members, they were eligible to be nominated to the Board. Despite their eligibility, the two students were not added to the list of nominees for Board positions. In an effort to maintain the border between students and board members, Henrietta effectively stalled the process of change by stating that the by-laws needed to be altered. Unfortunately, the board members, staff and students did not challenge Henrietta's statement and she was successful in maintaining the status quo for the remainder of her term on the board.

If we consider the image of a circle, students are usually outside its border, or at the periphery and staff are inside the border, at the center. This creates, as one board member suggests, a situation where it's always "us and them, we and they, or whatever." Participatory practices have the potential to erase, reduce and or soften some of the borders

that serve to separate staff and students, enabling these individuals to cross over into new terrains where new relationships and roles can be established. This, in turn, may redefine the shape and structure of literacy programs. On the other hand, participatory practices may simply result in the reproduction of old roles and the maintenance of the status quo.

Part A: Summary of Benefits

The findings indicated that students, staff and board members either perceive and/or have witnessed the benefits of participatory practices. For many students, a primary benefit of participatory practices was the development of a community within their literacy program. This sense of community was developed through an informal exchange of knowledge at student meetings and social interaction among students within and outside of student meetings. Through sharing knowledge and common experiences, many students gained a sense of solidarity and began to feel more united and less "alone" in the world.

The concept of moving from silence into speech was another significant benefit for many of the students. In this study, several students spoke of their difficulty, fear and reluctance to speak in front of others. Through participating in the student groups and/or associations, eight students began to gain confidence in speaking up and expressing their opinion. The literacy workers, on the other hand, did not view the movement of silence into speech as a direct benefit of participatory practices and/or student groups.

Personal development did not emerge as a key benefit among the students and staff. This finding contradicts the liberal discourse on participatory practices, in which personal development is cited as a key benefit.

The majority of literacy workers, six staff members and two board members, emphasized how participatory practices provided students with opportunities to represent their interests and perceived needs by have a voice, and in the case of ALFA, a vote in the shape and

structure of their programs. The literacy workers agreed that the students' perspective needed to be brought forward since it might be different from their perspective. The Haines Junction and Creston students appreciated the opportunity to make their programs more responsive to their needs through participating in the student association and literacy council whereas only two of the ALFA and two of the Action Read students viewed their student group as a venue in which students' interests could be represented. The remaining ALFA and Action Read students were satisfied with their program and did not see the need to change it which suggests that there was a match between the program's goals and objectives and students' interests, needs and expectations.

The coordinator of each literacy program agreed that a benefit of participatory practices was that it would create a sense of ownership in the program among the students. One coordinator believed that ownership results in having a stronger commitment towards the program and their learning while the remaining two coordinators believed that the control and power that came from ownership in the program might transfer to the students' lives outside the program. In comparison, the students never discussed the importance of ownership in the program.

Finally, three literacy coordinators discussed how participatory practices had the potential to reduce borders that serve to separate students and staff. If these borders were questioned and challenged, the roles of students and educators and the relationship between them might be redefined. According to the literacy coordinators, participatory practices would create the opportunity for students to move from being passive recipients of an educational service to active participants in the educational process. As well, participatory practices would create the opportunity for staff to move from being authoritative figures to being collaborative figures. The findings indicated that the two literacy coordinators had witnessed how participatory practices was serving to move the relationships between staff and students from a professional level to a more personal level. Only three students commented on staff-

student relationships. The students' comments did not touch upon the need for a more personal relationship with staff; rather, they focused on the need for more equitable relations.

In summary, sometimes the different parties were in agreement about the benefits of participatory practices, but more often than not, they emphasized different benefits. Many students, for instance, sought a sense of community through their student groups whereas staff wanted students to have a sense of ownership in the program. These differences suggest a need for greater communication between staff and students; they suggest the need for students and staff to discuss their views on student participation.

Two other pieces of research have indicated that students and staff are sometimes at cross-purposes with respect to the benefits of student participation (Duff-McCracken & Fretz, 1992; Jurmo, 1987). According to Jurmo, "those involved often have different goals in mind (as when a learner might be motivated to join a student support group out of curiosity and a desire for fun, while a staff member might be trying to "empower" the learner" (p. 309). Duff-McCracken and Fretz noted that students and staff emphasized different benefits, although "there was widespread agreement on what those benefits are" (p. 7).

Barriers

This section describes the barriers to student participation from the perspective of staff, students and board members. The barriers are presented and discussed under the following four themes: (1) communication; (2) student constraints; (3) program constraints; and (4) ownership and representation revisited.

Communication

About student meetings

The findings indicate that communication presented barriers to participation in student meetings at Action Read, and to a lesser degree at ALFA, whereas communication did not present a barrier to participation in The Literacy Network meetings simply because the students in the latter program were on campus and could easily be informed about meetings.

Within the Action Read program, one barrier to student participation in student meetings was lack of knowledge that these meetings were occurring. The results of the Action Read Student Involvement Questionnaire indicated that 26 percent (N=39) of the respondents were not aware of the student meetings even though two of the four meetings had been advertised in the program's newsletter. As well, Shelley had been contacting students by telephone to inform them of the meetings.

Three students -- Maria, Geoffrey and Jacob -- and I met to analyze the results of the Action Read Student Involvement Questionnaire. The students were quite surprised that 26 percent of the respondents did not know about the meetings. Jacob wanted to examine a copy of the Action Read newsletter that advertised the March 1st meeting, so that we could critically analyze the advertisement:

We noted that the ad was on the fourth page of the newsletter, rather than the first. The three students thought it was very well worded. Geoffrey and Maria were a bit more critical than Jacob, saying that it should be closer to the front

of the newsletter, in bigger type and on different colored paper " (Fieldnotes, March 12, 1993).

We included these suggestions in a report to the board on the results of the questionnaire. The students' criticisms were constructive and indicated that future notices should stand out from the rest of the newsletter and grab the reader's attention.

It was difficult for Shelley to communicate information about the meetings by telephone because reaching and talking to 100 students was very time-consuming. Some students could not even be reached by telephone because they did not own one. The limitations of communicating through the newsletter were two-fold: students with low-literacy skills had difficulty reading the newsletter and it was only distributed on a quarterly basis. The staff's communication efforts sometimes ended in frustration because some students would forget about the meetings even though they had read the newsletter notice and received a phone call. Geoffrey told me that if he doesn't "hear about it on the phone, [he] forgets." And he "doesn't think of looking at the calendar everyday." Geoffrey would write the meetings on his calendar, but then forget to look at it. In setting up meetings with Geoffrey, Maria, Ernie and Jacob to work on the photostory and questionnaire, I found the best strategy was to remind them by phone one day prior to the meeting.

Shelley informed me that other students "agreed to attend the meeting, but never showed up." This suggests a number of possibilities. These students, like Geoffrey, might have forgotten about the meeting. Or, perhaps constraints in their lives prevented them from attending. For example, maybe it is easier to say, "Yes, I'll be there" than "I can't come because I don't have the busfare." Finally, the students might have agreed to attend the meeting because agreeing to do something is often easier than saying, "No, I'm not interested." It is important to remember that the students were receiving a "benefit" in terms

of literacy instruction from Action Read, and this may have influenced their decision to agree to attend.

The Action Read students and staff were disappointed with the poor attendance and the students "agreed that it would be far more effective if students could call other students in Action Read and encourage them to attend the next meeting." Shelley "explained the confidentiality issue and it was accepted" that confidentiality would be breached if the students tried to recruit other students by telephone. Geoffrey viewed confidentiality as a barrier and stated: "They don't know who all's going to be at these meetings. See, so they figure well if somebody here that knows me and knows my wife and stuff see, so there's lots of withdrawing that way."

The issue of confidentiality kept surfacing during my conversations with Barb. She told me that "the confidentiality is something that I'm always very aware of because some of the students are so adamant about it." I then asked: "Perhaps more so because it's a small town?" Barb replied: "Oh, I'm sure. Like some of the younger people particularly in the group would die if their friends knew they were in the group. Until, sometimes they start to learn and then they start realizing that they can learn and then they don't care so much anymore." This suggests that confidentiality might become less of an issue once students are confident about their ability to learn.

Barb used two strategies to overcome the communication and confidentiality barriers. First, Barb and Donna devised a system whereby Barb would phone the students who wanted their names and phone numbers to remain confidential and Donna phoned the students who had agreed in writing to having their names and phone numbers released to the student group. At each student meeting, a form would be circulated for students to sign if they were "willing to put their name on a phone list." This system effectively dealt with the issue of confidentiality, an issue which is frequently cited as a barrier to student involvement (Duff-

McCracken & Fretz, 1992; Jurmo, 1989). The second strategy simply entailed having the student meetings on the third Monday of every month. Having the meetings on a regular basis reduced the time and effort needed to inform students about dates, times and places.

At times, literacy workers, particularly those who work in programs that rely on one-to-one tutorials, are hesitant to involve students because they feel that the students want to remain anonymous. Perhaps this strong emphasis on confidentiality needs to be re-examined, as it sends the message that students should be ashamed of their limited literacy skills. (Jurmo, 1989). Perhaps, once given the invitation, students might be willing to become more actively involved in their literacy program because everyone knows and accepts the fact that they have low literacy skills. Barb was persistent in her efforts to involve all the students in the group, even those who wanted to remain anonymous. Her persistence was rewarded, and during one meeting, a student arrived whom she had never even met for two years because he wanted strict anonymity.

About the program

Learner involvement requires that learners have access to information about their literacy programs. Information is knowledge, and knowledge is power. We found that in literacy programs where learners are not actively involved, learners are not aware of how the program is managed - how it is structured, who makes the decisions, what decisions are made (Duff-McCracken & Fretz, 1992, p. 42).

The findings indicated that students wanted to learn about their programs. During the production of the Action Read photostory, the students expressed curiosity about the program -- its history, its funding, its governance. During my interviews with Action Read students, they continued to ask questions about the program and sometimes their comments suggested a lack of knowledge. Maria, for instance was under the mistaken impression that there were already students on the board.

Shelley was concerned about the procedures at Action Read's Annual General Meeting (AGM) because the students "don't know what the issues really are". She added, "They haven't had time to hear and talk about them with their tutors, because they need to have that familiarity with these, cause these are sort of formal issues." If students are ignorant about the structure and management of their program, it becomes difficult for them to participate in decision-making activities during AGMs. In order for students to have "more of an active voice" and to make informed decisions at AGMs, students need information about the issues on hand prior to the AGM.

In ALFA, a one way communication system existed whereby Donna, the student representative, reported the student meetings to the board. When asked if she acted had as a liaison between the two groups and reported board information to the student group, Donna replied, "No, I haven't, you know." Eventually, the idea of having Donna report board meetings to the student group was brought before the board. Barb stated that:

it surprised the board members because they didn't say anything...And I guess they may have thought maybe what went through their mind is "What is there that's happening here that's relevant to the students?", and yet everything that's happening there is for the students so everything's relevant! The budget's relevant.

The board members were acting as a screening filter for information. The board members appreciated Donna's reports about the student group, but had not deemed it necessary for the student group to receive their reports. Consequently, the students were bleached out of the decision-making process, making it difficult, if not impossible for them to respond to the board's decisions.

Constraints in Students' Lives

Material

The findings indicated that among the students, material constraints such as time, childcare, money, and transportation presented barriers to student participation. The results of the Action Read Student Involvement Questionnaire indicated that seven (18 percent) of the respondents, all of them women, did not have transportation or lived too far away to attend student meetings. As well, two of these seven women were unable to afford and/or arrange for childcare. An additional two women and two men also indicated that the issue of childcare prevented them from attending student meetings. In summary, a higher number of women (9) than men (2) were unable to attend meetings because of material constraints such as childcare and/or transportation. This finding, when coupled with the fact that Maria was the only woman who participated in student meetings and the development of the questionnaire and photostory, suggests that participatory practices in literacy programs may be a gender issue.

Phillips (1993), who writes about *engendering* democracy within society, would probably agree with the notion that participatory practices are a gender issue. Phillips declares:

Yet the more participatory a democracy sets out to be, the more it discriminates between women and men. The more emphasis it places on activity and involvement, the more it tends to exaggerate the influence of those who have greater resources of education, charm, or time (p. 197).

The female students within The Literacy Network often mentioned their difficulties in accessing education because of their children. Dorothy, a mother of six children, related how "it's pretty hard for me to get a babysitter." Jean, a single parent of four children, also stated that "there's always babysitters and stuff like that and that was the main reason I couldn't go to the Red Deer conference." Considering their material constraints, participation in school for these women is an achievement; however, participation in extra-curricular school activities is often beyond the scope of their material resources.

Among the female students, time surfaced as a significant barrier to participation in student meetings and program activities. Moreover, time prevents them from participating in the public sphere throughout their lives:

I think if a person really had the time. Again, see time is the one that really counts with everything here, but I guess a person can really get involved in something with the school or anywhere, I guess, if you had the time. [Jean]

I figured that I don't have time to join groups. [Sally]

I'm just not interested or no time or I don't know. [Heather]

Although these women *might* want to increase their participation in their literacy program, or in the larger society, the social organization of their lives contains many aspects that often prevents them from fulfilling this desire.

The issue of time surfaced quite frequently in my interviews with Jean and Peggy, the two presidents of the student groups and/or associations. When asked what sorts of ideas she would like to share at student get-togethers and conferences, Jean replied:

Maybe ideas about how to find the time to do things, like here everyone says they're tired, they don't have the time. Like I say I'm sure there is time...Maybe other people have different ways of making time for something that we don't know of. Maybe that's why we figure we have no time.

Horsman (1990) found that women "rarely acknowledge the practical constraints which they are very much aware of. Instead, they blame themselves for their failure" (p.51). In the preceding narrative, Jean appeared to reify time, viewing it as just another area in women's lives which needed to be improved.

At the beginning of the study, Brenda stated: "I just really *struggle* with my school and my two kids." Brenda's children were older and did not present difficulties in terms of finding babysitters; rather, Brenda found that she did not have enough time to spend with her children because of her other responsibilities as a student. Being president of the student

group was yet another responsibility that cut into her time as a mother and a student. The multiple demands on her time often left Brenda feeling overwhelmed. Horsman (1989) also found that women organized their lives around the needs of others and, as a result, women's lives were dis/organized simply because they live their lives around the organizational demands of their immediate and extended family. Consequently, the social organization of women's lives is a significant factor in their power to make choices, and, as such, influences women's participation in literacy classes, not to mention extra-curricular educational activities.

At the end of the study, Brenda found that the *struggle* was just too much and she decided to resign as president. She felt guilty that she hadn't "even done [her] share [within the student group] this year...The load of going to school is so much already. It's just really hard...I just know it's too much for me." Brenda added that other students should consider whether they have the time to take on leadership commitments: "You got to make sure that you have the time before you take that commitment. You should, a person should know how much time about that it's going to take to be able to do this job and do it right." Since all of the students in this study had never held a leadership position, they were unaware of the time it would take. This suggests that literacy workers and students need to discuss time requirements in order to avoid situations where students feel guilty because they are not fulfilling their leadership duties due to a lack of time.

A total of 13 students, seven female and six male, who responded to the Action Read Student Involvement Questionnaire also listed time as a barrier to their participation in student groups. These students indicated that they were too busy to attend meetings. According to Aronowitz and Giroux (1985), "time is a privation, not a possession, for most working class students" (p. 86). However, the findings indicate that time, for women, might be more of a privation than time for men.

In comparison to the other literacy programs, transportation posed the most difficulty for the ALFA students because those who lived outside Saratoga had to travel a great distance to attend student meetings. However, by the end of this study, they had found a solution to this constraint. They decided that in the future, the student meetings would alternate between the different communities and that arrangements would be made to carpool to the different sites.

The staff who participated in this study were cognizant of the students' material constraints which presented a barrier to their participation in student meetings and in program activities. They realized that "there's only so much [the students] can do, because they have family, they have jobs, [and] they go to school." The staff understood the multiple demands on the students' time. Shelley described how Maria's "got her little boy and she's doing full time studies and she's working two jobs. So, there's not a lot more a person can do." Nonetheless, the staff were disappointed when students did not show up for meetings or planned activities. It was difficult for the group to plan activities when there was a "lack of consistency" in attendance.

Educational

The findings indicate that for many students, the question "Do I have enough education and/or literacy skills to participate in meetings and conferences?" always lingers in the back of their minds.

Geoffrey and Jacob, two of the Action Read students, speculated that many students do not participate in meetings because of their low literacy skills. According to Geoffrey, students who have never attended a meeting develop a schema about meetings by watching television:

Everybody has their own beliefs [about meetings] and stuff like this and then you hear meeting and then everytime even if they were watching TV or something and they say "oh, we got to go to this meeting, this board meeting" and stuff like

that. And then they look and there's papers and everything else and they think oh yes, that's where we're going to go.

Students develop a schema of meetings through vicarious experiences such as television and talking with others. These vicarious experiences often lead them to believe that one needs a high level of literacy abilities in order to participate in meetings. According to Jacob, "the reason maybe that they don't want to come is for the simple reason because they can't read and write like myself." During the development of the Action Read Student Involvement Questionnaire, Geoffrey, Maria, Jacob and I discussed how students associated reading and writing with the term "meeting." We decided to use the term "student get-togethers" rather than "student meetings" in the hope that the former term would be less intimidating to students with low literacy skills.

Paul informed me that the Virden students did not want to attend the AAAL student conference for the following reason: "The rest of the students, I think they were kind of leery to go eh, like you know, they don't know whether they have enough education, but that's not the point." Peggy recalled how she doubted her educational abilities, but gathered up her courage to attend her first conference: "I was really scared at my first one. I was scared what they'd do, like what they do at a conference and if I could do it. That's what I was worried about and you do worry about what other people think too, if you can't answer the questions and stuff." Now that Peggy has experience in attending conferences, she finds "it quite easy" and assists other students who are attending their first conference.

Program Constraints

Readiness

In order to engage in student involvement, there needs to be a "sense of readiness" within the minds of the literacy workers, and within the organizational structure of the literacy program. Barb had prepared the ground for student involvement through simple preliminary activities such as potluck suppers and a student newsletter. She was ready, albeit a bit nervous of this new undertaking.

Liz also felt a sense of readiness. During the time of this study, it was Liz's third year as a literacy coordinator. During the first two years, her efforts had been directed towards personnel issues and the professional development of her paid tutors. Now that the staff were trained, Liz felt it was time to include students in the professional development days. Moreover, Liz was ready to place her energies in a new direction by weaving participatory practices into her practice as a literacy coordinator.

On the other hand, Jody, who was in her second year as coordinator of the program, did not feel a sense of readiness for engaging in participatory practices. Towards the end of the study, she shared the following thoughts with me: "One of the barriers, you know, just speaking personally, I guess, for me, was in some ways the timing wasn't quite right...Probably, if I'd had my druthers, I would have said, 'Let's hold off on this until next year.'" During Jody's tenure as literacy coordinator, Action Read had experienced major changes, such as new space and staff and the integration of a program for mentally challenged adults. As well, Action Read had incorporated and achieved charitable status, which meant the development of a board. During the course of this study, the Action Read board was not providing the support nor the direction which the program and staff needed. Consequently, the Action Read staff was under a great deal of pressure due to uncertainties about funding and the future direction of the program. Jody described the situation in the following manner: "I think we're a ship adrift at the moment. There's no one really in charge,

and you know, we're doing our job but nothing is happening very much with the program." In order to keep the ship afloat, Jody prioritized her responsibilities, concentrating on the issue of funding:

Cause [until] I knew that the funding was settled for this year, and if I could see that we [were] settled for next year as well, then I'd feel more comfortable with that, putting more time in it [participatory practices] myself, personally, you know, maybe, you know, maybe, I would like to have come to more of the meetings and that kind of thing. But, I just couldn't, you know, I already worked so much overtime that it gets impossible sometimes.

Therefore, within the Action Read program, the constraining effects of administrative contexts was a barrier to engaging in participatory practices.

The findings suggest that a 'sense of readiness' is a significant factor among the staff and within the program in the development of participatory practices within literacy programs. The extent to which this 'sense of readiness' impacts upon the degree of success in integrating participatory practices into literacy programs requires further study.

Material constraints

The interconnected issues of time, funding and space emerged as a barrier to student participation. These material constraints have also been documented in the literature on participatory practices (Duff-McCracken & Fretz, 1991; Gaber-Katz & Watson, 1991; Goldgrab, 1991; Jurmo, 1987). Literacy programs need to support the on-going activities of participatory practices, and naturally, that requires additional time, funding and at times, physical space.

The findings indicated that student participation required additional staff time and this was sometimes a concern within the Action Read and ALFA programs. Barb noted that she did not "begrudge the extra time because I think it's such a worthwhile undertaking but it does

require extra time." Time did not emerge as a concern within The Literacy Network because the students were on site, thereby eliminating activities which took time in the other programs, such as contacting students by phone. The two activities which seemed to require the most staff time were contacting students and "the additional meetings you have with the students." In her journal, Barb expressed how time played a role in the student group's activities: "I'm also feeling that we should have done much more than we did. The ideas are there, but the time element often hinders progress." Although the ALFA group generated many ideas, time dictated what ideas could be transformed into action.

The facilitation of student meetings during the evening was particularly difficult for Shelley because she was the only staff member on site. So, in addition to facilitating the meetings, Shelley had to manage the site. She described the experience to me: "I'm managing the learning centre here and the phones are ringing and people are coming in and it's very stressful to try and keep on top of what's going on when all that is happening at the same time."

Liz, Jody, Shelley and Barb all spoke of the funding costs attached to participatory practices. For instance, the postage costs for mailing information to all of the Action Read students was \$46.00. Action Read could not afford this extra expense, so student mail-outs had to be coordinated with the distribution of the program's quarterly newsletter. This was not always possible, and therefore, some of the student meetings could not be advertised in the program newsletter.

Liz realized that the students needed money to cover transportation and babysitting costs when they attended student-staff professional development days. Liz offered this advice:

If you're going to have student involvement and they have to come out to workshops, you've got to be really aware to have everything financially well-covered. That's another obstacle for lots of Alberta's coordinators. Daycare, finishing

workshops on time, so that if you have students whose kids are in school they can get home by 3:00 to be with the kids.

Although some students probably needed financial support to cover childcare and transportation costs, Action Read and ALFA did not have the funds in their budget to support these financial needs.

Finally, Jody informed me that it was sometimes difficult to arrange for space for student meetings. The Action Read program was quite active in the evenings, often holding workshops as well as weekly writing classes.

Staff support

The findings indicated that the staff members who were involved in promoting participatory practices often worked in isolation and did not receive the moral support and feedback they needed. Without dialogue with others, it is sometimes difficult to question and reflect upon one's practice. Liz described the effects of her isolation: "I have no one to talk to. That's likely why I get trapped up or swept up into the dominant discourse, because I don't have feedback. And that's why words and actions weren't going together, because I had nobody giving me feedback." Liz appreciated the time that we spent together discussing the theory and practice of student involvement. It is difficult to work in isolation and unfortunately, for many literacy workers in Alberta, this is their situation. In order for ideas to develop and be challenged, people need to get together on an ongoing basis to share their experiences, both positive and negative.

Size of program

Throughout the study, I heard differing opinions from staff about the correlation between the size of literacy programs and the amount of participation in student meetings and activities. The Action Read staff believed that "the bigger a program gets, the more difficult it is to attract students to functions." Shelley thought that in "a smaller program people

might know each other more and there might be more of a tendency to do things together." The size of a program might be a factor in student participation since Action Read had a lower participation rate in student meetings and served more students than ALFA. Barb, on the other hand, did not see a relationship between the size of a program and the amount of participation. She felt that it was more difficult to attract students to meetings in smaller towns because there was a higher possibility that students who desired anonymity might meet someone they knew.

Ownership and representation revisited

They're not willing to let students on the board, because of liability. And yet who is this program for? So, I find that a big contradiction, that they talk about how great the program is but they're not willing to let student's speak or represent themselves on the board.[Shelley]

Who owns the literacy programs? Is ownership a barrier to student participation? Who controls the literacy programs? Is control a barrier to student participation? These questions came to my mind as I observed the first of two sites of contestation within the Action Read program.

The first site of contestation circulated around the question: "Is it possible for students to serve on the board of Action Read?" At the beginning of the study, Maria made it clear to the staff that she was interested in serving on the board. The staff was supportive of student participation on the board, and Jody brought the issue forward to a board meeting. (It should be noted that the staff held reservations about Maria's participation at the board level, since she often expressed a willingness and an eagerness to participate in student activities, yet she would not attend the actual activity.) Henrietta, the chair of the board, was vehemently opposed to the idea. Henrietta viewed Action Read as both a program and an organization; she supported the students' involvement in the program but vetoed their involvement in the organization. Towards the end of the study, Henrietta's opposition to student involvement in the organization was still apparent. During an interview with her, she

stated: "I'm still not past [having students involved in] the program input stage. I haven't gone into the governance stage."

This created a tension between the board and the staff. According to Shelley, this study:

sort of brought to light that students want to be on the board, and now we're faced with the dilemma that the board does not want students on the board, but students want to be on the board. So, it's a very head-on kind of clash and it's very clear. It's not this misunderstanding and uncertainty. It's that students want to be on the board, and the board doesn't want them to.

Jody, on the other hand, thought that "it was more Henrietta [than the entire board] and her ability not to allow the issue on the agenda, than strong resistance by the board per se." Nonetheless, this clash created an awkward situation, since the board supervised the staff and the two parties held differing opinions about student participation on the board. Jody, recognizing the need to tread very carefully and diplomatically, stated "I think there's education that needs to be done there, too. You know people are at very different levels in their understanding and I think...at least half the board anyway, have no experience, no background in adult literacy."

In interviewing Henrietta, Jody, Shelley and Vicky, I developed a clear picture as to why Henrietta opposed student involvement on the board. Henrietta viewed students as being incapable of understanding legal liability and unable to be equal partners in the decision-making process.

Henrietta's position re: student involvement at the board level appears to be that the student should change and learn the skills to fit into the board. There was no mention of how the board could adapt and change to meet the students' needs. [Fieldnotes, September 4, 1993]

Henrietta has real reservations because of liability. When pressed about liability, she said that students are not capable of understanding that they are liable. [Fieldnotes, February 22, 1993]

The governing board has to function equitably and you can't accommodate an individual on it. They have to be there as equals in terms of their responsibility for the decisions...having the dedication to really take your 1/6th of the responsibility for the decisions made for the organization. [Henrietta]

I got really angry at the last board meeting when she [Henrietta] went on and on about we can't have a student on the board because the liabilities are too high, they don't really know what they're getting into, they don't know what they are signing their name for, and we can't take that responsibility. Well, I thought that was a real cop out you know. [Shelley]

The board consisted of white, middle-class educated individuals. In Henrietta's mind, they were responsible citizens capable of making decisions whereas the students did not have the abilities or the right "attitude" to make responsible decisions for the Action Read program.

It should be noted that Henrietta was in her second year in the Faculty of Law; this experience appeared to be playing a major role in shaping her views and underlying assumptions about the roles of literacy students, board members and staff. The language Henrietta used to describe students, for example, phrases such as "not capable of understanding," reflects the dominant discourse of the legal discursive field, a discourse based on positivistic notions of rationality, objectivity and truth (Weedon, 1987). Henrietta appears to equate literacy with intelligence, cognition and rationality, all of which she deems to be superior traits belonging to the literate population. Using this line of reasoning, Henrietta believes that individuals with low literacy skills, such as the students, do not have the cognition, intelligence or rationality to serve on the board. Throughout her tenure as chair of the board, Henrietta effectively used her privilege as a white, middle-class, well educated woman to exclude the students from participation at the board level. The assumptions behind her words shaped the social relations between board members and students as well as the practices and processes of Action Read's board. Rather than wanting to transform the social relations between board members and students, Henrietta chose to perpetuate the status quo through the preservation of boundaries and hierarchies which excluded students from the decision-making process.

On May 8, 1993, I interviewed Vicky, a board member, to learn her views about student involvement. I was immediately struck by Vicky's lack of knowledge about my research, especially since I had provided Henrietta with a letter of consent outlining this study, with the understanding that she would circulate it to board members. Vicky explained that the board members "haven't had an awful lot circulated to [them]." She confirmed that:

Henrietta is very nervous about student involvement on the board because of the responsibilities of directors and she feels that students can't, how could students be fully aware...that the responsibility that you're asking them to bear is something that they couldn't even properly envisage.

Vicky was open to the idea of student representation on the board, and posed pragmatic questions such as "Is there a proportion of students that one should have?" and "What sorts of literacy skills would they need?" Once her questions had been answered, she saw the value in having that "different perspective" on the board. Vicky also realized that the board would need to change some of its procedures in order to accommodate students.

On May 19, 1993, Vicky presented a three page brief to the board on the bylaws and election of board members. Section six of this brief dealt with students as board members and read:

Action Read's mission is to help adults learn to read so that they can become fully functioning and participating members of society.

But we don't have any students on the board. Why not? Are there any good reasons AGAINST doing so? And good reasons FOR doing so? The size of the Board would need to be increased to 8 (in the literature, 3 regular members to 1 student member seems to be the accepted ratio). This would require a change in bylaws, but that's easily done (See Article 6 Amendments).

To discuss this intelligently, we need background (information on organizations that have taken this route, why, how it works, liabilities, and so on).

At the first Board meeting in September, or at a meeting as soon as possible thereafter, should we discuss increasing the

size of the Board to accommodate two student members -- do we want to, how do we do it, when, etc?

After the May 19th board meeting, Jody informed me that:

everyone felt uncomfortable with Vicky's brief. Henrietta apparently said that board members need to be able to think and to have a commitment to the goals of the program. It was left that a by-law committee will be struck to look at increasing the size of the board as well as the feasibility of students serving on it. (Fieldnotes, May 25, 1993).

Part of the discomfort, according to Jody, was that board meetings "had been going along really nicely, and no one had raised probing questions." The brief served to shatter this tranquility, disturbing the status quo.

This leads to the questions: "Whose interests are represented in literacy programs?" and "Does the ownership and control of literacy programs determine whose interests are served?". These questions also came to mind when I observed the second site of contestation within the Action Read program.

Action Read's board and staff drafted the program's mission statement which reads: "Action Read is a community based, volunteer organization that provides literacy development opportunities for adults in order to enhance community participation and quality of life." In reading the mission statement, the question, "Who can be a member of the community?" comes to mind. Considering the board's position on student involvement in program governance, it appears that while anyone can be a member of the community, only literate citizens can be members with full rights and privileges. Although the students belong to a community of learners and tutors, they do not belong to the community of decision-makers, i.e. the board. It should be noted that the program does adhere to its mission statement in that it provides literacy development opportunities to adults, and is a widely respected program among educators and students.

In this study, the students whom I interviewed and worked with strongly indicated that although they appreciated the learning opportunities, they wanted the program to include more social opportunities. I expressed this interest to Henrietta and she replied: " That's not the business *we're* in. There's absolutely no way *we're* going to use *our* resources to do that." The inclusion of social activities did not fit within the program's mandate which the board, rather than the students, had produced. Consequently, it could be argued that the program was serving the needs of the board, not the students. Certainly, many students come to Action Read for the sole purpose of learning to read and write, but there are others who also want social interaction. Horsman (1988) writes about the social dimension of literacy and states that "many programs, programs workers and funders, saw time spent on social aspects as irrelevant, and an inappropriate use of time in a literacy or training program" (p. 80). In contrast, the students, particularly the women "wanted both social contact and an educational event" (p. 79). I concur with Horsman because my experience as a literacy worker has informed me that a mutually reinforcing relationship exists between educational and social events.

Towards the end of the study, the staff agreed to have more social events for the students and were hoping to plan a Christmas party. They also hoped to use the money earned from selling the students' photostory to create a student social fund. In my final interview with Shelley, I asked her to comment on the tension between the students' desire for more social events and the boards' decision not to use resources for social events. She stated that "it's time to look at the parameters [set by the board] and say, if this is what the students want, how can we provide it?"

Part A: Summary and Discussion of Barriers

The findings suggest that barriers to participatory practices differed between programs, depending on their channels of communication, program constraints and responses to ideological questions such as "Who can serve on the board?". The students and staff within the ALFA program employed effective strategies to overcome the barriers of communication such as the issue of confidentiality and constraints in students' lives such as transportation. However, I would like to put forward the notion that staff also need to examine and alter the discursive practices within their program(s) which promote confidentiality. When program brochures and staff promise a confidential service to students, are they not unintentionally promoting confidentiality and the need to hide one's "illiteracy"? Should spaces be made within the programs for students to gather and discuss the nature of illiteracy and its meaning in their life? What about an evening get-together for students entitled "Let's talk about literacy"? Could students not examine how they are portrayed in policies and media campaigns? Wouldn't the issue of confidentiality emerge in these types of discussions and activities? Are there other ways in which the issue of confidentiality could be raised? Why do programs create spaces for students that focus on methodology such as reading and writing whereas spaces that focus on "issues" are not a priority? Is there a tendency among staff to avoid issues that might be "hot" and outside the boundaries of traditional education? How do the criteria which uphold private and public funding of literacy programs and projects affect the nature of spaces where students gather within literacy programs? Although I am raising more questions than answers, I want to emphasize the importance of problematizing certain barriers, rather than continually relying on problem solving and the respective strategies that follow such an approach.

A common barrier to participatory practices among programs was the isolation among literacy workers. The literacy workers lamented the lack of opportunity to discuss the theory and practice of participatory practices with their colleagues. Interestingly, when literacy

workers gather for the annual conference of the Literacy Conferences of Alberta's (LCA), workshop choices are usually limited to topics such as methodology, fundraising, volunteer management and program evaluation, all of which reflect a technical skills orientation to literacy education. Perhaps literacy organizations such as the LCA need to examine the type of professional development which they are providing to literacy workers through conferences and regional workshops.

Another common barrier to participatory practices was the material and educational constraints in students' lives. The issue of gender and its relationship to participatory practices surfaced and showed the specificity of women's needs vis `a vis participatory practices. For me, a major concern was that students, particularly women, tended to blame themselves when they could not fulfill their responsibilities and duties as an active member of the literacy organization. Literacy workers need to acknowledge the realities in students' lives and to provide continually material and emotional support to students, in order to enable students to get involved and to ensure that students do not harbor feelings of guilt if they cannot maintain their involvement.

As well, the ideological assumptions which guided the practice and approach to literacy education among board members constituted a barrier to student participation at the board level in the Action Read program. It appeared that the board members were influenced by the arguments put forth by Henrietta, the chair of the board. However, it should be noted that the social and political climate of Alberta is conservative, and that it is highly likely that the boards and advisory committees of other adult literacy programs in Alberta may also have influential members who hold a deficit perspective of students.

To close, the findings revealed that participatory practices within literacy programs face a spectrum of barriers, ranging from constraints in students' lives and in programs to ideological constraints. Packaged as a whole, these barriers could conceivably overwhelm

literacy workers and students and deter them from engaging in participatory practices. If literacy workers and students view participatory practices as a vision rather than a set of goals, and place importance on the process rather than the product, perhaps they may be more accepting of perceived failures such as low turnouts to meetings and the slowness of changing bureaucratic processes such as student involvement on boards.

Part B: Themes Emerging about the Student Groups

Pedagogies

Top-Down versus Bottom up

Bottom-up, top-down -- educators use these words to describe the pedagogical process.²⁸ Bottom-up refers to a process whereby students are participants in setting the agenda of their learning experience; they are active subjects of their learning. Top-down, on the other hand, refers to a process whereby students are passive recipients of a pre-defined agenda; they are objects of their learning. Within the literature, top-down and bottom-up usually relates to educators' negotiation of the classroom experience.

In this study, top-down and bottom-up refers to the literacy workers' approach to working with the student group. If, for example, the purpose of the student group was to increase student participation in the literacy program, then a bottom-up approach would mean that the students became the subject of shaping program policies, rather than the objects of policies. Furthermore, students would have an active role in shaping and defining the agenda of the student meetings.

The issue of top-down versus bottom-up emerged as a significant theme among the participants. This section will examine the similarities and differences among the literacy workers' perspectives on this issue.

During the planning stages of the student group, the Action Read staff raised questions such as "Why are [the students] meeting?" and "What are [the students] going to do?" The Action Read staff and board used the terminology "top-down" and "bottom-up" as they endeavored to answer these questions. Shelley stated that she "believed in the idea of bottom-up" and Vicky, a board member, also emphasized that she "very firmly believed in

²⁸Bottom-up and top-down are terms found within the liberal educational discourse.

bottom-up rather than top-down." Rather than determining the agenda of the student meetings, the staff "decided to leave it completely open and to let the students find their own focus." However, this was easier said than done and towards the end of the study, Shelley realized that the student group "needed some direction, they needed some structure and they were looking to me...If I opt out completely, then there's just no structure at all." After one meeting, Shelley described how she felt that she "was pushing people too much and that [she] had to just lay off a bit." Although Shelley believed that she needed to provide some structure, she still felt uncomfortable about providing it. This suggests a tension between the needs of the group and her perceived role as an educator.

Towards the end of this study, Shelley questioned the staff's decision to adopt a bottom-up approach. In the following exchange, Shelley reflected upon the impact of the approach they chose to use:

Shelley: Perhaps, I don't know, in retrospect, maybe I did turn some people off of the student group because I did say this is a group based on what you women or men think and it's going to go where you take it, and I'm really not going to dictate what to do or what to think or what to decide. I can set parameters and let you know what's feasible from this end of it in terms of facility, money, but whatever people are interested in is what's going to happen.

Pat: So, that would turn people off by...?

Shelley: Just maybe giving too much responsibility, and being too vague and not saying what it is we are going to do.

Pat: And if they're used to taking direction and that they might not...

Shelley: Hm hmmm, they're used to being told.

In her final comment, Shelley positions the students within the context of the Action Read Program and/or the wider socio-economic context; she recognizes that adults with low-literacy skills have often responded to orders all their lives, simply because "the restriction of thought and autonomy is the law at the bottom tracks of school and occupational hierarchy" (Shor, 1980, p. 25). If the students were used to being passive recipients, a sudden change in social relations and practices might spark initial resistance among the

students. Perhaps the students at Action Read needed more time, experience and skills in order to make the shift from participating in student group meetings to actively organizing these meetings.

In our final interview, Jody, Shelley's supervisor, also questioned their decision to adopt a bottom-up approach. She commented that "it was the fear of being top-down" that underlined this decision. Jody realized that "it was difficult for students to find their own focus and decide what the focus should be...and that we probably need(ed) to provide a bit more structure." By the end of the study, Jody succeeded in stepping out of a dualistic framework that embraced either a top-down OR a bottom-up approach and described how her views had changed. According to Jody:

it's a constant balancing and you know, kind of, not jockeying for position, but just, you know, there are trade offs. You can be more directive, but really listen to what students have to say, too, and, as you say, make suggestions but at the same time be open to what they have to say, too.

Both Shelley and Jody were in agreement that future student groups would require some direction and structure.

Initially, Liz adopted a top-down approach and, like Shelley and Jody, did not question her chosen approach with the student group at the outset of the study. After two months of working with the student group, Liz began to examine her approach. "In the beginning," Liz says, "I really put my agenda on the group." Liz recognized that she was "silenc[ing] and control[ing] without being aware of it." This awareness sparked Liz's decision to adopt a different approach with the group; she chose to "sit back and just let [the group] evolve." When asked if she noticed that she had been setting the agenda or if she ever questioned her approach with the student group, Liz replied: "No, I just did it. And yet, that's kind of crazy, because I've always asked tutors about the topics they want to have covered in workshops." Liz's heightened consciousness about her approach with the student group was an important

moment and marked her entry into an examination of tacit rules and assumptions that governed her behavior as an educator.

Interestingly, these literacy workers employed a top-down approach in their decision to engage in a bottom-up pedagogical process. That is, the staff made the final decision about which approach to use without collaborating with the students on this decision. In a more participatory approach, the staff might have broached the question of top-down versus bottom-up with the student group. For instance, the staff could have asked the group "What are your expectations of me?" or "What kind of role would you like me to take with this group?"

Rather than engaging in a dualistic framework of either top-down OR bottom-up, Barb, the coordinator of ALFA, immediately recognized that she had "to give a lot of direction because this [meeting as a group] is new to them." At the same time, Barb didn't "want to run the student group. [She] want[ed] them to run the student group." Barb assumed a flexible position: a position that ranged from being a passive observer to being an active participant. According to Barb, "it's very difficult because I have all these ideas coming through my mind and I think let's do this and this and this." Barb realized that the students would probably accept her ideas, but she wanted the students to generate ideas.

Although Barb was conscious of the need to move between a bottom-up and top-down approach, she still questioned the path she chose. Barb speculated about the amount of direction she provided to the group and said "Perhaps I didn't do as much as I should have, simply because I was afraid of doing too much." Like Jody, Barb verbally expressed fear of the top-down approach. In retrospect, I wonder whether Jody and Barb were really 'afraid' of a pedagogical approach. Was it fear or was it a reluctance to partake in a approach that is not favoured by the dominant discourse which stresses 'student-centred' and 'bottom-up' approaches? Was it a response to me and the approach they thought I favoured? In

talking with Barb, I could sense her internal struggle surrounding her level of involvement of the group. Towards the end of the study, Barb remarked that she didn't want "to be too involved, and should have been a little more involved." Barb, like Shelley, placed the students in the wider socio-political context and realized that the students were used to having people "tell them" what to do, which in turn, precipitated the students' reliance on the educator.

Rather than expressing a fear of the top-down approach, Liz and Shelley provided a rationale about their preferred approach. Liz believed that students will "never think they can do much on their own if the staff's constantly involved." Furthermore, if staff employed a top-down approach, "you're saying that you just don't trust them to do it on their own." Shelley believed in a bottom-up program as well as a bottom-up approach in working with students because "then you are really serving the interests of the people who need it [the program] the most and I mean it's the *raison d'etre*."

In the initial stages of this study, Jody, Shelley and Liz's beliefs were based on the assumption that students have the skills, knowledge and experience to act in their own interests. Therefore, in terms of pedagogy, the bottom-up approach was favoured. According to Youngman (1986), "many adult educators who oppose the authoritarianism of traditional capitalist pedagogy have adopted forms of 'student-centred' pedagogy" (p. 206). Yet, the majority of the students in this study possessed minimal skills and knowledge in working with groups due to a lack of opportunities and experience. Therefore, these students would probably have benefited from the literacy workers' expertise. Barb immediately recognized that the student group was "new to them." In other words, the students would initially require some structure, support and direction. Consequently, she fluctuated between using a top-down and bottom-up approach with the group. Youngman (1986) advocates this dynamic approach and believes the educator should "take responsibility for making their expertise available in a way that will further the learners'

interests" (p. 207). Barb hoped that as time passed, the students would gain the skills and confidence and become less dependent on her expertise.

In listening to Liz, Shelley and Jody, I assumed that their verbal support for a bottom-up approach would result in their employment of a bottom-up approach. However, this was not the case in one program; a contradiction existed between the literacy worker's words and actions. I have chosen to highlight this contradiction because it illustrates how, as educators, we can be unconscious of contradictions between what we say and what we do. Also, rather than being critical of the contradictions of ourselves and others, we need to unpeel the layers in an effort to explore what lies beneath these contradictions.

The Action Read staff advocated a bottom-up approach with the student group. At the first group meeting, Shelley informed the students that "this is a group based on what you women or men think and it's going to go where you take it. And I'm really not going to decide what to do or what to think." Towards the end of the study, Shelley told me that literacy workers must "be prepared to really *listen* to what [the students] have to say." Jody, Shelley's supervisor, also stressed the importance of "really *listen[ing]* to what the students have to say." The identical wording of their statements suggests that Jody and Shelley had discussed and were in agreement about the importance of listening in a bottom-up approach.

Rockhill (1991) states that "unless [students] can bring their experiences into the classrooms and we can truly learn to *listen* - to hear their stories - to learn what they know, that they know, and *how* they have come to know what they know, I don't see how we can talk of critical literacy" (p. 23). Rockhill believes in the necessity of listening to students' personal narratives. After the first Action Read meeting, it was clear that some of the students wanted to talk about their lives. After the third student meeting, I interviewed Shelley and read her journal. At that time, I became cognizant of her thoughts about listening to *personal narratives* within the context of the student group.

In her journal, Shelley recorded that "even though the first hour of the student group was spent talking about students' lives, their failures, successes and experiences in general, I felt this was an important step in building trust and group cohesion." The words "even though" provides the first hint that while Shelley recognized the importance of building trust and group cohesion, she did not want to "make the focus of the group a complaint session." After the second student meeting, Shelley wrote that she "took a more vocal role as facilitator this time with the intention of mobilizing them *to do* something instead of just complaining about how unfair life is to them." Later, Shelley verbally expressed her frustration with the group and how she "realized in the first two meetings that there was a lot of complaining happening and it was really important to say, 'Ok, we've had a chance to do that now let's move on'." Although the students wanted to talk about their lives, Shelley continually talked about her role in "shifting the conversation," "bringing them back on topic and moving them along" and how it was "difficult to get right to the point." Whose topic? Whose point? Listening to personal narratives was problematic for Shelley, because of her need to move the group forward, and an assumption that listening to personal narratives was a form of therapy. At a much later date, while engaged in "member-checking" with Shelley, she also expressed a fear in focusing on the personal.

It should be noted that listening to personal narratives was also problematic for some of the students. According to Shelley, "not all of the students were comfortable in discussing or sharing their experiences. Some students were interested in attending a student group for other reasons." Shelley was specifically referring to Jacob and Ted. Although these two men did not verbally express their discomfort in listening to personal narratives with either Shelley or myself, Shelley told me that she had known these students for a long time and that they held a positive outlook on life, even though they had experienced hardship. Consequently, Shelley perceived that Ted and Jacob were "turned off" by listening to students complain about their lives.

Interestingly, Ted and Jacob were the only students who had immigrated to Canada. In this respect, they shared a similar social identity that differed from the social identity of the other students. Perhaps the dominant discourse of being an immigrant had informed Ted and Jacob that if you are motivated and work hard, you will succeed. Within this discourse, there is little space for "complaining" about the injustices of life. It should be noted that Jacob was the only student who had experienced financial success; he owned a home and a recreational vehicle. Nonetheless, this difference in social identities created a tension for Shelley in her role as group facilitator; she was working with a group whose social identities affected their needs and interests.

Although the Action Read staff were in favor of initiating a student group and utilizing a bottom-up approach, there was an underlying agenda with respect to the group's purpose. The staff wanted the student group to focus on program related ideas and activities. In her journal, Shelley wrote that, at the first meeting, she stated that "students are equal members in the association and had every right to voice their concerns, make requests or present proposals to the board." As a researcher, I had also promoted the concept of using the student group as a forum to involve the students actively in program decision-making. In a way, this pre-conceived agenda was contradictory to the bottom-up approach. According to Shor (1980), the "teacher needs to come to class with an agenda, but must be ready for anything, committed to letting go when the discussion is searching for an organic form" (p. 101). In other words, staff must be willing and ready to renavigate their route, if the winds of change blow their ship in a completely new direction, away from its original destination. As well, staff must always be listening for these winds of change, for sometimes, they can be very quiet.

Although Shelley believed in a bottom-up approach, whereby one listened to the students and was not "orchestrating them," her actions were in contradiction to her words. In the

following conversation, I began to understand her reluctance towards talking about personal experiences within the student group:

S: They talked about their experiences and their lives....How hard their lives were and done by, hard done by they were and I believe it and I'm sure it's true, but you know you don't want it to be a therapy session.

P: Right, yeah, how come you didn't see it as being that?

S: Well, if it's a therapy session, where do you go from there?

This exchange raises two very important questions. First of all, "Why would a literacy worker express objections to a therapy session?" I would like to put forward the argument that literacy workers who work within Alberta's volunteer adult literacy programs have been exposed to education and professional development that "trains" them to focus their attention on the individualized learner and her/his reading deficiencies rather than on social structures and practices that perpetuate illiteracy. Speaking for myself, I can remember a time, not too long ago, when I was so obsessed with assessment, methodology and remediation that I ignored gender, race and class. I worked within the boundaries of education and the public sphere, and did not think it was my 'place' to cross these lines. After all, were there not counsellors and psychologists better equipped to 'deal' with the private lives of students? In effect, I was not working with the whole person, as my education had trapped me within an analytical, partialist framework of thinking. I viewed illiteracy as the student's principal source of oppression rather than their gender, race, or class. It is only through a combination of events -- a questioning and readiness to change my views, an opportunity to study at the doctoral level, and reflection -- that I have been able to see my work in a new dimension. Perhaps Shelley also believes that "therapy" should be kept outside the realm of education because she is operating within the dominant discourse which decontextualizes what 'il/literacy' means to students in their day-to-day lives.

Shelley's words and actions suggest that she is operating under the assumption that listening to personal narratives is a form of therapy. The reluctance to listen to the "personal" appears to originate in the dominant discourse which Alberta's literacy workers have been subjected to in their practice. In Alberta, the dominant discourse appears to be one which locks educators into a dualistic framework by creating boundaries between the personal and the political, as well as the private and the public, education and therapy, and at times, literacy and illiteracy. This discourse is reflected in the language, assumptions and meanings that literacy workers ascribe to their experiences which, in turn, shape their social relations and practices. Critical (Giroux & Simon, 1988; Freire and Macedo, 1987; Youngman, 1986; Giroux, 1983; Shor, 1980) and feminist (Stanley & Wise, 1993; Briskin, 1990; Miles, 1990; Horsman, 1990; hooks, 1988) discourses, on the other hand, address the connections between the self and political reality; the personal is political.

Critical and feminist ideology often result in a pedagogy whereby the personal becomes the springboard for learning. According to Youngman (1986), "the starting-point of this (pedagogical) process is unambiguously the experience of the students and the issues and problems of their everyday existence" (p. 202). As students examine the commonalities of their experiences, they may begin to critically look at the location of "problems" that they encounter as personal and identify their systemic economic, political and ideological roots. In other words, they will (ideally) be enabled to address the connections between the self and political reality so as "to understand how power is reproduced, mediated and resisted at the level of daily existence" (Giroux, 1983, p. 238). To a large degree, such a practice could step out of the dominant discourse which locks us into a dualistic framework by creating boundaries between the personal and the political, the private and the public, and education and therapy.

In this study, the students often talked about their personal troubles with "systems" such as the the educational system and the social assistance system. During the interviews, two of

the four Action Read students used the metaphor of a wall as they discussed their position within systems:

You are compelled to sort of hide behind a wall. You're sort of looking around it until you become fairly good at it.
[Jacob]

All that I keep doing is running into walls. [Geoffrey]

In February, 1993, after the third student meeting, I summarized the student interviews to Shelley in a letter, with the hope that the findings would provide some insights about the students' thoughts towards the student group (See Appendix K). In one of the paragraphs, I shared that students "spoke of being frustrated by systems in our interview. So, perhaps the student group could even be a place to start sharing our knowledge about systems." After February, the student group only met one more time before summer, so the notion of systems was never explored by the group.

If the topic of systems had been raised within the group, what would have been the educator's role? Perhaps, Shelley could have assisted the students in repositioning themselves as victims of the system to describing, analyzing and examining possible ways to transform the system. Again, this might not have interested all of the students, due to their differences in social identity. Although the latter point of transforming the system might be idealistic, it could lead to students changing their relatively powerless position within the system by sharing resources and ideas and gaining the knowledge and confidence to challenge and stand up to the system.

In this study, I found that Shelley was not alone in her fear to focus on the personal. Liz also discussed how her staff would "cap" discussions about the personal. In Liz's case, this capping resulted from insecurities about how to deal with the personal. Liz shared why staff, including herself, would resist personal narratives:

[Students] start talking in great anger about maybe being abused. Like, I think a lot of our staff would cap it because like me they likely would feel, I don't know if I'd cap it, like,

but like me in other instances, I would say, 'I don't know how to deal with it, I don't know what to do, so I better not get into it.'

Liz speaks of the the staff's difficulties and uncertainties of moving from the familiar terrain of instruction and remediation to the unfamiliar terrain of personal narratives. Like Liz and her staff, Shelley also expressed the need to develop her knowledge-base so that she would be "pedagogically ready" to deal with personal narratives.

The second question raised by Shelley in our previous exchange was "If it's a therapy session, where do you go from there?" Although Shelley's pedagogy seemed to "fit" within a liberal ideology, personal conversations with Shelley informed me that she was sympathetic to political activism at the macro-level. Perhaps she was having difficulty transferring political activism to the micro-level. Shelley appeared to be searching for a concrete answer to the question, 'How does an educator facilitate a process that connects the personal to the political?' This question was posed to Shelley in a subsequent interview and she replied: "If they're stuck on their personal story, then perhaps lines such as, 'How do you think this relates to the other adult literacy students?'" Although Shelley realized the need for students to share the commonalities between their experiences, she did not go on to discuss the need to look critically at the location of these problems. Literacy workers in Alberta's volunteer literacy program who want to begin addressing personal narratives within the context of their student groups do not usually have the experience or education in teaching for social change.²⁹ Furthermore, these workers do not have experience in working with groups of literacy students, as their programs promote one-to-one learning situations. Therefore, it is not surprising that these workers may wonder about the pragmatics or what to 'do' after students have shared their personal stories.

²⁹For three years, part of my duties as a literacy worker included the development and implementation of training for Alberta's literacy workers. I came to know their background and needs, so I think that this is a fair statement to make. However, a deeper concern for me is that the participants seldom, if ever, identified education for social change as one of their needs.

Educators who support a bottom-up approach must be constantly vigilant about the way they negotiate the agenda with students. So often, we are not even aware that what we are saying is in contradiction to what we are doing. Therefore, although we may create spaces for students to have a voice, we have to make certain that we do not silence their voices when they do not say what we want to hear. Instead, we must truly listen to what they have to say.

Horsman (1993), in a keynote address to the 1993 Alberta Association for Adult Literacy's conference entitled "Voices and Visions", sheds light upon what it means to "truly listen":

we [literacy workers] don't have a lot of experience in how to listen well, listen supportively, listen challengingly. We struggle, I think, a lot in our literacy work with the whole concept of learner centred and we say we want to start from the voices of the learners. But I think we have to learn how to do that in ways that are challenging. It's not just 'learners speak the truth.' We all have many truths, and the truths are formed out of the experiences in our lives. We all need to be able to challenge each other.

Truly listening is more than listening to voices, especially those muted ones, that differ from ours. It is offering support while challenging the "truths" that have been formed out of our experiences.

Leadership

In this study, we have learned that the literacy workers, with the exception of Barb, whose approach fluctuated from top-down to bottom-up, initially preferred and promoted a bottom-up approach. This being the case, it was not surprising to learn that the literacy workers did not want to act or be viewed as the leaders of the student group. Even Barb stated that although "they're looking to me for more than back-up, but more for being the leader, [I didn't] want to be the leader in their student group." All of the literacy workers wanted the students to assume a leadership role within the student groups, although none of the 18 students that I interviewed had ever held a leadership position within a group or organization.

This raises two questions: "How do students, who have never held leadership positions, respond to their new role as leaders?"; and "How do staff approach the issue of working with students to foster leadership skills?" Before responding to these two questions, I will describe how student leaders were chosen in their respective programs.

The issue of choosing a student to be the president was handled through an election process in four of the five programs. ALFA and two of the three programs with The Literacy Network (Haines Junction and Virden) formed student associations with elected officials. The remaining Literacy Network program (Creston) elected a student representative to serve on their literacy council which was affiliated with Laubach International³⁰. Of these four programs, Barb was the only coordinator who provided a rationale for wanting students to hold titled leadership positions. She told the students that "somebody always has to be in charge and I didn't want it to be me." Barb believed that electing student leaders was an effective strategy that would serve to shine the spotlight on students, rather than on the literacy worker.

Action Read utilized a grassroots model for their student group which meant that there were no elected officials. Instead, Shelley facilitated group meetings. Shelley recognized that the group "need[ed] a leader," yet the occasion never arose where the staff or students formally discussed the election of representatives. Shelley recognized that Daniel, a student, was "very much a natural leader," yet he was never approached by staff or students to 'head up' the student group because after the first student meeting, he began to pressure the program for material resources. Although Action Read was not a full-time program, Daniel wanted tutoring five days a week and started coming to the centre on a daily basis. He would stay at the centre for three to four hours, and during that time, he would photocopy books, tie up

³⁰Laubach Literacy International is a non-profit, educational corporation founded in 1955 by the late Dr. Frank Laubach. It is dedicated to teach reading to adults with low literacy skills. The Laubach approach emphasizes the use of volunteer tutors on an Each One Teach One basis, using structured literacy books and easy-to-read follow-up literature.

the telephone lines and wander in and out of the learning centre, disturbing other tutoring pairs. The staff found Daniel's daily visits a drain on their resources, and decided to belatedly set some parameters. When Daniel was approached with their decision, Shelley told me that he responded by stating: "You're just like every other program. You don't want to help. You really don't care about students."

Towards the end of the study, I asked Shelley if there were ways by which staff could foster leadership among the students. She replied that "I suppose they could vote. We could put it in a formal way or you could just observe who's coming and who seems to be really supportive and committed and say, you know, just approach them, and say, offer to them, would you be interested in heading up this committee."

The student groups which adhered to a traditional notion of leadership with an elected executive were the groups that were successful in formulating and meeting some of their goals. These groups also followed traditional organization forms such as decision-making by majority vote.³¹ Action Read unconsciously chose a grass-roots model which promoted shared leadership, agreement by consensus and structurelessness. I use the word 'unconsciously' because, to the best of my knowledge, the Action Read staff and students never discussed the issues of leadership and decision-making, although it could be argued that a "core" group of interested students is necessary in order to begin exploring leadership. Although the Action Read student group formulated goals in the sense that they listed ideas and activities that they wanted to pursue, their only success in terms of reaching their goals was the development and analysis of the Student Involvement Questionnaire.

This next section examines how students who have never held leadership positions responded to their new role as leaders. The four students who were elected to the position

³¹ See Chapter 7 in Adamson, N., Briskin, L., & McPhail, M. (1988) for a discussion on feminist organization and feminist process.

of president or student representative were quick to tell me that it was the "first time they had ever been involved in stuff like that" and that it "was a big experience for [them]." In the following narratives, we can see how Peggy and Paul were uncertain about their roles and how Jean and Paul were uncertain about group process. This section focuses on the students' struggles, as opposed to the benefits that they derived from being in a leadership position.

Learning the ropes: The question of role

In 1991, Donna was elected to serve on the ALFA board as the student representative. At the beginning of this study, it became apparent that Donna's role as student representative had not been communicated to the student group. During one of our interviews, Barb explained that students can "funnel their ideas [through Donna] to the board." When asked if the students were aware of this process, there was a pause in our conversation, followed by laughter. Barb then responded: "We never discussed it. But, good point. It should be mentioned to them." Donna was also unaware that, as student representative, she was in the position to take the students' views and concerns to the board.

Towards the end of the study, I asked Peggy what she needed in terms of leadership training. Although Peggy had been president for a year, the following exchange reveals that she was an actor in an unfamiliar terrain; she was mystified about her role in navigating others through this terrain.

Peggy: I still have a hard time, like 'cause I don't, I don't know how to do it right.

Pat: Ok.

Peggy: For me to, someone to show me, or teach me how to do my job right not just to come in, like I come in without really knowing, I still don't really know for sure what to do.

Pat: Yeah, and sometimes when you don't know, you don't even have the words to explain what it is that you don't know. Does that make sense?

Peggy: Yeah, like sometimes I , at a meeting Barb wants me to say, but I, a lot of times I can't because I don't know, I don't know how to do it, I guess.

Pat: I know what you mean. And that, but that just makes sense, cause if you hadn't had experience in it before, then you wouldn't know, so you need almost some training.

Peggy: Yeah, like if someone, for a president you must have to do, you know, certain things in certain areas, which I don't even know, I wouldn't even know which areas to begin in.

Pat: So, wanting to know what you should do and how to do it?

Peggy: Yeah, what your part would be of what you want to be like.

Throughout our conversation, Peggy is grappling for the words to name the confusion about her role. She speaks to the need for a well-defined set of duties so that she knows what is expected of her. As well, Peggy is concerned about her performance as president. Through observation of Peggy at student meetings and at public events and through my conversations with Barb, the coordinator, it was clear that Peggy had acquired leadership skills, such as the ability to chair meetings, to speak publicly and to set and reach goals. Peggy was even beginning to use the language associated with chairing meetings such as "Is there anything else from the floor?" Despite her achievements and the support she received from staff and students, Peggy was still concerned about her ability to "do it right," and unclear about her duties and responsibilities. This suggests that Peggy needed constant reassurance and moral support about her performance as president.

After discussing what she needed in terms of leadership training, Peggy informed me that she wanted to resign from her duties as president. She still wanted to be part of the group, but she wanted a smaller role. Immediately after our interview, Peggy informed Barb of her decision. Peggy's decision prompted Barb to realize that she "should have been telling

[Peggy] what her role was and teaching [Peggy] more about her role." Peggy was a mother and was attending college full-time, so it should be noted that this situation dictated the amount of time Barb could spend with Peggy.

Paul, the president of the Virden student association, was also unclear about his role. He expressed this uncertainty in a brief, but illuminating exchange:

Paul: Why they got me like is I talk quite a bit eh and joke around and they figure well, he'll be good for a president.

Pat: You can speak.

Paul: But after I got in there, I didn't know what to say.

Providing opportunities for students to have a voice does not necessarily mean that they will know how to use their voice, simply because this is such a new experience for them.

Learning the ropes: The question of process

In Virden, the student association generated a list of goals, one of which was to buy books for beginning readers. Early on in the study, I asked Paul whether the student association had pursued this goal and we engaged in the following cryptic conversation:

Paul: Well, we never talked too much about it after that like you know.

Pat: That's the thing is how to once it's...

Paul: Yeah, I figure once it's on paper maybe it, maybe they will jump to it.

Pat: Whose they?

Paul: I don't know, I'm giving a hint here.

In this exchange, we can see how Paul has attributed power to the written word and to an outside force which he refers to as "they." Paul's comments suggest to me that within the realm of an educational institution, he is mystified about and alienated from the processes needed to convert ideas into action. According to Sarup (1982), "the working class itself has not been involved in the decision-making process [within the educational system], but has

been acted upon; 'good' has been done to them" (p. 113). Paul, a working class student, has always been a passive participant on the receiving end of educational services who follows and obeys the decisions and rules made by 'others', rather than an active participant who has a role in shaping and defining the service.

Jean, the president of the Haines Junction student association, seemed to be the clearest about her role and how to turn ideas into action. In terms of process, Jean requested staff assistance whenever there was "a situation that [the students couldn't] handle together" as she was unsure of how to resolve conflict within the group.

The need for leadership training

Of the three presidents, two expressed a need for leadership training. Rather than learning through a vicarious experience such as observing presidents in action at meetings, they wanted direct training either through a one to one mentoring relationship or through workshops. These were their comments about training:

Someone to show me, or teach me how to do my job right.
[Peggy]

There should really be workshops. [Paul]

Well, the only support that the guy could get is somebody that had experience that teach us what to do like you know. Get somebody's that been in there for three or four years eh that has been a president and tell us what like you know to do, what we don't have to do, like you know, just on and on.
[Paul]

Peggy was the only president who was involved in a mentoring relationship with her literacy coordinator. Peggy informed me that Barb "helps me out lots." Although Peggy was appreciative of Barb's efforts, she still doubted her own abilities. Paul, on the other hand, reported that "the only support I'm getting is from my students."

Fostering leadership skills

Socialist and feminist pedagogies aim to address the issue of the educator's role in fostering leadership skills (Briskin, 1990; Maguire, 1987; Youngman, 1986; Schniedewind, 1983; Reed, 1981). Youngman argues that socialist pedagogy acknowledges the expertise, authority and leadership of the educator:

Socialist adult educators bring to the education situation a necessary expertise and they initially assume a position of authority and leadership (a position which is itself the product of the unequal personal development that capitalism generates). They take responsibility for making their expertise available in a way that will further the learners' interests. They participate in a collaborative process which aims to raise the level of awareness and competence of the learners and hence their position is not static (1986, p. 207).

According to Youngman, students initially lack, to varying degrees, the knowledge and skills needed to assume a position of expertise or leadership. Therefore, it is the educator's responsibility to share his/her expertise with the students. As the students' awareness and competence is raised and developed, the educator's role changes and he/she begins to recede into the background. In this study, it was evident that the students lacked leadership experience and wanted training and support to develop their knowledge and skills in this area. This section addresses how the literacy staff approached the issue of working with students to foster leadership skills.

Although Barb would not define herself as a socialist educator, she certainly was aware of her expertise and was willing to share it with the group, and in particular with Peggy, the president, and Donna, the secretary. Barb recognized that the students had never held a leadership position and consequently needed assistance with their new roles. She described how Peggy, the president, would look to her for cues: "But, sometimes you'll notice at the meeting Peggy's looking at me [as if to say] 'What should I do now?' and that's ok to begin with." Barb realized that students would initially be dependent on her and she hoped that they would eventually become independent as they developed leadership skills and

confidence in their abilities. In other words, she assumed a dynamic, rather than a static position with the students.

Barb was the only literacy worker that employed direct training through a mentoring relationship. As a mentor, she provided training and moral support. For instance, she discussed and formulated the agenda with the president and secretary in advance of the meetings. After the meetings, she would assist Donna, the secretary, with the minutes. Barb taught Donna how to use the computer and how to compose business letters. Barb informed me that she was "teaching her all the things that I think a secretary of a group should know." Barb also recognized the need to expand direct training to other students by having "leadership workshops and discussions on leadership."

Some feminists also believe that teaching leadership should be the responsibility of educators because "those who are outside the 'culture of power' learn best how to access that culture when the rules of that culture are taught explicitly" (Delpit in Briskin, 1990, p. 14). Those who advocate a bottom-up approach might argue that teaching leadership undermines student autonomy and is undemocratic. However, Briskin (1990) says that "acknowledging teacher expertise does not necessarily negate the authority of the students' expertise" (p. 13). In other words, is it possible for an educator to instill leadership skills while still maintaining a bottom-up approach?

The remaining literacy workers in this study did not directly teach leadership skills through a mentoring relationship. There was even a reluctance to share their facilitation skills during the group meetings. Shelley was reluctant to provide direct leadership training to the Action Read student group. The following statements indicate that she did not want to utilize her knowledge of standard facilitation techniques, unless the group requested them:

They wanted [their ideas] on paper because they were forgetting and because it was just these you know ideas come and then they go. And so it came from the group that I

should write it down and that was really positive because I didn't want to just start introducing the writing down stuff.

Even though I wanted very much to draw up an agenda and attack the items in order, I realized the ideas and pace must come from the group [journal entry].

Shelley's comment suggests that she believed introducing facilitation skills would not be consistent with the bottom-up approach. Maguire (1987), a feminist educator who conducted participatory research with a group of women who had been abused, also discussed her "reluctance to utilize [her] full range of training skills and techniques with the group" (p. 162). Maguire thought that these skills might intimidate the women. Upon reflection, Maguire realized that her reluctance was a mistake and that she had "lost many opportunities to introduce structures and activities that would have made equal and meaningful participation more possible" (p. 163). Demetris (1993), a manager of a literacy program who was involved in promoting student support groups, also discussed his "hands-off approach" with the group. He was "apprehensive that [his] pragmatic drive to make things work may have overridden the emerging efforts of the learners" (p. 43). Towards the end of the study, Shelley expressed a preference for promoting vicarious experiences, rather than direct training in her comment that students could learn all kinds of skills by attending meetings and being exposed to "things, like how to run a meeting, how to organize to get things done, how to delegate authority, how to follow up, how to arrange a speaker [and] how to arrange a function."

Interestingly, at the end of the study, Jody, Shelley's supervisor, had recognized a need for direct training. Jody reported: "I think we need to provide just a bit more structure for them and help them along a bit more...by giv[ing] them the benefit of [our] knowledge and [our] expertise." Jody's perception of the role staff need to adopt parallels the role of the animateur, a role in which the educator nurtures leadership ability and acts as a catalyst and resource person in a democratic process (Brookfield, 1983; Titmus, 1981; Kidd, 1971).

Initially, Liz believed in the virtues of vicarious training. In monthly professional development days, she set up situations in which the students could learn through modelling. Later, when I shared Paul's need for assistance, she became more open to developing a mentoring relationship with the students.

To Be versus To Do

Pedagogy attends to the practices of teaching and learning and the knowledge that educators and students produce within a given time and space. Within this time and space, the question "What are we going to do?" underscores the practices of teaching and learning and tends to surface more than the question "How should this class be?". According to Shor (1980), this emphasis on doing sometimes results in a "liquidation of autonomous time and space" where students and educators can engage in free discussion, sharing of ideas and collective exploration of experiences (p.8).

In this study, the literacy workers were working with student support groups and student associations. Consequently, the focus was not on teaching and learning per se, but nonetheless, there was still an emphasis on "doing." The following excerpts illustrate how Shelley and Liz focused on the need "to do."

I realized I was concerned that are they really *doing* something the students, sort of in their student associations or their groups, like are they really doing anything, you know sort of concrete and very formal...And you know and what's happening when they're meeting are they *just* talking that type of thing but then I then I learned well maybe that's what for me I would need that if I was a student maybe and I was involved more in an association. [Liz]

I guess because I'm really task oriented, I always think you meet, you have plans and goals and you *do* things and you keep meeting until they're *done*. And it's a very linear kind of thought process. And I realize that that's really not what's happening. Different people coming to different meetings, having different expectations. And I'm sort of trying to see where it all will lead. [Shelley]

And then, I ask myself questions, what kind of group would it take to get something *done*. And you know, why are they not really interested? [Shelley]

Shelley and Liz describe their preference for "doing" as an individual trait. However, I would like to argue that their orientation towards task is not just an individual trait, but part of the structure of their literacy programs, in which they are positioned. Their programs are very production orientated, an orientation that mirrors today's society. Consequently, programs and staff who produce products and results are praised and supported. According to Sauve´(1987), "in our society there is a tremendous value placed upon the doing of something. We may indeed be driven to the point of feeling guilty if we cannot readily tell someone what it is that we are doing. Yet education is, in the classic sense, more concerned with being than doing" (p. 47). Sauve´ argues that the present educational system is based on a delivery-based model that reflects society's orientation towards production.

In re-reading the interview questions that I posed to students and educators, I can see that, like Shelley and Liz, I was also caught up in the framework of doing. For instance, the question "What are the group's goals?" indicates an emphasis on doing. When I posed this questions to Barb, the ALFA literacy coordinator, she framed her response around the need to be, rather than the need to do. She told me "that they're still groping. We're trying to find out who we are." Barb was the only literacy worker who was not overly concerned that the student group had not formulated goals; she recognized that the student group needed time to be.

The text of the ALFA photostory suggests that being is a prerequisite to doing. It was only once the group had time to "be," that they were ready to move on to "do." The text reads:

We enjoy student meetings because we make new friends.
We feel comfortable about sharing our feelings and ideas.
You feel as if you are not alone. You don't feel like you are

the only one in this position. We feel more confident. Some of us used to be so shy we could not even speak to people. Now that we have more confidence, we are doing more things by ourselves and with the group.

In the early stages of the ALFA student group's formation, they spent time talking and sharing. When asked why she attended the meetings, Heidi, one of the ALFA students, responded in the following manner: "I think just to be with them and just to talk how they feel here...and you can share some feelings that other people don't understand." As well, Peggy accentuated the importance of 'being' in her application for the AAAL student meeting: "I've really learned how important it is *to be* with other students." Shor (1980) locates discussion within a socio-economic context, and believes that "discussion is a privilege, not a democratically distributed right" (p. 73). In other words, those who are in positions of power and privilege have more time and opportunity to engage in discussion, whereas working class people are often employed in labour intensive and service oriented jobs where one is not rewarded for discussing ideas.

The findings suggest that the students in Action Read and the Literacy Network also wanted to be engaged in a mutually reinforcing process of being and doing. In the following dialogue, Maria, an Action Read student, responds to my question about the purpose of the student group:

Maria: Everybody had different ideas about starting [the group] you know.

Pat: About what it should do?

Maria: What it should do, what student group should be.

If we juxtapose Maria and Shelley's vision of the student group, we can see a striking difference. While Shelley, the literacy worker, wants the student group to have plans and goals, Maria, the student, wants the group to engage in being *and* doing.

In examining the written purpose and objectives of Virden's student association, I saw how the group was trying to resist society's dominant discourse which values doing over being. Although half of the objectives related to doing and were production-oriented, the other half were connected to being. Objectives that came under the rubric of being were items such as giving everybody a chance to speak, discussing ideas, supporting other ideas, involving everybody. Objectives that came under the rubric of doing were items such as going on field trips, and buying books for beginning readers. When I initially saw that the student group had slotted discussing ideas and giving everybody a chance to speak under the heading "objectives," I thought to myself, "These ones don't fit." Now, I realize that although the being objectives did not fit my schema which emphasized doing, they did fit a schema which emphasized being and doing.

Why do we, as educators, place such importance on doing, when students seem to clearly speak for a balance between being and doing? I think that, as educators, we are positioned within a product-oriented discourse that is governed by a set of discursive practices. For instance, programs, projects and proposals that receive recognition and government funding are those that are time-bound and tied to products and results. And increasingly, within the conservative climate of Alberta, it appears that if we don't "do", they won't allow us to "be."

Social Relations

Identity Politics

In my proposal for this study, I stated that "student involvement [had] the potential to alter power relationships between literacy workers and students and, in turn, create new roles for both parties" (Campbell, 1992b, p. 2). This statement was grounded in the assumption that student involvement was the locus for altering power relationships. The findings, however, indicated that identity politics play a pivotal role in the transformation or reproduction of power relationships between literacy workers and students. It is only after we have

addressed identity politics and power relationships articulated through 'identities' that we can begin to talk about student participation and the creation of new roles.

In this study, identity politics refers to the question of who 'we' are in relation to 'others'. According to Weiler (1991), "the central issues of difference, positionality, and the need to recognize the implications of subjectivity or identity for teachers and students have become central" to the actual practice of feminist pedagogy (p. 460). Weiler argues that our race, class, gender and sexuality and the power, privilege and oppression embedded within these respective subject positions affect the way we process information. Giroux (1983) explains why educators' need to understand how race, class and gender has left its imprints upon how they think and act in the following statement: "It is important to understand what society has made of us, what it is we believe in, and how we can *minimize* the effects on our students of those parts of our "sedimented" histories that reproduce dominant interests and values" (my italics, p. 241). Thus, we need to develop the capacity to see how our subjectivity --how we hear, how we speak, how we know -- is lodged in social relations and shaped by discursive formations.

In this study, the findings indicate that Liz was the only literacy worker who verbally questioned her identity in relation to that of her students. According to Liz, "you have to have a certain political slant to even want to examine it [identity politics]." Liz's words partially explain my reluctance to actively pursue the subject of identity politics with the other literacy workers. It also seemed that the opportunity never arose. At the time of this study, Liz was also raising questions about her identity in her personal life. Because of this, I think that she was open and ready to discuss identity politics within the sphere of education. During the fall of 1992, Liz and I discussed and shared articles on the issue of subject positions, power and privilege.

There was one occasion where the notion of privilege was touched upon by Jody, but we did not pursue this topic. During an interview, Jody acknowledged that literacy workers should "give [students] the benefit of [their] knowledge and [their] expertise." Jody was referring to the knowledge and expertise needed to engage in participatory practices such as running meetings and serving on boards. I commented that "it's almost like you've got privilege and it's just sharing it somehow." That was the end of our discussion, but I sensed that Jody was beginning to recognize the need to share her privilege in ways that moved beyond being a reading specialist who remedied reading difficulties through the application of professional techniques.

The next section, which focuses on the students and staff at Haines Junction, illustrates how identity politics played a role in the transformation of social relations between a literacy worker and students.

The students at Haines Junction decided that their photostory should be about a critical incident in which they were excluded from the decision-making process in their literacy program. That is, the students were not given a choice or an opportunity to make a decision about something that affected them. (Due to the confidential nature of this incident, it was decided that the particulars and specifics would not be inserted into this dissertation. As well, the text of the photostory would not be publicly circulated in this dissertation or among literacy workers.) The students informed me that they did not protest the decision that was imposed upon them by Liz, the literacy worker because, at the time, they felt shy and scared. I regret that I did not probe beneath the surface of these words, but their narrative was unfolding at such a rapid pace, I barely had time to capture their words on paper.

How does feeling shy and scared relate to the issue of identity politics and the reproduction of power relationships? At the time of the incident, the students were undoubtedly cognizant that they were occupying a socially constructed position of subordination whereas the

literacy worker was occupying a socially constructed position of privilege. The students probably did not see any space for 'negotiating' these positions, and consequently chose to remain silent. Ellsworth (1989) would probably agree with my response to this paragraph's opening question. According to Ellsworth, we must move beyond the notion that 'oppressed' people are silenced and instead, consider the possibility that they are choosing/declining/refusing to talk.

Ellsworth argues that differences in an individual's privilege and oppression in relation to the other members of a group influence his/her decision to enter into dialogue. According to Ellsworth (1989), "what they/we say, to whom, in what context, depending on the energy they/we have for the struggle on a particular day, is the result of conscious and unconscious assessments of the power relations and safety of the situation" (p. 313). Ellsworth argues that before individuals decide to unleash their voice, they might well ask themselves, "Do I feel safe?" or "Do I trust the other members of the group?" or "What are the risks and costs of voicing my thoughts and feelings?"

Ellsworth's thesis helps to explain why the students at Haines Junction were willing to move from an initial position of silence in September, 1992, in which they did not protest the decision that was imposed upon them to a position of narrating the incident in April, 1993, for the photostory. I think the students perceived a positive shift in the power relationships between them and the literacy worker; the students had moved to a position of feeling safer and at less risk. Interestingly, the comment that preceded the first sentence of the photostory was "we don't have to say it, do we?" Liz and I responded by reassuring the students that it was 'ok' to share their thoughts and emotions, that others would learn from their story and that we might resolve the incident in the telling of the story. This final bit of reassurance seemed to clear the air and the students began to tell their story. Hence, a space had been created where students could express themselves.

As Liz listened to their narrative, she became aware that she had unwittingly made a decision that was in opposition to the decision the students would have made, had they been given the opportunity. As the students narrative unfolded, Liz began to see her actions and her words through their eyes. Brookfield (1987) uses the metaphor of a mirror to explain how others, by holding up a mirror to our behaviors and actions, provide us with an opportunity to reexamine our behaviors from a different perspective. Brookfield (1987) is quoted at length because his words parallel what happened with Liz during the production of the photostory:

Seeing our actions reflected in the mirror offered by others' perceptions is tantalizing yet unsettling. We recognize elements of congruence between their perceptions of what we were doing and our own. We are also struck by those instances in which actions that were self-evident to us are seen by those around us as ambiguous and contradictory to our stated intentions. Questioning the assumptions under which we have been acting, and exploring alternative ideas, is psychologically explosive. The effect can be appreciated by visualizing an explosives expert who lays dynamite charges at the base of a building requiring demolition. When these charges ignite at key points in the structure's foundation, the whole edifice comes crashing down. Beginning to question key assumptions is like laying down charges of psychological dynamite (p. 30).

In this study, the students became mirrors who reflected Liz's behavior and actions back to her. Although her intentions surrounding this particular incident had been 'good', she began to see her behavior from a different angle. During the first photostory session, Liz was quiet and attentive to what the students were saying. During the second session, Liz apologized to the students. She said: "I think I'm saying this for myself, but it's kind of an apology too. I got thinking about everything we talked about or said yesterday about having a choice and it being your decision...What I'm apologizing for is that I didn't give you a choice at that time." To apologize in front of the students, the paid tutors and myself must have been very difficult. As Arnold et al. (1991) state: "deepening our consciousness about our social identity requires taking time, probing our own discomfort, risking frank discussion" (p. 15).

During the first two photostory sessions, Liz understood that her previous words about the need to share power and privilege were not congruent with her actions. Liz reflected upon our initial discussions and became alarmed at the contradiction between her words and actions: "Those were the words, and those were the mulling over the words. That was the intellectual. " She described how painful it was to acknowledge the contradictions that existed between her words and her actions:

It is painful to acknowledge that you are working maybe from an internalized dominant point of privilege and silencing and controlling people through that. I think that likely what I was so upset on Tuesday. On Monday night, on Tuesday, Tuesday morning. At breakfast it was starting to hit me and I think as the day progressed and then I was sitting in on the workshop for the photostory and I think it hit me at coffee break like profoundly that what hit me and that that's why I think I felt so angry and teary and hurt and I think I first of all I did take it out on people around me. Not the students but and that was even hard initially not to sort of you know say you know fuck them. That's all part of being dismantled when you offer a position and you deconstruct it and it felt like that.

The photostory served as a trigger event which prompted a sense of discomfort within Liz.³² This was followed by a period of self-scrutiny. During this period, Liz became acutely aware of the contradiction between her words and actions, and the resulting emotions that flooded through her almost resulted in a resistance where she wanted to say "fuck them." Brookfield concurs that during self-scrutiny, we "alternate between minimization and denial and brooding on the exact nature of our perplexing contradiction" (p. 26).

I can resonate with Brookfield's metaphor of an explosion in relation to the questioning of assumptions. After the second photostory session, Liz erupted. Her explosion was primarily

³² Brookfield (1991) describes the stages that a person goes through as they begin to examine their behaviors, challenge their assumptions, and change their thinking patterns. According to Brookfield, "many different terms are used to describe these phases, but their essential components appear remarkably similar" (p. 25). Brookfield names these phases as trigger event, appraisal, exploration, developing alternative perspectives, and integration.

directed at me. (I realize now that during the photostory my energy and attention was entirely focused on the students and, consequently, I was insensitive to the wide range of emotions that Liz and the paid tutors must have been experiencing as the students voiced their discontent about the incident.) Liz's anger was palpable, and once the anger had been driven through her, we began to talk. We talked for hours. (I did not tape our discussion simply because I did not feel it was the time or place to pull out my taperecorder). We explored identity politics at a deeper emotional level, casting aside our prior need to intellectualize everything. Liz described it as "hard work, emotional hard work, cause you have to examine yourself in relation to them and that's hard."

Liz was struck by the contradiction between her liberatory words and her "directive, controlling" actions. As we explored this contradiction, we realized that Liz was caught between discourses which were competing against each other. On the one hand, Liz was a feminist who valued collaboration, democracy, equality, participation; these values surfaced in her words. On the other hand, Liz was a female teacher working within in a hierarchical system that valued control, discipline and authority; these values came through in her actions. During our exploration of the contradiction, I commented that "it's interesting because you're a feminist, and feminists usually work in collaborative, you know participatory [ways], so you've been really influenced by...." Without skipping a beat, Liz finished my sentence with the words "by the dominant discourse at [this institution]." Kosmidou and Usher (1991) agree that the teacher is "positioned within a number of different discursive and material practices...all of which have different meanings involving power relationships for her and all of which shape subjectivity, often in contradictory ways" (p. 39). Giroux and McLaren (1992) also recognize that "individuals are produced through the clash of conflicting discourses and subject positions" and stress the importance of "reflect[ing] upon subject postions they have assumed, and choos[ing] those which are the least oppressive to themselves, to others, and to society as a whole" (p. 19).

After exploring Liz's contradiction or incoherence between saying and doing, we began to ask pragmatic questions: What follows an examination and acknowledgement of privilege? How do we silence and control others without even being aware of it? How do our subject positions affect the way we process information? How do we unravel and address the tensions that arise from the students' and educators' different subject positions? What do you say to a working class woman who is feeling guilty about leaving her children in order to come to school when you have never been a mother? How do you respond to a working class mother who tells you about the day somebody gave her two garbage bags full of clothing because she didn't have any clothes for her baby? We did not have any answers to our questions, but we had begun the process of trying to integrate a new way of thinking and being into the fabric of our pedagogy.

Finally, one of the strands within this section has been Liz's contradiction between her words and actions. Initially, Liz did not recognize this contradiction. It was only after she recognized the contradiction that she engaged in praxis. After the production of the photostory, Liz's understanding of identity politics deepened and she stated that she was clearer about student participation and identity politics. Then, she uttered the following statement: "Your actions, your words, your actions." In my mind, this statement suggests that rather than living a contradiction, Liz had been engaged in a cyclical process of learning that unified theory and practice. Mao Tse Tung's summary of the role of praxis parallels Liz's description:

Practice, knowledge, again practice and again knowledge. This form repeats itself in endless cycles, and with each cycle the content of practice and knowledge rises to a higher level. Such is the whole of the dialectical materialist theory of knowledge, and such is the dialectical theory of the unity of knowing and doing (In Youngman, 1986, p. 59).

A deeper understanding of social identity requires praxis, a dialectical process between thought and action.

Critical theorists and activists argue that the first strategy for social change education is the location of ourselves and those with whom we work (Arnold, Burke, James, Martin, and Thomas, 1991; Razack, 1991; Weiler, 1991; Rockhill, 1991; Garber, Horsman and Westell, 1991). This strategy may assist educators in their awareness of tensions that may arise because of differences in subject positions between students and the educator and even between students.

Working Across Differences

It seems well nigh impossible to have groups whose members will have no significant differences among themselves, despite the commonalities of their oppression and of the interests that bind them together. So, 'working together continuously across our differences' seems to be a project we cannot avoid or get away from. We are condemned to either ignoring and annihilating differences, or to working tenuously across them to form always risky bonds of understanding (Narayan, 1988, p. 34).

In this study, the students who attended the student group and/or student association meetings differed in terms of race, gender, age, ability and religion. The findings indicated that the literacy workers and students varied in terms of acknowledgement of these differences and their willingness to work across these differences. Furthermore, the findings suggested that, in one program, the acknowledgement of differences was a contributing factor towards the development of a sense of community³³ within the student group. In this study, Barb was the only literacy worker who verbally acknowledged differences among students at student meetings. In turn, the students within the ALFA student group appeared to share a strong sense of comradery and fellowship. The remaining student groups did not openly address student differences, although two staff members mentioned diversity during interviews. The findings indicated that when differences among

³³ In using the term 'community', I am referring to the "abstract quality of fellowship, the sharing of common relations or feelings" (Nicholson, 1991, p. 48).

students were not acknowledged, spoken and unspoken tensions would begin to surface within the group.

At the beginning of the study, Barb informed me that she was "afraid" of starting a student group because of the "diversity" among the students. In terms of diversity, Barb was primarily referring to abilities, rather than race, class or gender. For instance, some of the students who attended the group were mentally handicapped and others were not very fluent in spoken English. As well, Donna, the secretary was hearing impaired. Barb stated that "I decided that this forming a student group was a good idea, but I was afraid of it because there's such a diversity of students within [ALFA] and I couldn't visualize in many ways putting them all together." For Barb, one of the biggest "challenges" in forming the student group was "learn[ing] to work across the differences." She tried to find "common ground" as well as to "make sure that we try to do things that are of interest to all of the group at least once in a while." Rather than denying diversity among the students and treating everybody as the same, Barb wanted a student group that met and supported the specific interests and stated needs of students with different abilities and backgrounds.

Towards the end of the study, Barb named the differences within the group at a student meeting. Rather than pretending that differences did not exist, she thought that an acknowledgement of differences would ultimately lead to an understanding and acceptance of each other and a realization that students had specific needs, based on their differences. In my final interview with Peggy, the president of ALFA's student group, she acknowledged an appreciation for the differences within the group:

Peggy: There's three different groups. There's, I don't know, handicapped, I'd guess you'd call it and then there's people from different countries who that can't speak very well and then, Canadians, I guess.

Pat: How does that work?

Peggy: Actually it's kind of neat because you learn stuff about other countries. You learn, I don't know, just the way that some people speak and stuff is really, it's really neat.

Pat: Yeah.

Peggy: Just try to understand them and kind of like learning about other countries.

Pat: What about the mentally handicapped people? Do they, is there time during the meetings for them to have their say, or do they sit back more and observe, like watch?

Peggy: They mostly, well most of the time they just sit back, but they, like Barb tries to get them going, so they'll talk, but, sometimes they do and sometimes they don't.

Pat: Yeah.

Peggy: But she tries to get everybody involved.

The other students also acknowledged and appreciated the group's diversity and this came through during the production of the photostory. In fact, the photostory's first sentence about the student group highlighted the differences and read "our student group is made of people who have different needs." This naming and acknowledgement of differences seemed to unite the group and I observed a strong sense of comradery and fellowship among the ALFA student group.

Although differences among students were acknowledged by students and staff at Action Read and Haines Junction, these differences were not discussed in the student groups. Interestingly, differences among students did not surface in conversations with students and staff at either Virden or Creston. This is probably because the major difference among students in both programs was gender. For instance, all of the students who attended the Virden program were Native and all of the students who attended the Creston program were Mennonite.

Shelley was aware of differences among students within the student group in terms of their age, gender, ability and interests. For instance, in her journal, Shelley noted that "Maria was

the only female, aside from myself and was very quiet throughout the meeting." As well, Shelley wrote that Jacob "is twice everyone's age. He probably felt that he didn't quite fit in." The issue of age also came up with Jacob during the production of the photostory and the student questionnaire. In both instances he commented that he would like to talk with students who were nearer to his age.

In terms of ability, Bill was the only student attending Action Read's student meetings who was mentally and physically challenged. As well, Bill had a speech and hearing impediment. In the student meeting, I noticed that he did not engage in group discussion at any time. As Bill was mentally challenged, his lack of participation in the group discussion may have been due to an inability to follow the discussion at a conceptual level. During the meeting, he continually interrupted the discussion with questions that were off-topic. For instance, he kept grabbing my arm, asking for the date of the next meeting. He persevered on this question, even though it had been answered. I recorded these observations in my field notes:

[Bill] is difficult in a group conversation as he interrupts and doesn't listen to what is being said. For instance, if we're talking about a certain topic, he'll join in and then talk about whatever is on his mind...It is interesting to watch their [the other students'] response to him. He is different from them and it would be interesting to ask something about this in the interviews.

According to Jody and Shelley, Bill had attended Action Read workshops for two years, and his "disruptive" behavior at the student meeting was typical. Although the staff makes a concerted effort to include and integrate students who are mentally challenged into the program, Bill's behavior taxed their (and my) patience. Bill, indeed, was a difficult person to work with in a group setting. Yet, the staff continues to accept him and provides learning opportunities for Bill in the workshops.

Within the literature on critical pedagogy, working across differences usually refers to differences of class, gender or race (Giroux, 1993; Young, 1993; Phelan, 1991; Rothenberg, 1990). Where does Bill fit into all of this? The scenario with Bill illustrates that a politics of inclusion, although desirable, does not easily translate into practice. Yet, if "we" exclude people who do not exhibit "appropriate" behaviours, how will "they" ever learn to participate in society? I have chosen to highlight Bill because, as educators, we have all known a Bill -- a person that taxes and strains the patience of any group. Certainly, there is a tendency to want to exclude Bill from the group, a tendency that speaks to the desire for unity, for harmony. Yet, we know that unity functions to oppress and exclude individuals and to repress differences (Nicholson, 1991; Ellsworth, 1989). So, how does one give voice to differences so that they will not be simply reduced to exclusion or silence? As educators, how do we begin to form a bridge across differences among students and between educators and students?

In the Haines Junction student association, differences related to ethnicity surfaced among students of the same gender. For instance, the Native and Mennonite women held different positions on motherhood and family and this, in turn, dictated who was able to participate in extra-curricular activities. The majority of the Native women wanted to participate in fundraising activities and were willing to attend conferences and go on field trips. However, the Mennonite women were not as interested in extra-curricular activities. During the student interviews, I noted an undercurrent of tension with respect to the issue of participation in extra-curricular activities. However, the staff and students, with the exception of Jean, did not articulate the relationship between participation and ethnicity.

Jean, a Native student stated that "they don't want to do anything else...Nothing. Just come here, do their work and go home...Cause to them, they find all these other little extra things here is not important." She later softened her criticism by stating that "it's not that they couldn't [participate], it's just that they couldn't because of situations." On the other hand,

Heather, a Mennonite student informed me that "they talked about pot lucks or bake sales and I didn't really agree with that." In both cases, these two students referred to "they," without specifying who constituted "they." However, it was clear to me that the Mennonite women constituted the group who did not want to participate in extra-curricular activities and the Native women constituted the group who were willing and able to engage in extra-curricular activities. Phelan (1991), an advocate for recognition of differences, would respond to this situation with the following suggestion: "The question we must ask is not simply whether people are 'the same' or 'different' within a particular structure, but *how* they are similar or different and what the effects of that are" (p. 136). I think that sometimes it is also important to examine the historical and systemic structures in order to understand *why* people are the same or different. How would the social relations between the students have changed if the Mennonite and Native students had examined and discussed how their particular social location or their ethnicity underscored their reasons for non/participation?

The propensity not to acknowledge and work across differences among students is certainly understandable, given the discourse within which literacy coordinators in Alberta work. Adult literacy students rarely work in group settings within the volunteer literacy programs, and consequently differences among students is an issue that is seldom, if ever, raised. When literacy workers do discuss student differences, it is couched in the terminology of learner-centred. Although this term connotes a willingness to address differences such as ethnicity, class and gender, the term has come to mean designing a curriculum to meet the needs and interests of the generic, non-gendered, non-raced, non-classed student.

Within the literature, there is an ongoing debate about whether communities and their desire for unity serve to exclude or repress differences. Those who believe that communities have been used to justify exclusion, coercion and denials of difference propose a "politics of difference" (Giroux, 1993; Young, 1990; Lorde, 1984).

A politics of difference lays down institutional and ideological means for recognizing and affirming differently identifying groups in two basic senses; giving political representation to group interests and celebrating the distinctive cultures and characteristics of different groups (Young, 1990, p. 319).

Nicholson (1991) critiques Young's politics of difference because it "fails to take account of the need for some common ground in order for people to live together peacefully" (p. 51). Instead, Nicholson argues for a community which balances "the appreciation of diversity and the affirmation of common goals" (p. 52). In this study, Barb seemed to have achieved a vision of community through a dialectical approach where she searched for common ground, while at the same time realized that people had specific needs, based on their differences. Within the ALFA student group, there was an appreciation of diversity and a sharing of common goals, which led to a sense of comradery and fellowship among the students.

Part B Summary

The findings indicated that each literacy worker initially chose a different pedagogical approach to work with the student group and/or association, with Barb striking a balance between a top-down and bottom-up approach, Shelley deciding upon a bottom-up approach and Liz adopting a top-down approach. Although these literacy workers were engaged in participatory practices, they did not consult with the students as to which type of approach the students preferred or needed.

The findings indicated a contradiction which surfaced between a literacy worker's verbal support (words) versus her employment (action) of a bottom-up approach. This contradiction came to light when the students wanted to talk about personal experiences within the student group. Rather than letting the students re-establish the agenda, a literacy worker felt the need to shift the students' conversation "back on topic" because she was

operating under the assumption that listening to personal narratives was a form of therapy. She appeared to be lodged in a liberal ideology which views the personal and the political as mutually exclusive. In turn, this ideology was structuring her pedagogical approach with the students.

Questions of leadership arose among the students, particularly the presidents of the student groups. Two of the three presidents spoke of a need for leadership training because of uncertainty about their roles and the processes used to transform ideas into action. Throughout the study, only one literacy worker adopted a mentoring relationship with the president of the student group, while the other workers expressed a preference for promoting vicarious training experiences.

The literacy workers and students differed in terms of their need "to do" versus their need "to be", with the former group dwelling on action, and the latter group realizing the need for a balance between being and doing. Literacy workers are positioned within a product-oriented discourse which rewards action-oriented behavior, so it is understandable that they value doing over being.

The findings indicated that identity politics plays a significant role in the transformation or reproduction of power relationships between literacy workers and students. In this study, Liz began to explore her social position in relation to her students', only after she had acknowledged a contradiction between her liberatory words and controlling actions. The necessity to acknowledge differences in social positions was also apparent among the students, as tensions would sometimes arise when differences were overlooked. In this study, Barb recognized the need to address diversity among the students and although it might not have been a comfortable experience, she initiated a discussion of difference within the student group.

CHAPTER 5

Summary, Possibilities, Implications and Recommendations for Further Research

Introduction

Chapter 5 provides a summary of the study. This is followed by possibilities and implications that are derived from its findings. Finally, recommendations for further research are outlined.

Summary

The main purpose of this research was to study participatory literacy practices in adult literacy programs. Two pilot studies were conducted with literacy programs that supported participatory practices; the first study was conducted in Toronto over a one month period in February 1992, and the second study was conducted in Edmonton over a five week period during mid-March to mid-April, 1993. The purpose of the first study was to gain knowledge and practice in interviewing students and in analyzing data whereas the purpose of the second study was to gain knowledge and practice in the production of a photostory.

The main study was guided by the following two questions:

- (1) What are the individual and group experiences of students and literacy workers who are involved in participatory literacy practices?

- (2) What changes do students and literacy workers see in themselves and in their programs as they become involved in participatory literacy practices?

I focused primarily on the first question, rather than the second question. This is because the duration of this study, which was nine months in length, limited the possibilities for

change among students and literacy workers and programs. Nonetheless, the findings indicated that change did occur in the following ways: (1) some students moved from silence into speech; (2) one literacy worker began to explore her social identity; (3) one program began to examine the feasibility of having students serve on the board; and (4) one program developed a sense of community.

To achieve the purpose of the main study, I adopted a qualitative and democratic approach whereby the participants had an opportunity to share and develop knowledge collectively, which, in turn, could be used to transform individuals as well as the social practices and relations within institutions and programs. The data regarding the two research questions were collected through individual and group interviews, journals, fieldnotes, photostories, document analysis and a questionnaire. In total, I conducted semi-structured interviews that contained open-ended questions based on the major purpose of the study with 18 literacy students, seven staff members and three board members between October of 1992 and May of 1993. Two students and two literacy workers kept journals about their experiences with the student group and/or association. I wrote fieldnotes to describe and record my impressions and reflections of conversations, meetings and interviews. Photostories were used as a means of generating knowledge and recording information about participatory practices. Document analysis was used to gather information about the literacy programs and student groups and/or associations. Finally, the urban program's student group worked with me to develop a questionnaire in an effort to determine whether other students were interested in participating in the program and student group. The information and findings that were generated throughout the study were systematically shared with the participants.

The following five programs were involved in this study: (1) ALFA, a rural Alberta literacy program whose primary mode of instruction is one to one tutoring; (2) Action Read, an urban Alberta program whose primary mode of instruction is one to one tutoring; and (3) The Literacy Network, an educational institution which sponsors three full-time literacy

programs in rural Alberta communities. ALFA and Action Read used volunteer tutors whereas The Literacy Network used paid tutors.

Possibilities

Social Discourse

It is through the full appropriation of the dominant standard language that students find themselves linguistically empowered to engage in dialogue with the various sectors of the wider society. What we would like to reiterate is that educators should never allow the students' voice to be silenced by a distorted legitimization of the standard language. The students' voice should never be sacrificed, since it is the only means through which they make sense of their own experience in the world (Freire and Macedo, 1987, p. 152).

Learning the dominant language

Participatory literacy practices created a rehearsal ground in which students could learn the dominant language that often excludes them from participating in meetings, in conferences, and in the wider community. The students spoke of their reluctance to attend conferences and meetings because of their limited educational experiences. Yet, the unspoken fear appeared to be connected to not speaking the dominant language which they would encounter at these events. For instance, the students talked about being "leery" and "scared" and not being able to answer the questions, or "saying the wrong thing." Jean shared the insight that "it's maybe kind of good to learn *it* here because who knows maybe some where down the road you could end up anywhere, even in your work."

Moving from silence into speech

Participatory literacy practices, specifically, the students group and/or association, created the possibility for students to speak and be heard. For eight students, six females and two males, a major benefit of participatory literacy practices was their movement from silence

into speech through their participation in group meetings, a venue which provided a safe and secure place for them to speak. In comparison, all but one of the seven staff and three board members, did not view the movement of silence into speech as a *direct benefit* of participatory practices and/or student groups. Although the literacy workers believed that the students had the "right to voice their concerns" and "speak on their own behalfs", they did not explore the problematics which underscore the right to speak.

The students who participated in this study emphasized the oral aspects of literacy such as speaking and seldom, if ever, spoke of the visual aspects of literacy such as reading and writing; six female and two male students who were interviewed emphasized their difficulty in speaking and/or other students' difficulty in speaking and the sixteen students who participated in the Haines Junction and ALFA photostory spoke of their fear to speak. All of these students were either afraid to speak, found it difficult to speak and/or chose not to speak.

Quite often, the students attributed their fear of speech to shyness. However, hooks (1988) views this shyness as an expression of "deeply embedded, socially constructed restrictions against speech in a culture of domination, a fear of owning one's words, of taking a stand" (p. 17) This fear could emanate from past experiences where, as working class people, they were not heard because they did not speak the dominant language. As well, one woman directly connected her isolation to her fear of speech.

In this study, the students were not always heard by the programs' staff members. For instance, the students' suggestions about programming were sometimes met with resistance by staff and board members. One student group "came up with an idea for peer tutoring", yet the idea was not carried forward. In another instance, the students' desire for social activities was denied because it did not fit into the program's mandate.

To close, participatory literacy practices created a rehearsal ground in which students could learn the dominant language that often excludes them from participating in public events and the wider community; they created the possibility for students to speak and be heard.

The Social Nature of Literacy Education

If programs do not create a separation between "work" and "social" time in the program they help to create a discourse that contests the individuality of learning and makes it possible to see education itself as social (Horsman, 1989, p. 334).

Integrating the social and the educational

Participatory literacy practices created possibilities for students and literacy workers to come together in a new context -- a social context, and as such, opened up a new way of being and learning together.

The students who attended ALFA and Action Read, literacy programs whose primary mode of instruction was one to one tutoring through volunteers, viewed their student group as a venue for creating a community. Moreover, the students viewed community as a primary benefit of participatory practices. These students advocated for a social context where they could participate in an informal exchange of information, a place where they could create and share knowledge and challenge the oppression that resulted from isolation and poverty in their lives. The ALFA students achieved their desire for developing a community within their student group and eventually this sense of community enveloped their literacy program. They gained a sense of solidarity from their student group; they felt united and not as alone in the world. The Action Read students did not develop a sense of solidarity to the same extent as the ALFA students because the group met infrequently and its composition kept changing.

The ALFA students, in particular, valued the opportunity to *be* together:

I've really learned how important it is to *be* with other students. [Peggy]

I think just to *be* with them and just to talk how they feel here...and you can share some feelings that other people don't understand. [Heidi]

These students appreciated the chance to share their feelings and ideas and talk about their lives.

Eight of the nine students who attended The Literacy Network, a full-time literacy program with paid tutors, did not view the student association as a potential or current community. This finding suggests that the students registered with ALFA and Action Read wanted to reduce the isolation that came from being in a solitary learning context. The Literacy Network students, on the other hand, did not view their student association as a community because they interacted with other students on a daily basis.

The results of the Action Read Questionnaire indicated that a large number of students (74 percent) valued student-centred activities such as student get-togethers and welcoming new students into the program whereas a smaller number of students (48 percent) wanted to be involved in program-centred activities such as serving on the board, evaluating the program, choosing library books and training tutors. As well, the Action Read students whom I interviewed and worked with strongly indicated that although they appreciated the learning opportunities, they wanted the program to include more social activities.

Despite the students' interest in pursuing opportunities for social interaction, the Action Read board, particularly Henrietta, the board's chair, was adamant that funds would not be allocated towards social events. In no uncertain terms, Henrietta told me "That's not the business *we're* in. There's absolutely no way *we're* going to use *our* resources to do that." In other words, Henrietta viewed literacy education and social interaction as separate entities,

with social interaction being peripheral or outside the sphere of education, rather than an integral part of education. Unfortunately, she was not alone in her views. The seven staff members, with the exception of one, and the three board members who were interviewed did not view creating a sense of community among the students as a *principal benefit* of participatory practices.

To summarize, participatory literacy practices created possibilities for students and literacy workers to interact in a social context, and consequently, opened up a new way of being and learning together.

Contextualizing literacy

By integrating literacy education and social interaction, the possibility for the contextualization of literacy is created. This possibility existed in all of the groups, including the student group that participated in the pilot study. In the pilot study, the students talked about sexual abuse, unemployment, social assistance. At Action Read, the students frequently talked about the "system". Prior to the opening of one meeting, they were engaged in a lively conversation about AIDS and prostitution. However, this conversation collapsed as the meeting began. In the Literacy Network program, students, particularly women, talked about their frantic schedules, their busy lives, and about being "tired out and run right down". With the exception of the pilot study, these conversations were not carried forward or explored by the literacy workers. By viewing literacy education and social interaction as separate, the possibilities for the contextualization of literacy were overlooked. The only way in which students can begin to see that personal problems are social issues is through entering dialogue with each other. These conversations could have been the springboard for dialogue, for a contextualized literacy education that recognizes the collective, social purpose of education rather than a de-contextualized, de-politicized functional education that stresses the needs of the individual learner.

With the exception of one literacy worker, there was little support for the concept of dialogue, for exploring collective situations within the student group. The literacy workers' reluctance to enter into dialogue appeared to have its roots in a learner-centred pedagogy which focuses on the functional skills which students desire such as filling out job applications, reading to their children, getting a driver's license, managing on a low budget and so on and so forth. This type of education is ensconced in an instrumental ideology, in which, according to Giroux (1983) "knowledge is seen as objective, outside of the existence of the knower" and is "valued for its utility and practical application" (p. 210). According to Malicky and Norman (1993), "the goal of literacy programs based on functional and fundamental views of literacy has been to adapt individuals to fit into the existing socio-political order and hence, to preserve this order" (p. 2).

Within the realm of functional literacy, there is a focus on product, on skills and on doing. Therefore, it was not surprising that the literacy workers spoke of a need "to do" in the student group versus a need "to be." Liz shared how she "was concerned that are [the students] really doing something?" or "are they *just* talking." Likewise, Shelley described herself as task oriented and her need to "meet, [to] have plans and goals and [to] do things and you keep meeting until they're done. " She realized that was not happening in the group and raised the question "what kind of group would it take to get something done. And you know, why are they not really interested?" The emphasis on doing also detracted from the possibility of dialogue, as that was viewed as "just talking."

In one case, Shelley equated listening to personal narratives as a form of therapy and appeared to be caught in a discourse which decontextualizes what 'il/literacy' means to students in their day-to-day lives. Rather than viewing personal narratives as exploring mutual social issues, Shelley viewed personal narratives as individualistic and a form of complaining. Finally, Shelley and Liz spoke of their fear in addressing the personal. This

fear seemed to emanate from a pedagogical base. In other words, as a facilitator, what do you do, what do you say when personal narratives are shared in a group?

In summary, participatory literacy practices, through the integration of literacy education and social interaction, created the possibility for a contextualized literacy education that recognizes the collective, social purpose of education.

Social Relations

Literacy as part of a broader politics of difference and democracy points, at the very least, to two important considerations. First, it makes visible the historically and socially constructed strengths and limitations of those places and borders we inherit and which frame our discourses and social relations. Second, literacy is a form of ethical address that structures how we construct relationships between ourselves and others. It marks out the boundaries of difference and inscribes them in borders that 'define the places that are safe and unsafe, [that] distinguish *us* from *them*'(Giroux, 1993, p. 368).

Challenging hierarchies

Participatory literacy practices created possibilities to challenge the hierarchical social relations that govern literacy programs and create borders between students, literacy workers and board members -- borders which distinguish 'us' from 'them'. These relations are hierarchical in that a group occupying a dominant, privileged social location is making decisions for a group occupying a subordinate, less privileged social location.

On the outside of the border are students, the passive recipients of services and on the inside are literacy workers and board members, the program's active decision-makers. In effect, the literacy workers and board members represent the students' interests, and speak for "them". This creates a hierarchy which was succinctly described by Paul, a student: "They think we're way down on the bottom, they way up there. They just look down at us."

The majority of literacy workers, six staff and two board members, advocated for a transformation of this hierarchy. For these workers, a major benefit of participatory practices was creating opportunities for students to have a voice and a vote in their program. They reflected upon the question of "who is speaking for whom" and realized the shortcomings of having educated, white, middle-class citizens make decisions on behalf of students. A major shortcoming was that decisions were made from the perspective of a dominant group that does not have the insight, the epistemic knowledge that comes from a different social identity -- from being "other" (Nurayan, 1988).

In comparison, the majority of students *did not* touch upon the need for more equitable social relations or more opportunities to represent their views in their programs. Paul was the only student who spoke bitterly about the inequitable relations in a hierarchical system. Two Action Read students, Geoffrey and Maria, expressed a strong interest in serving on the board because they believed the board members needed the "insight" and "ideas" of the students so that the board members would not try "to dig and hit the wrong territory".

What meaning can be derived from the students' silence towards having their needs represented? Were the students' needs being met in that they were learning to read and write? Would their class status in combination with their limited experience in program governance and their low-literacy skills explain their silence around having their needs represented? The findings indicated that the students were curious, but not knowledgeable about the "inside workings" or the bureaucratic processes of their program. (Geoffrey and Maria were a bit more knowledgeable than the average students because each of them had been in the program for over four years.) So, perhaps, if one is uninformed, one becomes indifferent. Surely, if one is constantly on the receiving end of outside social forces which one has little control over, one begins to become indifferent, apathetic and even fatalistic. However, if one is knowledgeable about these outside forces and realizes he/she has the

potential to change them, one comes to see oneself as a subject, rather than an object and is more willing to try to change structures and relations.

The possibility of challenging hierarchical social relations through having students serve on the board was met with resistance by Henrietta, the chair of the board. She practiced a politics of exclusion which effectively barred students from participating in the decision-making arena. According to Henrietta, students did not possess the "abilities" or the "right attitude" to serve on the board. Towards the end of the study, Henrietta was challenged by the other board members and action was taken to explore the "feasibility" of having students serve on the board.

In closing, participatory literacy practices created the possibility to challenge the hierarchical social relations that govern literacy programs and create borders between students, literacy workers and board members.

Examining social identity

Participatory literacy practices also created possibilities for literacy workers to examine their own social identity in relation to students' social identity; it was a chance to move beyond descriptors such as "student" and "literacy worker" and to look at how class, gender and race constitute social identity. By recognizing one's social location and the differences in social identity among people who occupy different subject positions, one may begin to acknowledge privilege and unravel its implications in structuring social relations with people who have less privilege.

Although the possibility to examine social identity existed, only one of the seven literacy workers pursued the concept of social identity during the study. One might very well ask, "So what? What does an examination of social identity have to do with literacy work, with students, with participatory literacy practices?" My response, having completed this study,

would be "Everything, because our class, race and gender and the power, privilege and oppression imbedded within these respective subject positions affects the way we process information and interpret the word and the world." This study revealed that, through examining social identity and privilege, and engaging in a dialectical process between thought and action, a transformation in the inequitable social relations which tend to exist between students and literacy workers may occur.

Liz, through examining her social identity and the relational power between students and herself in the classroom, began to see how she silenced students. She began to listen to students in a different way -- in a way that meant she really heard what they had to say and did not render them invisible. This, in turn, resulted in a situation where the students' spoke their mind about a staff decision which they did not agree with. Eventually, this decision was overturned by the students and the development of more positive -- in that the students felt safe to speak their mind and Liz began to listen to their voices-- student-staff relations occurred.

When differences between multiple social locations and privilege were not examined by students and/or literacy workers, tensions and misunderstandings often arose. Shelley, for instance, would become frustrated with students who did not turn up for meetings or fulfill their promises to do something. In examining the factors that led to this low level of participation, Shelley stated:

I don't want this to sound really negative, but either they lack the social skills, they lack the confidence, they lack the articulation to say that they don't really think that this is a good idea or they don't want to do it, but you kind of get this passive-aggressive cooperation up until the event, when you really need them, and then they're not there because they haven't believed in it all along. And that's very, I find that really hard to deal with because I'm more used to talking with people and either you agree and you do something or you don't and then you do something else.

The meanings which Shelley ascribed to the behavior, actions and words of students were coloured by her social identity as a white, middle-class, educated woman; her subjectivity affected her interpretation of the world. Weedon (1987), a writer of poststructuralist theory, would probably challenge Shelley's fixed meaning because a basic principle of poststructuralism is that "any interpretation is at best temporary, specific to the discourse within which it is produced and open to challenge" (p. 85). Shelley perceived that the students' behaviour was in sharp contrast to the behaviour of people (friends, family, colleagues) that she usually associated with in her daily interactions, yet she did not question why the students' behavior was different. Consequently, Shelley was locked into a deficit perspective of the students which painted them as lacking confidence and social skills, rather than looking at how the intersection of class, race and gender played a significant role in their participation and willingness to speak their mind.

To close, participatory literacy practices created possibilities for literacy workers to examine their social identity in relation to their students' and to look at how class, gender and race constitute social identity.

Acknowledging difference

As well, participatory literacy practices created possibilities for students to acknowledge their social identity in relation to other students in their group; it was a chance to move beyond descriptors such as "we're all in the same boat" and to look at how gender, class, race, culture and intellectual ability constitute social identity and our relations with others. It should be mentioned that the students did not facilitate the acknowledgment of social identity; rather, it was a role adopted by the literacy worker(s).

The students who attended the student group and/or association meetings in each of the literacy programs differed in terms of race, gender, age, ability and religion. However, Barb, the ALFA literacy coordinator, was the only literacy worker who verbally acknowledged

differences among students. The ALFA group consisted of able bodied Canadians, students who were mentally handicapped, Canadians and immigrants who were not fluent in English, and one woman who was hearing handicapped. From the outset of the study, Barb informed me that she was "afraid" of starting a student group and couldn't "visualize...putting them all together" because of the "diversity" among the students. Rather than denying diversity among the students and treating everybody as the same, Barb wanted a student group that could find "common ground" as well as support the specificity of people's stated needs and interests. Barb dealt with her fears about diversity by naming the differences among the students in a group meeting. My interviews and the photostory with the students indicated that they acknowledged and appreciated the group's diversity. Moreover, the naming and acknowledgment of differences seemed to unite the students and I observed a strong sense of camaraderie and fellowship among the student group.

The Action Read and Literacy Network students groups also consisted of students who differed in terms of class, race, culture and gender. Although the literacy workers discussed these differences with me, they were not raised by the students. These differences sometimes caused tensions among the students. For instance, within the Action Read student group, the students, with the exception of two men, wanted to discuss personal experiences. These two men, who were both immigrants, shared a similar social identity that differed from the social identity of the other students. Shelley perceived that these two men were "turned off" by listening to students "complain" about their lives. Immigrants are often part of a discourse which purports that if you are motivated and work hard, you will succeed. Within this discourse, there is little space for talking about the injustices of life.

As well, differences related to ethnicity among the female students in The Literacy Network created an undercurrent of tension. The Native women, all of whom were also single mothers, were keen to organize extra-curricular activities and criticized the Mennonite women, all of whom were married, for not wanting to participate. Jean informed me that

"they [the Mennonite women] just want to come to school. They don't really want to do anything." The Mennonite women, in turn, were less critical of the Native women, and simply said that they did not agree with organizing and participating in extra-curricular events. If the Mennonite women did agree with increasing their participation, would they be "allowed", given that they lived in traditional, patriarchal families where the men were the spokespeople? Would the social relations between the students have changed if the Mennonite and Native students had examined and discussed how their particular social location or their ethnicity underscored their reasons for non/participation?

To summarize, participatory literacy practices created possibilities for students to acknowledge their social identity in relation to other students in their group and to look at how gender, race, culture and intellectual ability constitute social identity and relations with others.

Questioning pedagogy

Finally, participatory literacy practices created possibilities for literacy workers to question their pedagogical approach with students -- an approach that rested on social relations more than methodology. In the beginning of the study, each of the three literacy workers who worked directly with the student groups chose a different pedagogical approach. Barb vacillated between a bottom-up and top-down approach, Shelley advocated for a bottom-up approach and Liz adopted a top-down approach. Shelley, for example, soon realized that the bottom-up approach was unfeasible since the majority of students were used to being passive recipients of a program's services as well as being users rather than doers in the wider socio-economic context; they were used to having people tell them what to do. Therefore, by introducing a bottom-up approach, one is introducing a sudden change in social relations between the educator and the student. Mid-way through the study, Shelley realized that the students needed more time, experience and skills in order to make the transition from participating in student group meetings to actively organizing these

meetings. In terms of skills, Shelley was initially reluctant to introduce facilitation skills as this would not be consistent with the bottom-up approach. Towards the end of the study, she realized the need for promoting vicarious experiences so that the students could learn skills, which do not come "naturally", but rather, are socially constructed attributes that are part and parcel of social location and privilege. As educators, we may think our skills are "natural", but this may be because we have reached such a point of automaticity that we are unconscious of them. In summary, participatory literacy practices created possibilities for literacy workers to question their pedagogical approach with the students.

The role of dis/organization

On a final note, this study indicated that social relations within people's lives and within literacy programs play a role in the social dis/organization of their lives and their programs. This dis/organization limits the students' possibilities to participate in their programs in ways that move beyond being a "student", and limits the possibilities that programs will actively pursue participatory practices. By dis/organization, I am referring to the ways in which people's lives are organized around the needs of others and the ways in which this disorganizes their lives (Horsman, 1989). In this study, women, in particular, cited a *lack of time* and childcare as significant barriers to participation in students meetings and program activities as well as the larger public sphere; they lived their lives around the demands of their children, and in the case of the Mennonite women, around the demands of their husbands. Although the possibility existed within this study and within participatory literacy practices to question how discursive practices dis/organize lives and programs, the issue was never explored. Consequently, students talked about their busy lives and blamed themselves for not having the time or skills to do more with/in the program. They did not look at how the social relations within their families contributed to the dis/organization of their lives. Although the literacy workers were cognizant of the multiple demands of the students' lives, they still expressed disappointment when the students did not attend meetings and events.

On a similar vein, the Action Read staff lamented their *lack of time* to pursue participatory literacy practices in their program, saying that the "timing wasn't quite right." Indeed, the constraining effects of Action Read's administrative contexts was a barrier to engaging in participatory practices. Yet, we never examined the social relationship between the state and the Action Read program and how this relationship created a set of discursive practices that regulated the program's time, playing a significant role in what the program's staff was ready and willing to do. According to Ng (1988), who studied the politics of community services, the state:

fundamentally constitutes a set of social relations which (a) legitimizes certain course of action, thereby rendering other (alternate) forms of action illegitimate; and (b) organizes how people relate to one another. What is important to grasp is that these social relations are relations of domination and subordination: they are relations of power (p. 89).

It was difficult for the Action Read staff to justify the material resources needed to institute student involvement when the government did not recognize participatory literacy practices in its funding system.

In Alberta, the government's only measure of accountability for volunteer literacy programs is the number of students served per year. The higher the rate of participation in a program, -- participation meaning the number of people served -- the higher the probability that the Department of Advanced Education and Career Development will increase the program's grant. The Department pays lip service to the principle of community participation, but funding is connected to *rate* of participation rather than student involvement.

In closing, the social relations within people's lives and within literacy programs play a role in the social dis/organization of their lives and their programs. This social dis/organization limits the students' possibilities to participate actively in their programs and the possibilities that programs will active pursue participatory literacy practices.

Implications for Theory and Practice

The findings point to the need to reconceptualize the follow areas of adult literacy: participatory literacy practices, literacy, literacy programs and literacy education.

Reconceptualizing Participatory Literacy Practices

Prior to engaging in this study, I assumed that participatory literacy practices were the locus to alter power relationships between literacy workers and students, and in turn, create new roles for both parties. However, the findings indicated that identity politics play a pivotal role in the transformation or reproduction of power relationships between literacy workers and students. The question, 'Who are we in relation to the students and their issues?' needs to be posed by literacy workers so that they can recognize and explore their privileged position in relation to that of the students. Arnold et al. (1991) state that "an unwillingness to recognize and learn about the role of social identity will ensure the perpetuation of power relations and will hold back the work of education for social change" (p. 15). This means moving beyond the notion that 'we're all in this together' towards the recognition that the subject positions of educators and students are lodged in power and differences between these subject positions will affect the ways in which we actively interpret the word and world and the ways in which we work together. Opportunities need to be provided so that literacy workers can collectively explore the questions of social identity and privilege, as it is highly unlikely that a literacy worker in Sundre, Alberta will begin posing these questions to herself. Provincial organizations, such as the Literacy Coordinators of Alberta and the Alberta Association for Adult Literacy, could provide venues and opportunities for workers to engage in a pedagogy that explores these issues.

The literature on participatory literacy practices heralds personal development as a major benefit of participatory literacy practices. However, in this study, personal development did not emerge as one of the key benefits among any of the participants. The findings indicated that literacy workers and students emphasized different benefits, with the students citing "community" and "moving from silence into speech" as major benefits and the staff stressing how participatory practices provided students with opportunities to represent their interests and perceived needs by having a voice and, in the case of ALFA, a vote in the shape and structure of their programs. The differences between the literature and student and staff perceptions points to the need for more discussion on this topic so that people are not working at cross purposes as they advocate participatory literacy practices within their programs. This means that spaces need to be created inside and outside of programs for students and staff to come together and ask the critical question: "What is student involvement and what do we want it to be?"

The findings indicated that the students, particularly those who held leadership positions, were confused about their roles and concerned about their performance. Therefore, educators need to work closely with students, particularly the group leaders, in student groups and/or associations. Rather than adopting a bottom-up, hands-off approach, literacy workers need to move between a top-down and bottom-up approach, and develop a mentoring relationship with the students. As educators, we need to view our facilitation skills and techniques as socially constructed attributes that have been developed through years of education and experience. People with low literacy skills are often outside the circles of opportunities where one can develop these attributes and, therefore, as educators it is our responsibility to teach, share and perhaps demystify facilitation skills and techniques.

Finally, the findings indicated that literacy workers viewed participatory literacy practices as an action and production oriented mode of activity; they placed importance on doing. The students, on the other hand, wanted to be engaged in a dialectical process of being and

doing; they appreciated the chance to simply "be" with other students, to discuss and share ideas. As educators, we cannot underestimate the importance and the benefits of spending time discussing ideas. Therefore, we need to challenge and contest the production-oriented discourse which shapes our practice. Rather than viewing participatory literacy practices as activities and events such as serving on the board, forming a student group, and public speaking, we need to view participatory literacy practices as a process that gradually evolves over time. This, in turn, may alleviate the frustration and disappointment which the literacy workers felt when students did not turn up for events. Perhaps literacy workers need to understand that participatory literacy practices do not originate with the formation of a student group or having a student serve on the board; rather, they originate from a way of thinking about egalitarian social relations.

Reconceptualizing Literacy

In this study, the programs' mandates centred on providing a "basic educational service" and "literacy development opportunities" for students. This translated to providing reading and writing opportunities for students. Within the wider literacy community, the theory and practice of adult literacy also emphasizes the visual aspects of literacy such as reading and writing while the oral aspects of literacy such as speaking and listening are often overlooked. Yet, in this study, the students seldom, if ever, spoke of the visual aspects of literacy. Instead, they spoke of their difficulties in overcoming their fear of speech. This points to the need to reconceptualize literacy and to place more emphasis on voice, on speech. By this, I do not mean that mini-courses should be offered on public speaking. Rather, the concept of student's voice should be problematized so that both students and staff have a deeper understanding of their fear of speech, rather than equating it with shyness and/or passivity. Then, opportunities should be created within and perhaps outside of programs for students to move from silence into speech. For instance, volunteer literacy programs could organize safe spaces for students to come together to talk about their

experiences and their issues. Perhaps, in time, the students could collectively make presentations at community and public forums on issues which personally affect them as a group.

Reconceptualizing Literacy Programs

The programs that were involved in this study relied on individualized tutoring with volunteer and paid tutors. Although The Literacy Network was classroom based, it still used individualized tutoring as the primary mode of instruction. In Alberta, all volunteer literacy programs are also based on individualized instruction and there is little, if any, group work.

The findings from this study indicated that students value community and a sense of solidarity with other students. They often spoke of the isolation in their lives and of feeling alone in the world. The students valued participatory literacy practices because they brought a sense of community into their programs.

The students' strong desire for community points to the need to challenge the "each one, teach one" concept that pervades throughout Alberta's literacy community. There need to be more opportunities in programs for group work to occur. This means that the Government of Alberta's Department of Advanced Education and Career Development needs to recognize the validity of group work and that funding of volunteer literacy programs should not be negatively affected if they pursue group work.

Reconceptualizing Literacy Education

In this study, the literacy workers viewed education and social interaction as separate entities. This is not surprising as literacy within Alberta is usually viewed as reading and writing and, to date, professional development for literacy workers has focused on

methodology and "hands-on" activities simply because this meets the literacy workers' perceived needs; they want something they can "take home and try". The students, on the other hand, expressed a need for more social activities. As well, they continually talked about their personal experiences and their issues within the student groups.

In each of the student groups, the conversation often steered towards the personal as students talked about their experiences with "systems", with social assistance, with sexual abuse and so forth. In this study, the literacy workers spoke of their fear and their reluctance toward listening to the students' personal stories within the student groups and/or associations. As well, there was a belief that listening to personal narratives was a form of therapy and this was not part of adult basic education.

Perhaps there is a need to reconceptualize literacy education in Alberta. Rather than focusing on learning functional skills such as reading a sewing pattern and a driver's manual and filling in forms, activities which are geared towards having students fit into the existing society, we need to acknowledge the importance of personal narratives and facilitate a process whereby students can see that personal troubles are, quite often, social issues (Kirby & McKenna, 1989; Mills, 1959). In turn, this means that literacy workers need to develop a stronger knowledge base in critical theory and pedagogy. I do have a fear that a move in this direction could result in nothing more than a two day course on popular education. What I visualize though, is more of a process whereby literacy workers can begin to examine their positions about literacy education and the assumptions that underscore these positions. Certainly, literacy workers would need training in how to work with groups in ways that allow them to examine critically their issues and experiences. As well, literacy workers would need training in how to deal with differences among individuals in group settings.

Recommendations for Further Research

This thesis opens up many channels for further research. A longitudinal study which traces whether students who become actively involved in their programs eventually become more involved in their communities would be valuable. As well, a comparison of participatory literacy practices between community-based and volunteer literacy programs would provide insight on how ideology shapes practice. Finally, participatory or action research on implementing participatory literacy programs within a conventional literacy program would benefit the program, literacy workers and students as well as increase the general knowledge base on literacy practices.

Visions

This study developed and affirmed my views of literacy, of what it is and what it could be. My reconceptualizations of literacy are overshadowed by sadness and anger, as I see the negative effects of the Alberta Education and Career Development's "new" vision for adult learning in Alberta, a vision which rests on individualism, skills training and 'accountability'. If this vision is not contested, it will become even more difficult for literacy programs to create the possibilities that were outlined in this chapter. In order to contest the dominant discourse, it is imperative that literacy students and workers develop their own vision, hopefully a vision that provides opportunities for students to collectively read the word and the world, a vision that rests on egalitarian social relations, community and participation, a vision for a world in which it is not us against them.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A
PHOTOSTORY TEMPLATE

Photograph

**who?
where?
doing what?
props?
position of people?**

Text

Page number

APPENDIX B
PHOTOSTORY

Some people don't know what the Learning Centre is all about. This book will explain it.

Sister Beryl started the learning room in 1981. She was a teacher. She wanted to teach adults. She was excited and scared.

This is where it started. At first it was a women's program. Wendy was the first student.

Alice tutored at the Women's Program. This program grew and became the Learning Centre. Alice became the first coordinator of the Learning Centre.

Alice moved in 1992.
Mary became the
coordinator. Mary also
used to be a tutor.

This is our Learning
Centre today. We
moved here in 1986.

When Ben came to the Learning Centre, he felt nervous. He was nervous because he didn't know what the Learning Centre was all about. He didn't know what to expect.

Sometimes Ben wonders what people think of him because he is coming here. He used to wonder what people were thinking. But now he forgets what people are saying. He's coming here for himself.

We like the Learning Centre because it is free.
You can come in on your own free will.
You can come and go as you please.

We like working with the tutors.
We learn and laugh together.

We are treated like human beings. We feel accepted for who we are, what we are, what race, gender and creed we are. We don't feel discriminated against.

The Learning Centre feels very comfortable. We meet people and make friends. We hear other languages. You do not feel threatened or out of place.

It is not like when we went to school before.
They do not put us in a corner with a cone on
our head.

We are learning more here than we did in normal school. There we slipped through the cracks. The classes were large. The teachers did not have time.

We are all learning to read, write, spell and do math. We can also work on the computer.

We have a choice on what we want to do. The program helps people make their own decisions.

We like all the different programs. We enjoy going to conferences and going to the reading and writing workshops.

Some of us write our life stories. Then we put them on the computer. The stories sometimes get published with our pictures. It makes a person feel good about themselves. We have published something that we can be proud of.

Then when people read your story they can understand your situation and relate to it. Others learn that they are not alone in this world.

Some of us interview
people in the community.
Mary felt nervous the
first time. Once she got
into it, she loved doing it.

Mary and Eddie sit on
the Learning Centre
board. They discuss
what the students
want for the program.
They write reports
about our activities.

Hopes and Dreams

We would like to have group get-togethers. We feel relaxed with everybody in the group. It opens up our thoughts. We could talk about how people are progressing. We could have guest speakers.

We want to change the attitudes of others.

We want to show other people that we are doing something special for ourselves. We want to show that we are dependable and responsible.

We want more space so we can get young kids in to continue their education. Then we can take time out to help them.

We want to share our knowledge and thoughts with others who are less fortunate than we are. We would like to help the next generation.

APPENDIX C
STUDENT GROUP INTERVIEW

GROUP INTERVIEW

- (1) How did this group get started?
- (2) How often does this group meet?
- (3) What sorts of things do you talk about during student meetings?
- (4) What sorts of activities has this group planned?
- (5) What are your hopes for this group?
- (6) What sort of support is this group receiving?
- (7) Has this group faced any problems?
- (8) Have you formed some goals for the upcoming year?

APPENDIX D
CONSENT FORM

CONSENT FORM

My name is Pat Campbell and I am a student in Adult Education at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education. I am interested in learning about student groups and student involvement. I hope that what I learn will be helpful to your group, and to other students and literacy workers who are interested in student involvement and forming student groups.

I agree to participate under the following conditions:

* I will allow the interviews to be tape-recorded. I understand that the interview is being taped so that nothing is missed and my words are not changed or misunderstood. I can turn off the tape-recorder anytime during the interview.

* I agree to allow Pat Campbell to share the information from the interview with students and literacy workers through publications and conferences. However, I understand that my privacy will be protected by disguising names and other identifying information.

* I understand that I can discontinue participation in the study at any time. Furthermore, Pat Campbell will destroy my past records, if I so desire.

* I understand that Pat Campbell will not be evaluating my performance.

Signature _____

Date _____

APPENDIX E
STUDENT INFORMATION QUESTIONNAIRE

STUDENT INFORMATION QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Name: _____

2. Gender: _____

3. Birthdate: _____

4. Address: _____

5. Place of Birth:

City /Village _____

Country _____

5a). First Language _____

6. Marital Status:

Married: _____ Divorced/Separated _____

Single: _____ Widowed _____

7. Number of children at home: _____

Number of children who have left home: _____

8. Are you presently:

employed full-time _____ studying full-time _____

employed part-time _____ studying part-time _____

working at home _____ unemployed _____

retired _____

9. What is your occupation?

10. What have your former occupations been?

11. Highest level of education achieved

Less than grade 9 _____	Grade 12 _____
Grade 9 _____	1 year college/university _____
Grade 10-11 _____	Other _____

12. When did you join this program?

13. Have you ever been in another literacy program?

Yes _____ No _____

13a. If yes, please indicate the length of study

14. Have you ever belonged to any organizations or groups?

Yes _____ No _____

14a. If yes, which group(s)?

15. Have you ever attended meetings through work or through your involvement with organizations or groups?

Yes _____ No _____

16. Have you ever held a position such as chair, president, vice-president, secretary or treasurer? (check the appropriate answer)

Chair _____ President _____ Vice-President _____

Secretary _____ Treasurer _____ Never held a position _____

16a. Have you ever been interested in holding a position?

Yes _____ No _____

17. What sorts of skills does a person need to hold a position?

APPENDIX F
STUDENT INTERVIEWS

STUDENT INTERVIEWS

1. How did you get involved with the program?
2. How did you get involved with this group?
3. What sorts of other groups have you belonged to in your lifetime?
4. Tell me about your experiences with the student group.
5. What are the benefits of the student group?
 - to you
 - to others
 - to the program
6. What is the staff's role?
7. What suggestions would you have for somebody who was thinking of starting a student group?
8. What does student involvement mean to you?
9. Why is it important for literacy programs to have student involvement?
10. What changes have you noticed in yourself since you became more involved in the program?

APPENDIX G
STAFF INTERVIEWS

STAFF INTERVIEWS

1. Tell me about your literacy program.
2. What were the beginnings or the seed of student involvement in the program.
3. How did the student group begin?
4. What does student involvement mean to you?
5. How has your thinking about student involvement evolved?
6. What are the benefits of student involvement
 - to you
 - to the students
 - to the program
7. What is your role vis a vis the student group?
8. How do you think the students perceive your role?
9. What sorts of supports, if any, do staff need?
10. What are some of the questions you have been asking yourself.
11. What are the main issues/activities that the student group has been involved in?
12. What are the strengths and limitations of participatory practices?
13. What are the goals of the student group? Have they asked you to work toward them?

APPENDIX H
PHOTOSTORY CONSENT FORM

Consent Form

Pat Campbell is a university student at the University of Toronto. She is going to publish a photostory about ALFA.

I give permission for my photograph to be used in the photostory. This photostory will be shared at conferences. Although my name may be changed in the photo-stories, my picture will be in the photostory. Therefore, my privacy is not protected in this project.

I understand that I can discontinue participation in this project at any time. Furthermore, Pat Campbell will destroy my photos, if I so desire.

I, _____,

(print name)

agree that Pat Campbell can print and publish photos of myself in the photostory.

(signature)

(date)

APPENDIX I
HISTORICAL TIMELINE

APPENDIX J
ACTION READ STUDENT INVOLVEMENT QUESTIONNAIRE

ACTION READ Tutors: Please assist the student you work with in filling out this form at your next lesson. Attached is a stamped envelope for returning this form. We appreciate your time.

ACTION READ Student Involvement Questionnaire

Name: _____
(Your answers will be confidential).

ACTION READ has started a student group. We look forward to seeing you at our next student get-together. This is a chance for you to meet other students. We want to hear your ideas and expectations. Our next get-together will be on **Monday, March 1st at 7:00** at ACTION READ. We hope to see you there. [Press the buzzer if door is locked!]

1. Are you interested in coming to monthly student get-togethers?

Yes _____ No _____

2. Some students are unable to attend monthly student get-togethers. We would like to know what is holding people back from attending monthly student get-togethers. (Please check one or more responses).

_____ I am only interested in learning to read and write.

_____ I have no transportation.

_____ I have children who require baby-sitting.

_____ I am not interested in meeting other students.

_____ I am shy.

_____ I am too busy.

_____ I live too far away from ACTION READ.

_____ I did not know about the monthly student get-togethers.

Other: (please specify) _____

Turn over

3. In this questionnaire, we hope to find out whether ACTION READ students would be interested in becoming involved in activities above and beyond their reading and writing. Please put a checkmark beside any activities that interest you.

_____ planning social activities for ACTION READ students and tutors

_____ fundraising for ACTION READ

_____ helping to choose library books for ACTION READ'S library

_____ serving on the ACTION READ board

_____ public speaking

_____ helping to train ACTION READ tutors

_____ planning conferences for literacy tutors and students

_____ talking to the media about ACTION READ and literacy

_____ welcoming new students into the ACTION READ program

_____ helping to evaluate the ACTION READ program

_____ I do not have time right now

_____ none of the above

4. If you are interested in coming to the get-togethers, when would be the best time for you to come?

Daytime _____ Evening _____ Doesn't matter _____

**Please return this questionnaire to ACTION READ by March 1. (We'll accept late questionnaires!) Thank you for your time.

APPENDIX K
LETTER TO SHELLEY

February 1, 1993

Dear Shelley,

Enclosed is your transcript from our interview. If you have time to re-read it, you may find that you would like to add or change something. Also, something that we talked about may spark off another idea. Just put a mark beside these spots and we can go over them during our next interview, perhaps in late March or April.

In addition to giving people back their transcripts, I also like to share preliminary findings with staff and students. So, in this next section, without using names, I will share some findings from my interviews with ACTION READ students.

To begin, I must say that I entered the interviews feeling discouraged that the same students, with the exception of Geoffrey, Bill and Daniel, were not coming out to meetings. I do not see a problem with working with a small group, but I do see a problem in continually working with different students. I was also discouraged that the meetings were not moving beyond "talking".

However, after the interviews and after doing some reading and thinking about group process, I felt more upbeat!! Every student that I interviewed was really positive about the meetings they attended. They did not enter the meetings with any expectations, other than to meet some other students and to "gather more knowledge about what others are doing".

All of the students enjoyed the social aspect of the meetings. This is something that I'm finding across the province. Although I would hope that there was more of a political agenda at the meetings, this is not what the students are wanting. At least not right now!! The ACTION READ students want to organize social events for other students. Although I pointed out the financial cost of this, they did not seem to think this was a problem and spoke of fundraising!! The students seems to think that through social events, more students might want to join the students group and become more involved in ACTION READ.

I'm quite interested in the students' desire for opportunities to meet other students. They reported that they like the support that comes from meeting others. One student liked the networking and felt that meeting others might provide contacts for jobs in the future. I think that the students are really looking for a sense of community through these meetings. In

fact, one student announced that he was going to make a pronounced effort to engage in conversation with more students when he comes down for lessons in the learning centre!

Another aspect that students are interested in is knowledge about systems. They want to know how Action Read is funded, who the players are in the government, etc. etc. I am finding that this may be everyday knowledge to 'us' as educators, but that students could really benefit from this type of knowledge. They also spoke of being frustrated by "systems" in our interview. So, perhaps the student group could even be a place to start sharing our knowledge about "systems."

Of all the students I interviewed, only one voiced that students should have a say in ACTION READ because the program was for them. This person thought that students should be on the board. This person said "actually cause the program is based around students like literacy people and I think the students should have a say what goes on in the program. [ACTION READ] should have insight of the students."

One student is very keen about the meetings and writes each one down on his calendar. He liked to learn about what the other student groups were doing around the province. He was interested in the student groups that had a janitorial contract but realized that this was probably only possible in smaller communities.

In the interviews, nothing emerged about some students having "stronger voices" than others in the meeting!

I asked the students about staff members' roles in the students meetings. They saw staff as providing support and taking notes!

Three students participated in developing the student involvement questionnaire. They really liked being involved in the process and mentioned that they would have liked to spend the whole afternoon on it!! We spent a lot of time talking about whether we should have a question like "Is it ok for someone from the student group to phone you about our next meeting?" We never resolved whether to put this on the form or not. One of the students felt that this question might be offensive to students who want privacy and confidentiality. They were worried that you might get in trouble for having this question on the form!

One of the questions on the form was "What other activities would you be interested in being involved in?" I asked the group of students to generate a list of possible activities. I

found it interesting that the group could only come up with one or two ideas. e.g. planning social events. This suggests to me that they are unaware of all the possible ways students could be involved. e.g. choosing books to purchase etc. etc.

The students felt that perhaps others weren't coming to meetings because the word "meetings" scared them off. The word meetings conjures up images of reading and writing. So, we decided that the next meeting (if there is one) should be called student get-together.

The students who helped develop the questionnaire are interested in tabulating the results in March. I told them that we should be happy with a 50 - 60% return rate. These 3 students would like to have another meeting in March and to advertise this meeting on the questionnaire.

To conclude, I suppose that I am trying to get away from the notion that a group has to do "activities" or "things". Perhaps discussion, if it is moved from the personal to the political, is enough at the beginning of a group's formation. I had the strong sense that students just wanted to get together! And then I thought about the support group that I belong to for my studies at University. We get together once a month and go around a circle and talk about our progress. This is, in itself, informative and supportive.

I am wondering if it is worth your time and ACTION READ time to organize monthly meetings if such a small number are turning out. Is it worth the hassle? Finally, I am wondering how you are feeling about all of this and how it is going!!

Please let me know if there should be another student meeting in March or whether ACTION READ wants to go another route and involve students in different aspects of ACTION READ or whether student involvement is unfeasible in a program that serves such a large geographical area. Also, if you do decide to have another meeting, is there any way I can be more helpful as I know Thursday evenings are extremely busy for you! If you decide not to have another meeting, there is still alot that other programs can learn from your experience.

Finally, would you be interested in doing a joint workshop on student involvement at the next conference. I was thinking of also asking J. and B. I noticed in our interview you wanted opportunities to talk with others. We could have a *really casual* get together with other coordinators. I'm sure everyone has a lot of questions and we could get a good discussion going about the challenges, benefits and limitations of student involvement.

Hope I haven't rambled too much!

Sincerely,

Pat

Cast of Characters

Action Read program

Jody.....full-time literacy coordinator
 Shelley.....facilitator of student group
 Lisa.....part-time literacy worker
 Isabelle.....clerical assistant
 Geoffrey.....student
 Bill.....student
 Ted.....student
 Maria.....student
 Jacob.....student
 Ernie.....student
 Vicky.....board member
 Henrietta.....chair of board

The Literacy Network

Haines Junction program

Liz.....full-time literacy coordinator
 Bonnie.....support staff member
 Jean.....President of student association
 Susan.....Secretary of student association
 Jennifer.....student
 Heather.....student

Creston program

Sylvia.....support staff member & chair of literacy council
 Cameron.....student representative
 Harold.....student

Virden program

Paul.....President of student support group
 Sally.....Secretary of student support group

ALFA program

Barb.....literacy coordinator
 Lois..... literacy worker
 Peggy.....President of student group
 Donna.....Secretary of student group & board representative
 Heidi.....student
 Ziva.....student
 Bev.....student
 Roger.....chair of board