

Doing Freedom: An Ethnography of An Adult Literacy Centre

by

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Abstract

My research is a study of the experiences and perceptions of the people of the Reading and Writing Centre in Duncan, BC. Based on a sociocultural perspective of literacy and using a framework of power, this ethnography explores what a dialogic, learning-centred literacy program looks like from the perspective of the people involved and asks : how are power and authority operating in this place? The purpose is to document the relationship dynamics of good adult basic education in a place where teachers and students say they are “doing freedom”. The study shows how doing freedom within this educational environment means creating and maintaining a community relationship and a facilitative power system through the force of the teachers’ philosophy and vision of a learner-run centre.

The study builds on current research about participatory practices and student leadership within adult literacy programs. My analysis of the relationships amongst students and teachers is placed within the context of the politics of the North American literacy discourse. Analysis of the efficacy of the Reading and Writing Centre illuminates why the dominant literacy discourse is problematic and pushes us to critique the specific elements and ideas of individualism, the deficit model of adult literacy education and the narrow definition of literacy and literacy education.

Since my research focus was to hear from students and teachers and to explore their perceptions of the Reading and Writing Centre, ethnographic research methods were chosen. I completed five months of fieldwork, with two-day visits to the Centre every week for participatory observation, interviews with nine students and two teachers, and two discussion groups with students. During the research process, artifacts were used as a tool for data generation, for reciprocity, and as a way of testing my ongoing analysis of the data. I created artifacts (in the forms of sculptures and diaoramas) to visually represent my responses and interpretation of the themes that were arising from my observations and interviews, and then shared several of the artifacts with people at the Centre. These artifacts depict issues in the research process, power dynamics amongst students and teachers and illustrate elements of my theoretical analysis. Research participants also created sculptures and dioramas during group discussions.

My use of artifacts evolved to include them as a research presentation tool. The presentation of this ethnography and the ethnographic process involves an interactive installation of the artifacts with explanatory posters, followed by a participatory workshop that explores the implication of this study for literacy practice and practitioner research. This style of research presentation extends the accessibility to this ethnography beyond the academic community and creates opportunity for audience interaction and multiple-sensory engagement.

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My thanks to you all !

In Memoriam

Christina Patterson
1952-2001

In memory of Christina Patterson,
who leaves the sounds of her glorious laughter
that rolled up from the depths of her being,
and a vivid imprint of a strongly independent and creative spirit.



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Chapter One: Introduction

This chapter gives an explanation of the impetus for the research study and its significance in the field of adult literacy. The key concepts of abundance and disruption are introduced and woven through a description of my fieldwork location and the outline of my theoretical framework.

Why this Research

This research was initially triggered by a personal need to find out some good that was happening in adult literacy education. Having recently shifted from early childhood education to adult education, I received my first introduction to the field of adult literacy, the theories of Paulo Freire and issues of power in education during the completion of a literacy instructor certificate. I embraced all three wholeheartedly. But I was appalled and disheartened by what I learned through my practicum experiences, my observations of literacy programs and my literacy tutoring experiences. In these experiences, I learned about demoralization and debilitation within programs and classrooms, about the narrow perspective of what constitutes literacy and literacy education, and about the lack of respect and value for the adult literacy field itself.

My teaching practicum in an adult literacy classroom exposed me to administrative stereotyping of adults with low literacy skills and abuse of teacher authority and power. During my interview with a potential practicum supervisor, I was questioned about which “side” I was on regarding literacy teaching philosophy. The literacy instructor rolled her chair very close to mine, and leaning inches away, boomed, “Are you Freirian or are you skills-based?” This same literacy instructor informed me that she was there to teach reading, writing, and math skills and she was not interested in the students’ lives or what they did with their literacy skills in their lives. Another experience that deeply influenced me was joining a community literacy organization that had a tendency to missionize literacy and had a condescending attitude towards learners. These experiences fueled a desire to understand the broader context and roots of such behaviour and to explore ways to influence change.

During my graduate studies I interviewed several literacy practitioners to explore their understandings of the present issues and to deepen my understanding of the field. I heard about teacher burnout, lack of support for literacy instructors, and the consequences of insecure and piecemeal funding. Literacy practitioners talked to me about the marginalization of literacy programs within the university-college setting, and the marginalization of themselves as teachers, and their students as learners. I heard about the funding priority of employment

training over literacy education, and the need to “sneak in” a literacy component to most of the job training programs at a private college.

Through my adult literacy volunteer tutoring experiences in two different communities I took the opportunity to explore some students’ experiences and perceptions. This sharpened my interest and desire to hear more from students, and student voices surfaced as a definite priority in my research study. I also wanted to help create or find literacy education environments that would help meet the needs of the people I was tutoring, people who fell through the cracks of existing programs. I was convinced there must be places where basic literacy students are treated with dignity and respect, where teachers are not authoritarian or patronizing.

And through fortuitous circumstances, I found such a place. The Reading and Writing Centre, located in a storefront setting in downtown Duncan, Vancouver Island, BC, is a place that had recently been opened by teachers who had the goal to be a learner-run literacy centre – a place where some very interesting things were happening:

There's something about this place, you can feel it when you walk in the door.
(Vicki Noonan* commenting on the Reading and Writing Centre)

When I come to the Centre I have to remember “oh yeah, I don't wear my teacher cap. This is something else” (substitute teacher at the Reading and Writing Centre).

Research Questions

What is meant by this "something"? What is the "something else" at the Reading and Writing Centre and what is the importance of this unique adult literacy educational environment? I was keen to learn about the Centre, to find out what works there for students and teachers and to explore why. Since I wanted to hear from the students and teachers, and to explore their perceptions of the Centre, I chose ethnographic research methods for this study. Through interviews with nine students and the two teachers, two discussion groups with students, participant observation over five months, and many informal conversations with teachers and students, I explored what the Reading and Writing Centre was all about. My initial research questions were: What are students’ and teachers’ experiences of power and authority? According to the teachers and students, what works here for them and why? As I grew to know the Centre, my questions shifted to: What does a dialogic, learning-centred literacy program look like, from the perspective of the learners and the teachers? How are power and authority operating in this place? What contributes to the efficacy of the Reading and Writing Centre?

* Coordinator of Career and Academic Preparation (CAP) program on Cowichan campus.

The Reading and Writing Centre is a learning centred environment that serves as an exemplary model of adult literacy education. This thesis shares and builds upon the perspective that literacy learning is a process of self-development - learning literacy skills is a means or a tool for learning how to learn (Bossert, Cottingham and Gardner 1994) and for experiencing success and building confidence (Battell 2001). The efficacy of the Centre's learning centred education lies in the capacity for teachers and students to "do freedom". Within the Reading and Writing Centre, the teachers' and students' experiences of doing freedom are analyzed within Gould's framework of freedom as self-development, where the basic social unit is the individual-in-relation. This emphasizes the context of the group or community in the process of self-development. I argue that doing freedom within the Reading and Writing Centre disrupts traditional power dynamics and creates abundance, a term used to describe the generative, sustainable quality of the Centre. I use the notions of abundance and disruption to explain the something different about the Centre, and use them as key concepts both to describe the Centre physically and to analyze the efficacy of the Centre.

Description of the Centre

Abundance and disruption are concretely visible from the outside, before even entering the Centre. While standing on the sidewalk, one can read the student-made banners adorning the windows. The banner, "*Learn To Read and Write*", along with the name of the Centre itself, declares that literacy learning is the focus here and indicates that students are free to openly and publicly declare that they are adult literacy students. "*This Class is Very Relaxing*" expresses some students' experience of the Centre and can be seen as a disruption of expectations that school will be a repeat of previous adverse experiences. The banner declaring "*We Are All Teachers Here*" expresses another aspect of students' experiences at the Centre - disruption of traditional student/teacher roles and relationships. I address these issues of disruption in the literature review and the analysis chapters.

Abundance is apparent when you first walk in the door of the Reading and Writing Centre through the general atmosphere, and from students' descriptions of the Centre as "a welcoming place" and a "freedom place". The something different about the Centre includes this climate of abundance, expressed concretely through the ever-full coffeepot, the weekly free bread delivery, and the profusion of food at the Centre's lunches and events. The atmosphere of the Centre is usually one of ample good cheer and occasional bursts of laughter. Students share cigarettes with one another as well as queries and information. On every table are jars full of pens and pencils for anyone to use. Students can use the photocopier and the computer printer

without paying. There is a large chart on the wall indicating an up-to-date monetary balance of the Student Fund, which is always in the black. Students can help themselves to the “free stuff” that has been donated and placed inside the drawers of a small painted bureau. Many students are on the sparse end of the socioeconomic scale and do not live with such abundance; thus students new to the Centre may take time to accustom themselves to the idea of the continuance of abundance. I observed one young man, who had recently enrolled, take most of the Twinkies from the free bread delivery and stuff them in his jacket pockets. Other new students appear initially reticent and unsure about opening themselves to the social and concrete abundance of the Centre.

Visitors to the Centre are welcomed to partake of the abundance. What follows is a description of a typical visit to the Centre during the late morning or early afternoon. When you first walk in, the sound of the blinds rattling against the door causes the student sitting at the Welcome Desk to look up and greet you. She is usually working at a computer or answering the student telephone. Your glance around the large room takes in full-wall shelves of books with the covers facing out. Some books have stick-notes attached with hand-printed comments saying “I like this book” or “this is an interesting story”. In a cozy corner, lounging on a black cushioned recliner chair with armrests and a footstool, a student holds a book on her lap and chats with someone sitting on a short couch. Small groups of people sit at the three clusters of tables. One is stacking fraction cubes then intently penciling in a math workbook; another is bent over with an arm shielding her writing; several others are reading. A few people at the computers throughout the room are chatting quietly together from their swivel chairs, or playing a computer solitaire card game. The student at the Welcome Desk interrupts your scan of the brightly-lit room to greet you, and to ask if she can help you. The smell of coffee causes you to glance towards the doorway to another large room. “That’s the Inhale Room” you are informed, “a place where we have the classes. The kitchen’s in there too, through that doorway. Help yourself to coffee, and there might be doughnuts left from our bread delivery that came this morning”.

As you make your way through the doorway to the Inhale Room, you pass a tall shelf holding math manipulatives and games, students’ floppy disks, extra paper and binders for students’ use. On one shelf are a few large photograph albums that give a visual history of the people and activities of the Centre. Following the coffee smell you enter the Inhale Room, an airy high-ceilinged room full of light from the large storefront windows and glass door. As you help yourself to a mug and pour the coffee, your eyes wander up to computer-made signs taped to the cupboards. One sign bluntly announces “Just Do the Dishes” and another, entitled “How

to Do Dishes”, gives step-by-step instructions about disinfectant and proper rinsing procedure. There are various donated items in a bureau that students are free to take, and the large cupboards nearby are full of the free bread delivery from that week. On the counter are few doughnuts in a box and some remaining crumbs from an opened Twinkies package.

In the centre of the Inhale Room are several tables arranged in a horseshoe shape on which sit more containers full of pens, sharpened pencils and scissors. A shelf on wheels is in a corner by the tall windows and contains a television and video player, along with a radio and audiotape machine. A flip chart stand holds a pad of large lined paper, the top page outlines a Monday Meeting agenda list written in thick blue felt pen. The handles of two roll-down maps of the world and of Canada are visible above one of the chalkboards. If you pull down that map of Canada and cast your eyes to the extreme left you can find Vancouver Island, but you will have difficulty seeing the dot that represents the small city of Duncan, the location of these two rooms that are the Reading and Writing Centre.

The Centre came to be through the initiative of the two teachers, Kate Nonesuch and Christina Patterson. They moved their fundamental English and Math classes, with about thirty registered students, from the university-college to a downtown site on Jubilee Street to help them further realize and enact their vision of a centre that would be learner-run.^{**} Their extensive experience with adult literacy students, their political awareness, and their concern for more equitable power relationships propelled the move to better work towards their goals and to provide more opportunity for autonomy of students, teachers and the Centre itself. This study looks at the experiences of the people within the Centre in order to explore and understand what goes on there.

Significance of the Study

There are three significant and distinct elements of this research: the unique qualities of the research location, the theoretical framework and my personal impetus for this study’s accessibility and relevancy. This study maintains that the Reading and Writing Centre is an efficacious adult literacy education environment which generates and sustains a strong sense of freedom, equity and community. There are few examples of adult literacy ethnographic research in settings that work to give opportunity for freedom and equitable exercise of power to students. Fingeret (1984; 1990) points out that research is often conducted in classrooms where there are unequal power relations between teachers and students. She explains how these relations contribute to practices that nurture and propagate the stereotype of incompetent nonreaders who

^{**} Further details about how this move was accomplished are in Appendix D.

are low in self-esteem and reluctant to take risks. Fingeret asserts that such research unfortunately usually ignores the limitations created by observing and interviewing adults in settings in which they are made to feel powerless and that the culture of adult literacy students is judged within the normative framework of the dominant group's cultural patterns. This includes the emphasis and value placed on schooled literacy and the unquestioned authority, power and privilege of the teacher position.

This research starts from a different place, from a different perspective and from a different environment. The limitations of the dominant ideologies that perpetuate stereotypes are a key focus of this study. The research location is a place where students experience something different from being made to feel powerless - an environment that works to disrupt the cultural norms related to teacher and student roles and to the meaning of literacy in their lives.

I needed a theoretical framework that would take into account the uniqueness of this educational environment and that could help explain the something different about the Centre. My analysis strategy is based on a framework of relationship, using relational theories of power, social literacy theory and the concept of learning centred education to help understand and explain the Reading and Writing Centre. The disruption of traditional teacher/student relationships and power dynamics is explained through a relational theory of power. Social literacy theory is used to analyze the Centre's abundance, which I argue grows from a sense of community. The concept of learning centred education is used to challenge and problematize the dominant ideologies within literacy and education discourse that help to inequitably position teacher and student within adult literacy education - specifically through individualism, deficit thinking and the scarcity paradigm.

The third element of significance within this study is my personal impetus for meaningfulness and relevancy. An objective of this research has been to create something of use, not only for myself as a student in a Masters program, but also for the research participants and for the intended audience. It is important to me that this work would be accessible and not destined to become a dusty tome on a shelf. To ensure that this would not happen, I actively engaged in an ongoing process of sharing what this research was about, both with my research participants and the people in the literacy field. This thesis has become a tool in my work in adult literacy research. Two adult literacy journals made requests for articles about my work using artifacts as a research tool (Soroke 2002; 2003). I have given presentations about this work at academic and adult literacy conferences and institutes in Canada, United States and United Kingdom. The sharing has included a public display of zipper sculptures installations;

slide show presentations and workshops given to students, teachers, administrators and funders of adult literacy programs; and my involvement in online and face-to-face discussions with experienced practitioners and researchers in the adult literacy field.

My ongoing contact with the Reading and Writing Centre continues to open up possibilities and opportunities to communicate the efficacy of the Centre. In April 2004, I travelled to Montreal with Carolyn, one of the student participants in this research. We were invited by the Centre for Literacy in Quebec to present at two events - the GRASSROOTS: Community Writing and Arts and the Blue Metropolis Montreal International Literacy Festival. Further plans for this research include a July 2004 presentation in the form of Reader's Theatre at a UK conference, which I then plan to develop into curricula for use in adult literacy classrooms. My rationale is accessibility – wanting students and teachers to access this research through a format they can understand and use.

This involvement supported the research and contributed to the significance of this study in a number of ways. I was able to share ideas and reflections with people in the field, which helped keep this study grounded and helped maintain my awareness of balancing theory and practice. The use of artifacts as a research tool for personal communication and reflection was extended to include a tool for data generation and participant reflection as well. Bringing art-inquiry into my research works to build upon methodological knowledge in ethnography. Finally, through sharing the process of research I was able to experience firsthand and concretely the ways that research can build upon existing knowledge, and how each of our studies can contribute another piece to the larger picture. My familiarity with the adult literacy field broadened and deepened as I became an active member in that community. I was fortunate to experience the responsibility, reciprocity and respect for the knowledge and experience within the adult literacy field through both contributing to and receiving from others.

The next chapter tells the story of how this research was conducted, followed by a review of literature on power, literacy and education. The analysis chapters explain the philosophy of the teachers and the Centre's facilitative power system. The data analysis is developed using three elements of Luttrell's learning centred approach – dialogic instruction, mutuality, and community. The final chapter summarizes the themes and suggests that education at the Reading and Writing Centre is a process of normalization and an exercise in democracy. Implications for practice and for further research are discussed. An epilogue tells a short story of the process of writing this thesis. The five appendices are descriptions of the research participants, the consent

form, the interview questions, a story of the move to the storefront location, and a story about Audrey, one of the student participants.

Chapter 2: Methodology

This chapter gives a brief explanation of ethnography and the method and issues commonly related to ethnographic research – data collection, informed consent and relationships within the research process. My art-based inquiry as a methodological approach is described and explained through the use of artifacts as a research tool. This is followed by a description of the data analysis and a discussion about the shifts in my thinking and perspectives that occurred during the process of this study.

Ethnography

Ethnography is the direct study of human beings in interaction and claims that “knowledge, while always tenuous, is best established by doing fieldwork, that is, research with people in the natural settings” (Haig-Brown, 1992:101). A key assumption within ethnographic inquiry is that one can reach a better understanding of the beliefs, motivations, and behaviours of people in the research setting than by using other methods. I wanted to know how the teachers and students experienced the Centre and to understand what those experiences mean to them, thus this was best explored through ethnographic fieldwork that consisted of participant observation, general observation, and formal and informal interviews.

Ethnography is a combination of research design, fieldwork and various methods of inquiry to produce accounts, descriptions, interpretations and representations of human lives that are historically, politically, and personally situated (Tedlock 2000). An ethnographic study works to place situations, events and understandings into a fuller, more meaningful context. This thesis works to describe, interpret and represent one period of time in the life of an adult literacy centre, and is situated within the historical and political context of adult literacy education in a North America.

I agree with other tenets of ethnographic inquiry that include the assumption that human group life is a process – a dynamic and relational process where we are shaped by the people and events around us (Prus, 1994). People influence one another and humans develop cultures through this process of connection and making sense of those connections and situations. Thus the life of the Reading and Writing Centre and the life of my research process are included in this human group life process. As an ethnographer, I planned to be attentive to all aspects of the Centre during my early observations and to involve myself in the interactions and dynamic process of group life within the culture of the Centre. Ethnographers become personally involved and enter into firsthand interaction with people in their everyday lives. Thus there can be potential problems when conducting ethnographic research in maintaining the delicate balance

required between involvement and over-involvement, sometimes termed as “going native” (Shaffir, Dietz and Stebbins 1994:41). I experienced an identification with literacy students and in the epilogue following the final chapter, I discuss some of those struggles related to that identity.

Reflection In Research

Another important aspect of ethnographic research is what Haig-Brown (1992) terms the “self-reflexive character of study” (102), where the conscientious researcher acknowledges her impact on the world she studies and attempts to be explicit about her assumptions. In my concern and respect for the people at the Centre, I wanted to be clear to them what my stance and beliefs are about education, so I chose to present myself through words and visuals during the first group meetings with them.

I was also aware of mutual influencing effects – that I would be affected by and would affect the people at the Centre. One student approached me as a confidante and wanted to talk about problems with her boyfriend and with drinking. The circumstances and crises in some of the students’ lives emotionally moved me and necessitated much reflection and journal writing in order to work out the boundaries of my role as researcher. The death of one of the teachers was an event that deeply affected me as well.

Christina Patterson died during the summer of 2001. She had undergone surgery and treatments, but the cancer returned. Her death revealed much to me about the depth of relationships amongst people at the Centre, and that I had become a part of those relationships. For a time after her death, I experienced many challenges and emotional struggles related to talking about Christina with others, listening to her voice on the interview tapes, and helping to deal with all the ensuing changes at the Centre.

Another area of reflection was my absorption with educational politics and my keen interest as a student, a mother and an educator in exploring power relations within my own life. Kirby (1989) helped me see that my decisions and research strategies were based on “the belief that we must include our own experience and understandings as part of doing research” (7) and that “...who I am circumscribes what kind of research I can do” (21). For instance, I chose interviewing because I am sincerely interested in people and keen to hear about their lives. My choice to use artifacts as a research tool is an extension of who I am as an artist and a scholar. As well, I believed that my own experiences of marginalization and being outside the mainstream (as a woman, an adult student, a single parent, a welfare recipient, an early

childhood educator and a labourer) would heighten my sense of empathy and insight into the experiences of the people I would be interviewing.

Data Collection

Initial Visits

Dr. Allison Tom, my graduate advisor, first introduced the possibility of the Reading and Writing Centre as a research site. She had received a call from Kate Nonesuch, the founder and teacher, who expressed an interest in having academic research conducted at her newly-opened storefront literacy centre. Before my fieldwork officially began in February 2001, I made several visits to the Reading and Writing Centre. My first visit was in October 1999, where during their weekly Monday morning meeting I addressed the group of teachers and students about my desire to do research about the Reading and Writing Centre. They asked a few questions and gave general approval for me to conduct my research at their Centre. I returned in June 2000, upon invitation from the teachers, to attend their end-of-year evaluation day that included teachers, students and college administration. Below is a calendar of the events related to my data collection:

Oct 1999	first visit to the Centre
Feb 2000	interview with Kate for a graduate class project
June 22, 2000	visit to the Centre's Evaluation meeting (by invitation)
Sept 2000	visit to the Centre
Feb 23, 2001	Malaspina University-College Ethics Board Approval
Feb 2001 – June 2001	weekly fieldwork in Duncan
March 13 – May 01, 2001	nine student interviews
May 13&14, 2001	teacher interviews
May 15, 2001	Group Talk #1
May 30, 2001	Group Talk #2
June 11& 19, 2001	Telephone Interviews with students not at the Group Talks
June 2001	second interview with Christina; fieldwork completed
August 14, 2001	Christina's death

Pseudonyms

Actual names of people and places are used except where a pseudonym is noted the first time the person is mentioned in the thesis.

Citation Abbreviations

Interviews:	First two initials of the interviewee, capitalized "I", followed by date of interview, e.g. Audrey (AuI 15/03/01)
Group Talks:	Participant quotations from the two group talks are labeled GT1 or GT2 followed by the date (GT2 06/30/01)
Field Notes:	(FN 03/12/01)
Research Journal:	(RJ 09/01)

During each visit I talked with teachers, students and people involved with the Centre. These initial visits gave a useful glimpse into the general nature and operation of the Centre. That knowledge acted as a valuable guide when working through parts of my research proposal, such as interview questions, reciprocity issues and how and when to fit my work into their schedule. During the whole process I was fortunate to be guided through my ongoing communication with Kate Nonesuch, in person, by email and telephone.

Fieldwork

After all the formal approvals for the thesis proposal and the ethics applications were finalized in February 2001, I immediately began my fieldwork at the Centre, making weekly visits from late February until June 2001. Each week I travelled to Duncan by road and by ferry to spend two full days at the Centre, staying the nights at the house of Kate Nonesuch and Evelyn Battell, who is also an experienced literacy practitioner. Every week the three of us met for dinner, sometimes joined by Christina Patterson, and engaged in rich conversations about education, adult literacy, and the Centre.

On March 5, 2001 I gave an initial presentation about my research to the students and teachers during the weekly Monday morning meeting. I spoke about my background and interests, the purpose and a description of the research, and how students could choose to take part. I also explained about the need for the consent form (Appendix B), which asked for consent in four areas: being observed, being interviewed, participation in group discussions and use of their real name.

There were many interesting comments and questions, the first being a student who asked what I meant by power – did I mean the power of stereotypes, of labels, the power of schools? He commented that it was not them that had failed, but rather the school system had failed them

because it had not done their job. He went on to say that they did not want to be lab rats, or put under a microscope (FN 03/05/01). After I joked about “have I got a maze for you”, I explained my ideas about research and my interest in exploring together the meanings of power. This first response helped open up the meeting for the expression of other people’s worries and apprehension about research. Rene, a student who later consented to be interviewed, said at this meeting:

When I see Bonnie come in the door, “oh she’s here to do research’ and I feel a tightness, I feel a fear (FN 03/05/01).

Christina, the teacher, wanted clarification on what I was actually studying, looking for, and what was I going to do? Later in the meeting she talked about her discomfort with being observed, of having someone watch her while teaching. These comments served as a valuable step in my relationship with the people at the Centre because I regarded their expressions of doubt and worry as a significant opening to our conversations together.

During that same meeting, I answered a query from Kate about the consequences of a student choosing not to participate. Then later, a student suggested that I give a short report each week on how the research is going. Because I wanted to keep communication lines open with the whole group, and not just the interview participants, I was quite pleased that everyone agreed with this suggestion. These weekly 5-minute “reports” helped make me accountable to the group, allowed me to keep almost everyone informed (not all students attend the weekly Monday meeting), and reminded them of the reason for my presence.

After this meeting, I stepped out with my packet of blank consent forms and experienced momentary stage fright. I felt great awkwardness realizing that now I had to actually approach students and ask them to be a part of this research. They have busy times here at the Centre, how can I intrude? What if someone says no? I started with what I do best - simply engaging in conversations with students. I found that most students wanted to talk, wanted to tell their stories and share their writing, so the task of completing the consent form became woven in with our conversations and interchanges. Conversation easily led to my asking if they’d like to look over the consent form, then after a student and I had read and filled out the first form together, I asked another student to witness the signing. The act of witnessing and signing helped create a connection and a bridge with other students and thus eased subsequent approaches. One student I approached consented to be included in only the observations, another consented to everything but the observation. There was one student who did not want to participate in the research at all. My first response to this person’s response for non-involvement was great discomfiture and a

sense of my intrusion. When she first told me, I quelled my desire to bolt and lingered a few minutes to talk about the math work she was engaged in. During the next few months of my fieldwork, I saw her again only a couple of times at the Centre and heard she was taking courses at the College. The Centre allows continuous intake, so new students continued to start during my four months of fieldwork. After the first few weeks, I did not continue to approach new students with a consent form unless we engaged in conversation or I was recording observations about them.

Observation

My observations included what I saw and heard at the Centre; I also collected documents and records, such as the Centre brochure, Student Handbook, weekly Inhale Room schedules, minutes from the Reading and Writing Centre Evaluation meeting, and posters and notices. During my first month of official fieldwork, I chose to type my daily field notes directly on to one of the eleven computers in the Exhale Room. Since there are more computer terminals than seats at tables, I could be less obtrusive and disruptive sitting at a computer along the wall than at a table in the middle of the room, and felt I blended in more with the students and events of the Exhale Room.

I felt a need to interact and connect with people at the Centre. The participant observer role allows the researcher “to get infinitely closer to the lived experiences of the participants than does straight observation” (Prus, 1994:21). So when I attended classes in the Inhale Room, I would participate with the students in the class activities and contribute during the rounds of discussion or reading aloud. This allowed me to experience on a firsthand basis some aspects of the role of students.

Student & Teacher Interviews

I interviewed ten students over the first three months of fieldwork. One student I interviewed left the Centre to take classes at the College, so I focused on the remaining nine students, five women and four men who were all between the ages of 21 and 56 years. Four of the students are First Nations, five are white, as are both the female teachers. During the first two weeks of fieldwork, I individually approached all the students attending the Centre and the two teachers with the consent form and we went over all the items together. During this process, all participants were informed of the choice to have their own name or a pseudonym used. One of the participants opted to use a pseudonym and chose the name she wanted me to use. After completing this thesis, I assigned pseudonyms to the three students that I was unable to contact,

and used the real names of the other four. The real names of all other people and places are used throughout this thesis.

The students chose the location of the interviews – either at the Centre or at a nearby café. Interviews lasted from 45 minutes to an hour. I transcribed all recorded interviews for analysis. One person did not want to be tape-recorded, but consented to me taking notes during our interview. I later used the notes to type up a description of the interview, paraphrasing some of our conversation.

My original plan for arranging and scheduling interviews was to post a list on the wall for students to sign up for an interview time (a technique used at the Centre for field trips). This idea was discarded early in my fieldwork after observing that students appeared to make decisions and time commitments on a short-term basis and also after noting two students' forgetfulness about a pre-scheduled day for a resource person to help with income tax. My decision to play by ear helped change the tone of my presence because I am more familiar and experienced with improvisation than with set schedules. I found that through vigilant observation I could usually become aware of an opportune moment to approach a student when I would be the least interruptive and they would usually be the most receptive.

The interviews served not only as data collection, but also as a first step in establishing a sense of trust and relationship. Following the interviews, I found participants were more likely to approach me to chat, ask questions or share their writing, than were people I had not interviewed.

The students involved in interviews were asked to attend two Group Talks that were scheduled after all interviews had been completed, transcribed and partially analyzed. Two students who consented to interviews initially declined participation in the Group Talks. Later, one of them decided to come to the Group Talks, the other I telephoned at the Centre for an individual conversation about the Group Talk topics, which I tape-recorded.

There were two interviews with each of the teachers. Both Christina and Kate were interviewed in their own homes for about 1-1 ½ hours and I transcribed the interviews. The second interview with Christina was conducted near the end of my fieldwork, outside at a community park. I had interviewed Kate previously in February 2000 for a project in a Research Methods course I was taking and I had tape-recorded and transcribed that two-hour conversation.

Group Talks

I facilitated two group discussions with student participants near the end of data collection, and both were tape-recorded and transcribed. Freire's term "cultural circle" best describes my role and my visions for these groups because "[a] cultural circle is a live and

creative dialogue in which every one knows some things and does not know others, in which all seek together to know more" (Freire in Wallerstein, 1987:39). I wanted to share my reflections and preliminary data analysis with the student participants. As well, I was interested in having participants hear one another's responses and perceptions of the research and the topics brought up in the interviews.

Data collection and fieldwork also included meeting college administrators, talking with substitute teachers, new students and visitors. I joined students and teachers on the Centre's field trips within the community and participated in online discussions that Kate and Christina were involved in with other literacy practitioners.

Informed Consent

Informed consent in this study included issues of literacy levels of participants, confidentiality, ongoing communication and relationship. In qualitative research, informed consent is not a single step procedure that simply involves the signing of a form, as with the psychological/medical model, rather, informed consent is an ongoing process and very much a part of the developing relationship with participants.

For this research study, a formal letter of consent was created to satisfy the requirements of the ethics committees. I agree with Niks (2000) that "[m]ore than having people sign the letter, I think we should think of this as one more event among the many in our research project where we are interacting with research participants and making sure they know what the project is about" (April 25, electronic mailing list). The consent form was written in accessible plain language to make it possible for participants to understand the document they were signing. This was done after consultation with Kate Nonesuch. Using plain language, taking time with each participant to discuss the study, and listening to questions and concerns helped set a tone that decreased possible intimidation about the use of a written document.

Even so, some students initially showed great reluctance to approach the 3½-page green document that I set down on the table before us. After they followed my reading of the consent form for awhile, most would eventually choose to read it as well, along with me, taking turns at paragraphs or sentences. Some words, such as "thesis, interview, authority", caused pauses in their reading. Steven, a student I had approached, looked at the consent form with me, following what I was saying and reading, then read a couple sentences on his own, saying excitedly:

Hey I read that – you know I was following what you're saying so I kind of knew that would be the word [the word was "question"] (FN 03/ 5/01).

The same consent form was used with the teachers. Going over that form with Christina acted as a catalyst in my relationship with her. It helped us work through and discuss Christina's discomfort with being observed and her need for clarification on what "the research" meant. Many important questions came up as we talked. This helped open up and make clearer each of our concerns and apprehensions about the research process, thus illustrating to me how "consent letters turn out to be an opportunity to make explicit some assumptions and expectations that both researcher and participants have about the project" (Niks 2000, April 25).

I needed a continued awareness that "...obtaining a signature on a formal letter of consent might not always genuinely meet the need for true informed consent to participation in the research project" (Tom et al 1994:75), because there are other models of consent that can be elicited. As well as the medical and psychological experiment model of informed consent used in most research, Muratorio (2000), an anthropologist and ethnographer, suggests that there are folk models of consent. This means that informed consent occurs when research participants can incorporate the researcher's role into their cultural idiom, or as Muratorio has experienced "when the person can translate you into her culture" (unpaginated).

The researcher learns the mode of understandings of the group and how they communicate that understanding. The people at the Centre revealed their modes of consent during the course of my fieldwork. One was when Kate informed me that I must be "in" with the students now because I was "showing up in their writing" (FN 04/15/01). A student's remark displayed for me another mode of consent. During a Monday meeting, two students displayed and explained a Suggestion Box they had created.

I ask if I could see what goes into the Suggestion Box, Christina is explaining that the teachers will read through the suggestions and the results will be apparent. I keep asking that I'd like to see the actual suggestions and Judy breaks in with "well put that in the suggestion box!" Laughter (FN 04/03/01).

Judy (a pseudonym) was telling me that if I wanted to make a suggestion, then I was to use the box, like all the other students. I interpreted this as acknowledgement of my presence as more of a student at the Centre, rather than being equated with the teachers, who would have access to the contents of the Suggestion Box. Being considered the status of student gave me a place within the Centre that was congruous with my identity of student-researcher. A third example of what I considered a folk model of consent was seeing my presence acknowledged through typed labels stating "BONNIE RESEARCH" posted by the teachers on the large weekly calendar in the Exhale Room.

For me, the personal relationships with participants lie at the heart of the issue of informed consent, which means being clear and honest about myself with others and maintaining a sensitivity to people's level of comfort and discomfort. As well, my awareness of the relative power and privilege of my position was also important, as will be discussed in a later chapter.

One of the students, who consented to a non-tape recorded interview and chose a pseudonym, did not give consent to being observed. At that time I did not explore further with the student what "no observation" meant. During my fieldwork, I did not remain continually and consciously aware of this request for no observation. During post-fieldwork analysis I was abruptly reminded of this request when I reread the signed consent form and my note at the top - No Observation. My observations of interactions and events at the Centre had included this student and there were key incidents during my fieldwork in which this student was central. To deal with this situation, I did not identify this student directly when describing the events and interactions that included this person.

In retrospect, I see that the informed consent that I set up consisted of choices that were not fully explored – specifically the choice to not be involved in the research, to not be observed or to participate at different levels. The issues around informed consent are complex and require an ongoing questioning of the process of negotiation between researcher and participants, since consent is such an important process of building relationships in research.

Relationships

Since a major component of ethnographic research is building trust, I was very conscious of the importance of getting to know people on their terms, and of actively listening and allowing for time to complete my research agenda. An excerpt from my field notes describes this process with a student who had expressed his nervousness about the research process:

Rene sits by the computer, doesn't seem to be involved in anything so when he swivels on his chair and catches my eye, I go over and ask if he'd have time to go over the consent form. He looks at the clock (2pm), "Oh I'm not sure, I have to be somewhere at 2:30'. I wait, then tell him maybe we could just start in on it and he could say whenever he needs to go. Rene talks first about his doubts, then about a book he read about a woman who went around to many different literacy centres and talked to people and how she did a good job in helping others know about different programs because she'd share what she knew with each program she visited, letting them know what was going on in other places. We discuss why I'm doing my research and my hopes and plans to share the Centre with other teachers and students. He is reassured that he's not being asked to write a report or fill out any forms – I show him where he can write his signature at the end of the form, that we just need to read it over together first. He reads it himself out loud, we talk about it every few paragraphs

or sections. We get as far as page two by 2:30, so we arrange to finish up on Monday when I'm back (FN 03/05/01).

When I was puzzling over how to resolve an issue of reciprocity (how to pay individual students for participation), I reflected upon what I knew about the values and philosophy of the Centre. Two posters hang on the wall at the Centre, outlining their goals and their values. I used their groundwork as a guide, specifically the knowledge that “students and teachers make things happen” (from their poster) and that decision-making occurs at their weekly Monday meeting. Their list of values acted as a guide, especially the one that states: “we ask for help.” So I asked for help with this decision. I approached Kate about my quandary over payment for research participation, and suggested that perhaps this could be a group decision instead of just my decision. Within the week, an email arrived from Kate informing me that the students and teachers at the Centre will be “deciding on a general policy, since often money comes in this way, from people writing or talking about the Centre.” They later made a decision, so I followed the new policy and made a donation of \$20 for each participant to the Student Program Fund at the Centre.

Roles

My roles at the Centre included observer, interviewer, participant, helper and confidant. I chose not to assume the teacher role. Instead I took on the role of student researcher, learning about the Centre and learning about research. I wanted to be able to freely align myself with students, with teachers, and with newcomers, believing I would not have the fluidity and freedom to do that within a teacher role. I declined the offer to serve as a substitute teacher at the Centre while conducting my fieldwork. This decision was based on consideration of the ethics of presenting myself as a researcher, as a student and then next day in the role of a teacher. For many adult students, having experienced a standard education, the teacher position is associated with power and authority. Possible imbalances and differences already existed - I am white, formally educated, and have access to many material and economic resources. I did not want to contribute to more possible barriers in my relationships with them by assuming a teacher role.

After Christina's death, I did choose to act as substitute teacher during the first week of school in September when the newly-hired teacher could not start until the middle of the month. My fieldwork was completed, thus I was no longer visiting the Centre every week. I saw the work as an opportunity to help out at the Centre during a difficult time. As well, it was

personally important for me to connect with students and to attend the Memorial for Christina that was planned at the Centre during that first week.

Artifacts As A Research Tool

I use the term artifact to mean an object produced or shaped by human craft. The artifacts I used as a tool in my research are simple, malleable sculptures, formed from recycled zippers and telephone wire mounted on bases of wood or foam, that depict human shapes in relationship within educative settings. I used the artifacts as a strategy in my fieldwork, as a tactile and visual thinking tool, and as an alternative means of communication. At the Centre during the Monday meetings, I presented sculptures I had created before and during the study. The sculptures were used during the Group Talks with student interviewees. I created a banner with letters formed from zippers and a sculpture of a Reader & Writer as gifts to the Reading and Writing Centre. As well, some students, tutors and a teacher chose to create their own sculptures during an activity and discussion I facilitated about experiences as an adult student.

Rationale for using Artifacts

The tools one chooses as an ethnographer will help shape the ethnographic description, whether the tools are pen, computer, camera, or artifact. These tools are an extension of one's physical being and a reflection of who one is. I have always needed to create and use artifacts to maintain some balance in my life. Art is a thinking tool for me, a means of reflexivity – a way to help move back and forth from the concrete to the abstract. I am a visual thinker and am drawn to communicate in other means besides words and written text. I have always been attracted to the unexpected and the open-endedness of art and visual imagination, and to the creation of artifacts. I believe this process is also integral to the general research process, where the researcher works to make the familiar strange and the strange, familiar:

To tap into imagination is to become able to break with what is supposedly fixed and finished, objectively and independently real. It is to see beyond what the imaginer has called normal or “common-sensible” and to carve out new orders in experience. Doing so, a person may become freed to glimpse what might be, to form notions of what should be and what is not yet. And the same person may, at the same time, remain in touch with what presumably *is* (Maxine Greene, 1985:19).

It was challenging and risky and exciting to integrate my research work and my work with zipper sculptures. I am in accordance with Mary Hamilton (2001) who, in her comments about participatory adult literacy research, recommends that in order to represent the experiences of students as they describe it, researchers employ a range of different sources – photos, video, pictures and visualizations. The insights of people writing about art-based inquiry resonated with

my own work, where I too was acknowledging that there is much that cannot be put into words. As well, I was using the sculptures to connect with people in ways that moved beyond what can be accomplished through interviews and conversation. I was inspired to hear the struggles and discussions about the politics of art-based inquiry within education (marino 1997; Neilsen, Cole and Gary 2001). In the literature there are many discussion about validation and the lack of acceptance of art-based work within mainstream academic qualitative research and explorations of alternative validity (Barone 1997; Bamford 2000).

Creating zipper sculptures was an ongoing part of my analytic process and a means of maintaining some semblance of balance during my struggles with the thesis writing process, which are discussed in the epilogue to the literature chapter. I also chose to represent the experiences of some students through the zipper sculptures and set up opportunities for participants to create their own sculptures.

Zipper Sculptures at the Centre

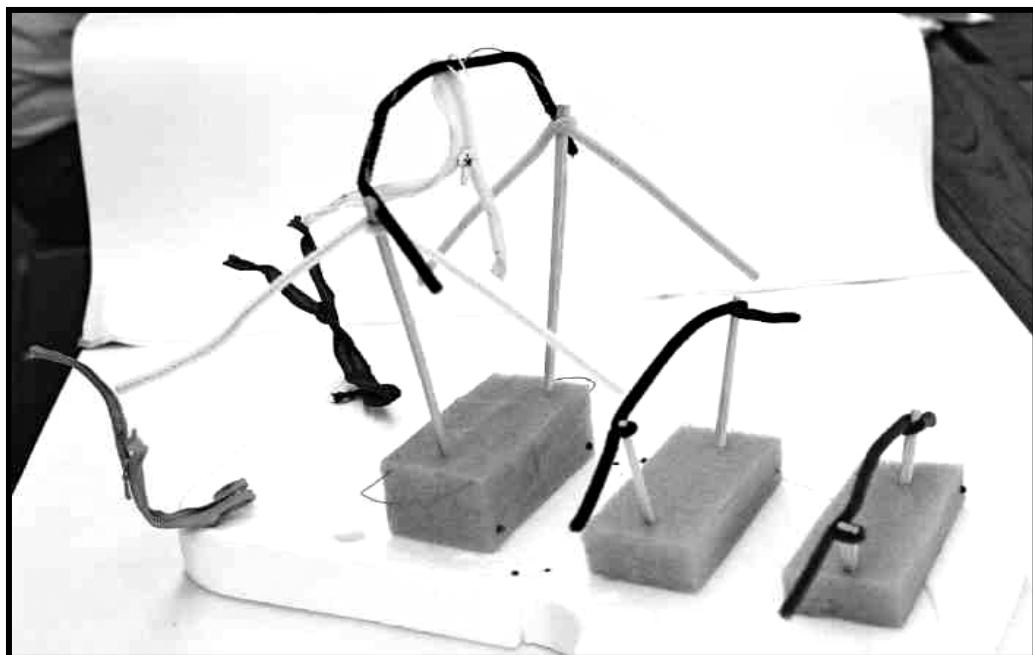
I first introduced the artifacts during one of my weekly presentations to the Centre. I showed some sculptures I had created prior to starting my fieldwork, using them to explain my stance and beliefs about power and authority relationship dynamics. As well, I showed two sculptures I had created in response to conversations and interviews with students. One was a head with a large zipper mouth, titled Voices, and the other was a maze being negotiated by a hand-held zipper puppet. These artifacts were used as a way of testing my ongoing interpretations and analysis of my observations and the interviews with the students.

Responses to this first presentation from the twelve people present at the meeting ranged from puzzled faces and indifference to outbursts of laughter. I courted and welcomed the laughter as a sign of engagement. I was aware of the possible mystique and potential distancing surrounding the artifacts and the art process, so it was important to me to keep the presentation light and interactive. A few people had questions about the Voices and Maze sculptures, asking when, how and why they were made. Christina suggested altering the puppet in the Maze so its feet resembled wheels and could turn, “like when you’re on a roll!” During a later session when several of us were creating sculptures and I needed a model to copy to make changes to the puppet, I asked Christina to please position her body as if she were “on a roll”. Through her posturing we both discovered that we ascribed very different meanings to “being on a roll”.

I had also wanted to create opportunity for people to physically engage with the sculptures and the raw materials, so I volunteered to lead an activity with students, teachers and tutors. During a Monday meeting of students and teachers, I was prompted and encouraged by

Judy, who suggested that we use the “zipper people” on the day the people from the Intercultural Centre were invited. Every two weeks, students from the Centre would visit the Intercultural Centre classes for English conversation and activities with adult students. So during a return visit that had been scheduled, I organized an activity involving discussion and sculpture creation around the topic Being an Adult Student. In small groups they talked together, then sculpted those experiences and presented them to the full group. Some chose to work individually on a sculpture, others created together in groups of two or three. We displayed all the sculptures in one of the Centre’s storefront windows. We heard later that some passers-by wondered if the Centre was a new sewing notions store!

Del and Carolyn, two of the interview participants, chose to engage in the sculpture



activity. The experience of creating sculptures together contributed to my deeper awareness about them and pushed me to uncover and reflect upon my own assumptions about the students and their experiences. When we talked about the sculptures, issues and stories emerged that never came up during our conversations and interviews. This is Del’s sculpture and story, Carolyn’s will be discussed in a later chapter.

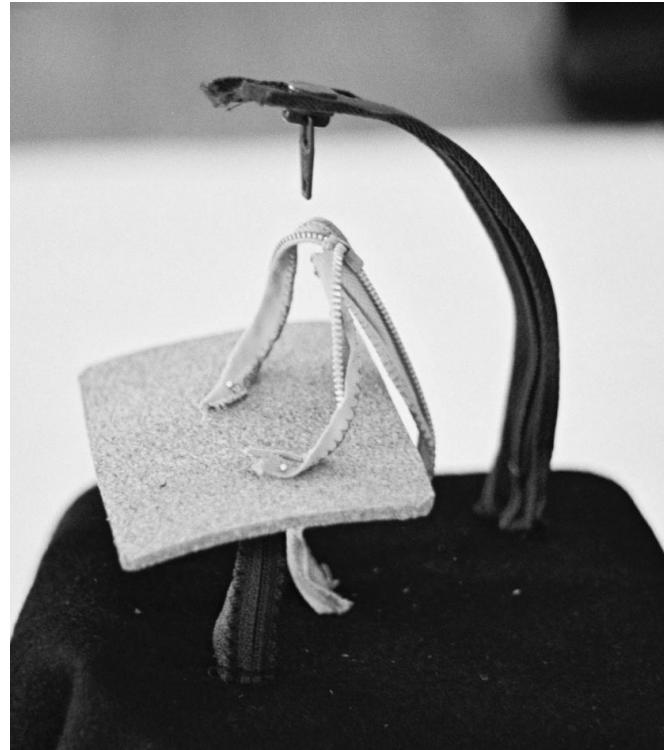
Del portrays himself as the white zipper swinging from the black trapeze line, and explains:

On one of my exciting days I feel like doing things, like taking risks and swinging up there. I made a strong base in order to swing. You start on the lower bar and move up to the next one because the highest one is too big a jump. Sometimes I am also the people on the ground, sitting, watching.

Del's sculpture and his accompanying story woke me up, figuratively speaking, and I had not been aware that I was asleep. During our interview, during the group talks and in our casual conversations I felt I was hearing Del tell the same stories over and over. I realized later that I had closed off to his voice. I was listening but I was not hearing. Seeing his sculpture, I was forced to look again and rethink my perceptions of him and his experiences at the Centre. I learned a lot about risks from Del. He helped me see that our risk-taking is related to the whole context of where we are, who we are and where we have come from. I was given a deeper look of what it means for him to be a student at the Centre, which prompted me to observe people in a different way. My heightened sensitivity awakened empathy about the risk-taking that may be involved in certain actions at the Centre: speaking out at a meeting, sitting down to a computer, or walking in the door for the first time.

Participant Responses To Zippers

My original intent in using artifacts was to minimize the use of written text with student participants. I failed to take into account that the use of art is another kind of literacy, where we are reading the artifact. Rene helped me acknowledge the need to take on the role of guide. During the Group Talk, people had been laughing about the possibilities of changing the positions of the sculptural figures. Rene commented that he could see the humour only after I explained the characters in the above Hovering sculpture, "oh I see that now, I see what you mean with the teacher and student".



Also the medium of zippers and haberdashery is gender specific. They are sewing materials, perceived by some as women's materials. During the beginning of our first Group Talk I had placed several zippers (with the wire sewn into them) and some foam bases on the tables where we would be sitting. Steven picked up one of the zippers, played around with it, bending it into shapes. Then he attempted to engage the two other male students, Rene and Richard (pseudonym), in a bantering and comparison of the size and stiffness of their zippers, asking them "How big is your zipper?" and laughing. They didn't respond, and after a few more

comments to them, Steven threw his zipper on the table, saying “this is so stupid” and turned his swivel chair away from the table.

I see Steven’s use of machismo to engage with the zippers as an attempt to read the sculpture materials in a way that is familiar and known to him. During that same group talk, two other students used the sculptural materials to depict their relationship dynamics at the Centre. Del chose to play around with the zippers, setting three zippers into a base, explaining that two of them are “yakking together” and the third one is backing away. Richard immediately responded that he liked that sculpture and he personally related to the third zipper character that was backing away because he feels a bit like an outsider at the Centre. We discussed those feelings, then he and Del changed and manipulated the sculpture to show how Richard would like to see himself at the Centre – facing inwards towards and closer to the two talking together.

Several sculptures were on hand at the Centre and used as a reference or an illustration during my conversations with students and visitors. People seldom asked about them or initiated conversation. When I questioned students generally about the use of the artifacts, they commented that it “just gives a different look, it just shows what you’re talking about” (LaI 06/19/01), and mentioned specific sculptures that they liked, particularly the Reader & Writer. This sculpture depicts a zipper person reading a miniature version of the published book by Carla Frenchy, a student at the Centre, while the writer has a pencil stub in hand. Generally the sculptures worked well to open up conversation and explore issues with students. They are an open-ended tool and capable of triggering new ways to look at and think about things. Much of our conversation about pushing and teacher behaviour revolved around the Hovering sculpture, which students played with and manipulated into different postures. This sculpture helped to create interactions and served as a concrete springboard that we could keep returning to. Perhaps the sculptures also served as a physical reminder of our conversations and a reflective tool for students.

Data Analysis

The process of analysis for this study was and is ongoing, beginning from the moment I first heard of the Reading and Writing Centre, up to the present moment. I was in a constant process of integration and analysis of knowledge I was gleaning from various sources. This included my fieldwork at the Centre, work with literacy practitioners doing research, participation in adult literacy online discussions, reading literature about literacy, education, power and the research process, and my own experiences and relationships as a graduate student in university.

My research data consisted of taped interviews, transcriptions of those interviews, daily field notes, personal research journal notes, headnotes, documents from the Reading and Writing Centre (e.g. schedules, minutes of meetings, student writing, posters, curriculum information), online discussions, and published writings by Kate Nonesuch. I transcribed all the student interviews, then spent time reading through the interviews for common themes, with plans to use that information at the two scheduled Group Talks with student interviewees. In May 2001, my third month of fieldwork, I stayed away from the Centre for one week to transcribe interviews and do a preliminary analysis before scheduling the Group Talks. During this time, I extracted students' quotations and started outlining some common themes. I worked at ways to summarize and communicate my interpretations to the students without handing them a photocopied sheet full of written text. The use of zipper sculptures was one method, and the other was to condense the themes from their interviews into single words – Respect, Equal, Choice – in order to further explore these concepts with the group. As well, in the Group Talks I checked with students on their meanings of Head Leaders and other student roles, teachers' roles and ways they saw to improve the Centre.

Later, I placed excerpts from all interviews and field notes on about 350 index cards, which were then coded according to categories. These categories were grouped into themes, which were analyzed for relationships amongst other themes, and relationship to theories of adult literacy (participatory, emancipatory programs), theories of critical and feminist pedagogy and to theories of power. The themes, issues and theories shifted and changed many times during the process of constructing this thesis. The themes and issues were further explored by going back and sorting through data that was collected through the Group Talks, my observations, the Centre's documents and my research journals as well as the student and teacher interviews.

The process of forming relationships between my research data and existing theories was grounded and enhanced through my post-fieldwork contact with the people of the Reading and Writing Centre and with people in the adult literacy field. This collaboration served as a validity procedure of building the participants' views into the study in ways that extends beyond the more formalized member checking of taking data and interpretations back to the participants for credibility checks and confirmation (Creswell and Miller 2000; LeCompte 2000). After my fieldwork, I continued to visit the Centre and to have conversations with the teachers and students. This helped me ensure that my analysis would yield results that are meaningful to the people for whom they are intended and described in language they understand. Throughout this whole research process I have struggled with my concerns about maintaining a balance between

meeting the academic requirements for masters thesis research and making sure this study is credible and useful to the people within the adult literacy field.

My work with people involved in adult literacy research in practice helped considerably to maintain this balance. My connections with researchers in North America and the United Kingdom served as a strong support to this research through peer reviews, in the form of verbal and written feedback, that served as a sounding board for my ideas. My conference presentations and journal articles initiated valuable conversations with others and opened up community connections within the literacy research culture.

Researcher Shifts

Throughout this research process, I experienced my own struggles with autonomy, power, and sense of community, as well as studying and analyzing these concepts from the researcher role. The sharing of this process is another tool for analyzing power and autonomy. I am in full agreement with Orner (1992) that “[i]n education, the call for voice has most often been directed at students. Where are the multiple, contradictory voices of teachers, writers, researchers and administrators? The time has come to listen to those who have been asking others to speak” (88).

My inexperience with research and my fervent desire to contribute to social change made for high ideals while planning this research. I had to learn about the big gaps between my visions of what was possible and what I could realistically accomplish in four months of fieldwork. An excerpt from my personal journal expresses my early idealism:

I am keenly interested in working out ways to work with literacy learners on this project – to explore their concerns and agendas in relation to power/authority issues, to develop key questions, problem and issues out of the “data” of their stories.

Until I became more familiar with the institutional requirements for Masters’ student thesis research, the nature of the Centre and the time limitations of my fieldwork, I continued to believe that I could develop my research design with the people of the Centre. As I became familiar with the university research regulations, time limitations and ethics review boards, I found I had to change my original dreams of that kind of collaborative research. I learned to adapt and shift my original plans as I began to understand and create my place as researcher/ethnographer in the adult literacy field through experiencing the realities of working in the field.

My initial beliefs about research included an adamant stance that unless research clearly contributed to social change it was not worth doing. This naïve impatience became tempered during the process of planning and carrying out this research study. In my fervent desire for

social justice and educational change, I believed that exploration of adult literacy learners' experiences and perceptions of power and authority in their education was a means to work toward such change. In my belief that education and research are collaborative enterprises involving the creation of equal opportunity for all to shape and influence the processes of education and research, I envisioned spending time at the Centre collaborating with the students in developing research questions and design together. I believe that research, like education, needs to be structured and organized by and with the people it is ultimately supposed to benefit.

Before I could consider doing research at the Centre, approvals were imperative. Thesis committees must first approve student proposals and the ethics boards of the university and the university-college must approve the proposed research. Before I could secure this approval, I needed to clearly outline the process of my research. My resistance to preparation of this outline stemmed from my desire to first spend time with the people at the Centre in deciding together on the research questions and design of the process. My resistance caused me to further question myself about my reasons for doing this research and to determine what was most important for me. It became clear that interviewing the students was my main priority. I wanted to listen to the students talk about themselves and their experiences at the Centre. The use of interviewing as a method of data collection was threatened during the process of gaining approval from the ethics committee of the university-college. Their concerns were about the method and the question of potential bias; privacy and participants' right to remove references to themselves; the use of real names vs pseudonyms in the final thesis or other products; the question of dissemination of results; and the question of the impact of my presence at the Centre. With the help of my advisor and the support of Kate Nonesuch, we developed strategies to secure approval from the ethics board while maintaining interviews with students. In order to secure ethics approval and to prove myself legitimate to do the research, I needed to make changes to my interview questions and rephrase the consent letter. We drafted a letter to the ethics committee to give explanations about the practice of qualitative researchers offering participants the choice of using real names or pseudonyms; about the practice of research generating academic papers beyond the thesis itself; about the fact that power and authority are issues being addressed in the broader field of adult education; and reassurance that my presence was not expected to detract from students' opportunities at the Centre. I was required to make use of the power and know-how of my advisor, and of Kate and her superiors to complete the task of securing ethics approval.

I experienced other shifts and changes in response to my fieldwork experiences, where elements of my own deficit thinking were revealed. One shift was prompted by a comment from

Christina, when she responded to my written captions on the photographs of zipper sculptures that students had created: “Why do you have to call them literacy students, why can’t you just say students?” She told me that she and many of the students do not like the term literacy student or literacy classes, preferring fundamental. When I spoke later with a few students about this, they said they preferred being called student, or they referred to themselves as “going to the Reading and Writing Centre”, rather than naming themselves.

Christina’s question jarred me into much reflection and had quite an illuminating effect because it forced me to reflect on my original research focus and the subsequent changing design of my research. I began this research with a focus on literacy and literacy students and I had not fully caught up to my shifting interest in power and authority that had evolved. In cloistering the people of the Centre under the literacy student/teacher classification, I was seeing them first through that lens. I had not been aware of how that lens affected my perspective and observations at the Centre. My own deficit perspective was exposed. As I shifted my perception of the learners at the Reading and Writing Centre to students, and not literacy students, I had to let go of the special status I had attributed to the students at the Centre. The shift brought to awareness my preconceptions of identifying all people associated with literacy as marginalized and disempowered – both students and teachers.

The process of reflecting on Christina’s comment created other openings for me. I began to take a broader and deeper look at the teacher/student relationship and dynamics as I moved away from the perception of literacy students and became unstuck from my narrow focus on the place of literacy. This also pushed me to see parallels between my own experiences of power, fear and resistance and those of the students at the Centre. I could more empathetically identify with some of their experiences as adult students.

Equating literacy learners with deficiency is a potent element of the dominant literacy discourse, as will be discussed in the literature review. Literacy, or fundamental education is commonly perceived as being at “the bottom of the heap” (Christina, in conversation) or at the “bottom rung of the ladder” (Hamilton 2001:2). Kate Nonesuch (1998) writes about the effects of this perspective amongst teaching colleagues:

There is more status attached to [teaching] upper levels. I see this when I talk about my own experience; mostly people know me as a fundamentals teacher. When I want a little more leverage in a situation, I make sure people know that I teach grade 11 Algebra as well as Basic Arithmetic. At a meeting of English teachers from all four of our campuses, I referred to my Never-Fail Writing Method. As I began to talk about using it with grade 12 classes, the interest

sharpened; eyes that had been glazed over suddenly looked at me and my methods with new respect. What effect does this have on us and our students?

And what effect does a deficit perspective have on research about adult literacy?

Through my personal experiences in the role of researcher and my relationships with the Centre and the people, I was often awakened to my own narrow vision and my unacknowledged assumptions about people in the adult literacy field. The jarring effects of the exposure of these narrow perceptions and assumptions sharpened my ongoing process of reflection and re-researching.

This process of re-search and reflection was also sparked and deepened through my work with the literature. Throughout this study, I have turned to the literature to puzzle through and reflect upon the ongoing questions that were triggered. I constantly struggled to balance and include the many voices that informed this research – those of the literacy field, the academic literature, the research in practice literature, the participants and myself.

My methods and relationships with the literature were as intense and challenging as the rest of the research process. Behind the scenes of the following literature review are my struggles to understand and accept both the requirements and the authority of academic literacy. As I spiralled through many levels of my own resistance and compliance, I continued to grow in respect of the constantly unfolding process of coming to know through writing and reading.

Chapter 3: Literature Review

“Doing freedom” within an educational environment – what does this mean and how does it happen? This chapter looks at the barriers, struggles and contradictions to doing freedom within adult literacy education through an exploration of the literature about power, literacy and education. The purpose of the review is to deepen understanding about the power dynamics in teacher/student relationships. I am interested in how the positions and roles attributed to student and to teacher are shaped, maintained and disrupted.

I use Carol Gould’s (1988) concept of freedom as self-development. She is an educational philosopher whose principle of democracy is one that is more participatory than representative, and is strongly based on human agency. Gould extends the conception of traditional forms of political democracy to contexts that include economic and social domains as well as the political domain. Her argument for this principle of democracy begins with the proposition of freedom as self-development, a term used in a way similar to educators’ use of “empowerment”. This freedom is grounded in agency, or the capacity for choice, and can be attained only through activities that individuals freely determine. Since we are social beings - individuals-in-relations - these activities involve other human beings. Gould argues that common activity is one of the conditions for self-development; it provides a social context for reciprocity and makes possible the achievement of ends that could not be achieved by an individual alone. Gould maintains that every person who engages in a common activity with others has an equal right to participate in making decisions concerning such activity. She argues that all humans are equally agents and they have “an equal right to the exercise of this agency and a *prima facie* equal right to the conditions necessary for its exercise as a process of self-development” (84).

This thesis is concerned with the conditions necessary for the exercise of agency within adult literacy education, and this is a key focus of this chapter. The necessary conditions are structured around the idea of “learning centred” approaches, introduced by Wendy Luttrell, a literacy practitioner and academic researcher.

Learning Centred Approach

Luttrell’s (1989; 1996) work is used as a focus to look at the ways that teachers and students become positioned: teacher as authority, teacher with power and agency, teacher as caregiver; student as the deficit learner in need of empowerment and caretaking. Luttrell argues the existence of a “lopsided relationship” between teacher and student and suggests the imbalances are related to the learner-centred and caregiving approaches within adult literacy instruction. She introduces the idea of learning centred approaches to address the areas within

adult literacy education that need to be problematized and challenged, outlining three key elements –dialogic instruction, mutuality, and community.

This literature review expands and builds upon Luttrell's work by situating her critique within the larger contexts of adult education and literacy in North America, through an examination of theories of power and of the discourse on literacy and on education. To understand Luttrell's argument of the need to problematize teacher/student relationships and positioning, this literature review first looks at definitions and theories of power in relation to education, then examines the dominant ideologies within literacy and education discourse. The review of the literature finishes with a more in-depth discussion of Luttrell's work about the lopsided relationship and the principles of learning centred approaches.

Power Theories, Literacy & Education Discourse

One of the purposes of this chapter is to show how positions and roles of teacher and of student are related to the definitions and purposes of power and literacy within education. We give meanings to the roles and positions of teacher and student. The meanings we give to things are part of our discourse, which is a set of cultural practices or recognizable patterns of the ways humans are together in the world. Discourses are our ways of being, knowing and doing in the world (Lankshear, Gee, Knobel and Searle 1997). Discursive practices within discourses are the stories we believe, the stories we can tell and the practical engagements these stories imply (Lewis 1993). This includes stories about the meanings of student, of teacher and how these roles are enacted in the relations amongst students and teachers. The stories, or discursive practices, differ according to cultural groups and within cultural groups, and are differentiated by class, gender, sexual orientation, ability/disability, and ethnicity. Our ways of being as teachers and students are culturally and socially constructed; we are shaped by and we also shape the discursive practices.

The social practices within discourses also “signify positions in subjectivity which are always multiple and which are always negotiated within the broader political and economic relations that mark our day-to-day lives” (Lewis 1993:113). The broader political relations this thesis looks at are the definitions and purposes given to literacy and power, and how that is enacted within education. This study adopts the view that teachers and adult literacy students are differently empowered individuals. The power differentials are related to the cultural meanings we give to power, to literacy and to education.

Our western social structure, being predominantly patriarchal, hierarchical and economic, contributes to the disadvantage and disempowerment of both adult literacy students

and teachers. The principles that contribute to this disadvantage and disempowerment that I focus on are: individualism, scarcity paradigm and deficit perspective. This literature review will demonstrate how these three principles are woven through our western culture's dominant perspectives of power and within discourse on literacy and education.

In particular, I want to illustrate how the notion of individualism prevails within traditional power theories and within the dominant ideologies of education and literacy discourse. I will show how this notion of individualism contributes to the placement of the adult literacy learner at the bottom of the heap and helps to lock the positions of Teacher = Power + Authority, and Student = Learning + need for empowerment.

Definitions & Theories of Power in Relation to Education

Power is a complex and multi-layered concept. A basic definition of power is the capacity to act. The capacity to act may mean exercising influence or making decisions that affect one's own life and that affect the lives of others. Generally, writings about power differentiate between power as a possession and power as relational. As well, there are traditional theories of power *over*, and feminist theories of power *with* and power *through*. It is important to look at the underlying values and worldviews of these differing perceptions of power to understand how the principles of individualism, scarcity and deficiency are entwined within those perceptions.

Power *over*, or power as property, is a view that sees power as something that can be possessed and owned, a commodity that can be taken from place to place. Power is understood as finite and is divided up among individuals and groups. The ones who have power gain power through their position within an organizational structure. Leaders are seen to possess more power than followers. Hierarchical and authoritarian structures work to lock power relations and power ownership through positions and roles. Power exercised as property comes to mean power *over* and has been the traditional concept of how power relations work.

The notion of power *over* is the mainstay of traditional power theories where the focus is on the formal positions of individuals and the structure of organizations. Traditional power theorists present static views of organizational power, such that people who occupy higher positions in organizations wield more power (Retelle 2003). Traditional power theories are zero sum theories; that is, power is seen as finite where whatever one gains, another loses (Burbules 1986).

Nancy Harstock (1998), a feminist theorist has explored the consciousness of power as a dominant relation - power *over*. She equates this perception of power to a marketplace

worldview, which presumes the individual as the basic social unit. The focus within a marketplace worldview is on economic development and consumption, with individuals isolated and in competition. Harstock relates how early social theorists, using a domination definition of power, posit society as being managed and controlled by the marketplace, where people are involved in relations of exchange. Thus domination or sovereign power arises from the certainty that there is a need for protection of property and maintenance of orderly relations.

The marketplace worldview is not conducive to equality. Paulo Freire points out that the use of money as a measure and the eagerness to possess, help to create a consciousness that “*to be is to have* and to be within the class of the ‘haves’” (1985:40). Freire goes on to suggest that the beneficiaries, the haves, cannot perceive that if having is a condition of being, then it is a necessary condition for all people. Instead, the have-nots are designated as the Others, and are regarded as incompetents and potential enemies. Thus we can see how power *over* becomes necessary and justified to maintain the privilege and standing of the haves. As well, it is apparent that the have-nots are defined and identified through their deficits, what they do not have. Within western individual meritocracy, there is the dominant belief that every individual can make it if they really try. Thus those who do not make it are deemed responsible for their own plight.

The marketplace consciousness and deficit perspective are related to what some theorists term the scarcity paradigm (Katz 1984; Burbules 1986). A scarcity consciousness is the perception that goods and resources are limited, therefore individuals and communities must compete with each other to gain access to these resources. Richard Katz suggests that through this scarcity paradigm, there is inherent pressure for accumulation at the expense of others and inherent resistance to sharing. Power consists of separate entities struggling amongst one another for control and strength. Katz concludes that politics becomes a story about individuals making it by getting to the top of the hierarchical system and holding their position.

Relations of domination are nonreciprocal social relations that inhibit freedom, since the direction or range of actions one can perform is controlled through control of the conditions surrounding one’s actions (Gould 1988). Gould differentiates between this control or authority and a form of legitimate exercise of authority, which will be discussed in a later section.

Power *over* is a potent notion that both shapes and is shaped by us all. Michel Foucault’s (1980) concept of disciplinary power helps us further understand this potency and the complexity of power dynamics. Foucault maintains that in today’s society, dominant or sovereign power has been replaced by disciplinary power. He explains that all people exercise power on others and on themselves in the everyday practices of their lives. Foucault argues that overt surveillance has

been replaced by self-surveillance. As individuals, we monitor and censor our own thoughts and behaviours, and this monitoring and censoring is shaped by dominant discourses.

Foucault's concept of disciplinary power is helpful to understand the complexity of power dynamics in adult education. Brookfield (2001) articulates how the notion of disciplinary power can increase our awareness of how existing power relations are subtly perpetuated through apparently democratic and participatory practices in education. The coerciveness of power *over* is less overt within disciplinary power. He uses the example of the adult education classic circle seating arrangement used in classes to help create equality and opportunity for all participants. He describes how this well-meaning circle arrangement can work to silence and intimidate students. They may feel more exposed or put on the spot than when seated in more traditional rows. Brookfield suggests that research should look at power by studying the micro-dynamics of particular learning groups in particular classrooms. In accordance with these ideas, the ethnographic descriptions within this study may help contribute to our understanding of the complexities of power dynamics amongst adults in education.

Theories of power as productive and relational (Foucault 1980; Wartenberg 1990; Kreisberg 1992), such as power *with/through*, help to further unwrap the many layers within power dynamics. These writers suggest that instead of power being property that one can possess, power is created and circulated through relationships. Power does not exist on its own, but operates more like an energy or force within relations amongst people. Since power arises in interactions, it is not something one can accumulate, but is a more of a process that one opens up to.

Seth Kreisberg investigated teachers' experiences in schools and their stories about influence and power in relationships with one another and with students. His analysis is strongly influenced by feminist theories of relationship and interconnectedness, as well as by Katz's (1984) field studies of empowerment and synergy within communities. Kreisberg sees power as "a resource produced through human activity and intentions" (1992:82), in contrast to seeing power through a scarcity paradigm framed in terms of competition and domination. Kathleen Hurty (1995), an educational researcher who studied the leadership of women principals, builds on this idea of power as a resource, pointing out that "[p]ower is not a finite resource, but rather a renewable, or expandable resource" (396).

The traditional perspective of having power over others can shift toward one of power moving within a network of relations (Foucault 1980), or a web of relations (Burbules 1986). This study uses this productive and relational definition of power as a resource, and looks at

ways that the flow of power moves and the ways the flow becomes blocked. This thesis demonstrates how power flows within an environment of mutuality, dialogic instruction and community; and it also looks at how the flow can become blocked or tangled within relationships through perceptions of individualism, scarcity paradigm, and deficit thinking.

The flow of power can be used to influence others to exercise power, to become empowered, thus Bernard Malamud's adage - the purpose of freedom is to create it for others - could also be applied to the purpose of power. These ideas form the core of feminist theories of power which are based on human relatedness, connection and acknowledgement of interdependence (Gould 1988; Harstock 1998; Rees 1999). Power is seen as a capacity for fulfillment of potential and as a system of facilitation. Hurty (1995) points out that it was early twentieth-century women leaders, such as Mary Parker Follett, who laid the groundwork for new understandings of power, theorizing about coactivity instead of coercion as the basis for the processes of negotiation and collaborative problem-solving. Power *with* can be defined as "the capacity to act purposefully with the mobilization of the energies, resources, strengths or powers in each person through a mutual relationship" (Walker in Rees 1999:34).

Feminist literature about power focusses on the experiences of power as a basis for theorizing about power. In her case study research with seventeen women principals, Kathleen Hurty (1995) gives a reconceptualization of power through women's experiences and theories of power. She argues that women's power as school leaders is characterized by their attention to human interrelatedness, which involves collaboration. The power focus is on interdependence, participation and reciprocity. She outlines elements of a power *with* mode that include reciprocal talk, defined as a style of communication that "implies turn-taking, both answering and asking questions, listening and responding to what is said" (389). She sees reciprocal talk as a resource of power, naming it a form of decision-making used informally throughout the day and also a useful strategy in building trust. Another element of Hurty's power *with* mode is pondered mutuality – a process that involves "turning things over in one's mind, exploring options, pondering responses garnered through reciprocal talk, checking back with colleagues, cogitation on possible consequences" (391).

Power *with*, along with power *through*, assumes mutuality and equality, and implies different uses of authority. Power *through* is synonymous with facilitative power and is a term used in both business and education. Ruth Rees (1999) uses facilitative power to describe her style of leadership and use of power as a university administrator. In her experiences, facilitative power is exercising power in a way that enables people and resources together to accomplish

tasks at hand. She sees that her facilitation lies in “collaborating, caring and communicating” (43).

Similarly, Dunlap and Goldman (1990, 1991, 1993) explain that a facilitative power system is power through others and is rooted in interaction and negotiation. Their research focus is on facilitative power systems operating within school programs and activities that they see as examples of reform and restructuring of education. One of their aims is to show the power sharing and the skills involved in order help direct school administrators who are experimenting with alternate forms of decision-making with teachers. Their research examined six examples of commonly operating programs or activities that exist in most school districts. This included cooperative learning as a teaching technique, thematic multi-disciplinary curricula, and community and alternative public schools. The characteristics of a facilitative power system are site-based management, decentralized decision-making, teacher autonomy, and a curriculum that is uniquely responsive to the people it serves. These characteristics serve as one of the frameworks of analysis of the Reading and Writing Centre.

Facilitative power implies a facilitator or leader who works to form web-like relationships amongst people and resources. Criticisms of this power system are that it is a somewhat benevolent form of the traditional form of power, that of power *over* others. Critics suggest that facilitative power is “a concept that largely depends on the degree of consonance existing between the administrator’s views and those of the followers” (Rees 1999:34).

Power discourse and conceptions of power can help shift how we look at what we do and how we use power. This thesis suggests that the roles and power dynamics amongst teachers and students in adult literacy education are shaped through the conceptions of literacy itself. In this next section I explain my use of social literacy theory and look at how it can work to make power more visible within literacy education.

Literacy Discourse

Power is integral to conceptions of literacy. Researchers have developed an extensive body of literature regarding the ways unequal arrangements of power are produced, reproduced and maintained within our society and within educational institutions. Dominant perceptions within literacy discourse, such as individualism and deficit thinking, are one way this happens. There is an emphasis on the need to make power visible because “literacy that obscures the power relations inscribed in its construction ultimately disempowers” (Crowther, Hamilton and Tett 2001:3). According to Freire (1976) and Lankshear (2002), the central role in literacy

education is to ask questions regarding the inequalities within society and the power inequalities within teacher/student relationships. This study operates from that premise of questioning.

The following exploration of the principles of social literacy theory is used to illustrate the need to challenge individualism and deficit thinking within literacy discourse and to examine alternatives.

Literacy is a social practice, and it varies as social communities vary. Literacy is always and everywhere a social relation within a community of practice, and not an individual accomplishment in the heads of distinct and separate people (de Castell 1998:6).

Using social literacy theory as a way of studying and researching literacy keeps individualism at bay: it moves away from the notion of the discrete individual to locating the individual in cultural context (Barton 1994) and thus acknowledges that what constitutes society's basic social unit is not the individual, but the individual-in-relation (Fingeret 1983; Gould 1988).

Another rationale for social theory of literacy is the recognition of the broad range of meaning and uses of literacy in people's lives. People in the literacy field use a farming metaphor of the silo and the field to differentiate between a narrow educational focus of literacy as skills and a wider concentration of how literacy is used in people's lives. The silo and its contents represent a conception of literacy that is limited to fundamental skills, skills that are cut and dried, that are pre-determined and stockpiled. The vibrant, ripening fields of growing hay that stretch out over the contours of hills and that are integrally connected to other life forms, represent a different conception of literacy - literacy as social practices, practices that permeate and are connected to the surroundings. The silo, being vertical, linear and contained, signifies literacy defined solely as hierarchical sets of skills to be learned and stockpiled; whereas the fields are varied, indefinite and horizontal in the way that social practices, which involve relationships, vary and grow according the community or cultural context. Recognition of literacy as social practices widens the concentration of literacy education as fundamental skills to looking at how people already are using literacy in their lives and building upon that.

A social theory of literacy is rooted in the social context and is based upon the following beliefs: literacy only has meaning within its particular context of social practice; there are different literacy practices in different domains of social life; literacy practices change over time; different literacies are supported and shaped by different institutions and social relationships (Crowther, Hamilton & Tett 2001). The theory of literacy as social practice has evolved through the work of researchers looking at the ways people use literacy and the contexts of this

utilization. Earlier studies examined and described informal and formal uses of literacy within the home, community and educational system (Scribner and Cole 1981; Heath 1983). De Castell and Luke (1986) looked specifically at literacy practices within schools and found that markedly different skills, abilities and attitudes defined literacy at different times within the history of Canadian schooling. These studies illustrate the range and diversity of literacy practices within the contexts of different domains of place and time. More recently, Barton and Hamilton (1994) show the ways in which literacy acts as a resource for different sorts of groups through their examination of the everyday reading and writing practices of families, local communities and organizations within one community. These studies maintain that people have different ways of using literacy and give different meanings to literacy in their lives.

Recent studies of research in practice by adult literacy instructors document the social dimension of literacy learning within adult literacy education. Pheasey's (2002) research, that looks at learners' perceptions of literacy, affirms the notion that being literate includes a wide range of knowledge and skills about getting along in the world. Evelyn Battell (2001) outlines changes in students' lives during their participation in literacy programs and asserts that these social practices, or "non-academic outcomes" are integral to literacy education. These non-academic outcomes can also be looked on as vernacular literacy practices, a key component of Barton and Hamilton's research that helps to show the different meanings people give to literacy.

Vernacular literacy practices are learned informally and are "rooted in action contexts and everyday purposes and networks", drawing upon and contributing to vernacular knowledge (Hamilton 1998:unpaginated). Looking through the lens of vernacular literacy practices, literacy learning and use are integrated in everyday activities and the literacy elements are an implicit part of the activity. Literacy itself is not a focus of attention, but is used to get other things done. One of my arguments in this thesis is that the acknowledgment and use of vernacular practices within an educative setting are a key means towards the equalization of power relations amongst students and teachers.

Literacy and literacy learning are not commonly seen as social practices, but rather literacy is viewed as individual skills, fundamental to a successful citizen's life. The next section is a discussion of dominant ideologies within Canada - how an individualism focus and deficit orientation affect the perceptions and positioning of the adult literacy learner.

The way literacy is defined determines how people with or without literacy are perceived. Linda Brodkey (1986) argues that all definitions of literacy are political through differentiation of a “literate self and an illiterate other” (47) since the culture’s ideology of literacy defines what is meant by reading and writing. Brodkey points out that the culture’s dominant ideology then helps stipulate the political and cultural terms on which the literate wish to live with the illiterate. Similarly Kathleen Rockhill (1988) speaks of the need to acknowledge and deconstruct the ideological trap of (il)literacy that creates the polarities of literates/illiterates, us/them, and haves/have-nots.

The language of defining through difference based on deficit is apparent in public awareness campaigns and surveys that focus on the lack of literacy skills within the Canadian population (Calamai 1988; IALS 1996). These campaigns and surveys have been criticized for the presentation of illiteracy as an isolated phenomenon, presenting “the illiterate” as a lost soul, as handicapped, and as a blight on the Canadian economy (Rodriguez and Sawyer 1990). Fingeret and Jurmo (1989) remind us that poverty causes illiteracy, not the reverse. Quigley (1990) suggests that illiteracy often serves as a scapegoat for other social ills associated with it, and that rather than attack the basic maladjustments of society, illiteracy has been the recurrent target.

The role of the press works in the maintenance of dominant ideologies (Clark and Ivanic 1997). The presentation of illiteracy as an individual condition of incapacity is maintained and renewed through media discourse. Using examples of literacy campaign posters, a radio program and novels, Jane Mace (2002) describes how low literacy is portrayed as morally bad and a fearful condition. Through an examination of the metaphorical representations of adult literacy in Canadian newspapers, Carole May (2000) demonstrates the flourishing of the illiteracy ideology through the stigma and myth attached to adults with low literacy, who are perceived through stereotypes of Child, Prisoner and Heroic Victim.

This literacy discourse of deficit and individualism limits the identity of adults with low literacy. They are perceived to be on the bottom rung of the ladder (Crowther, Hamilton et al. 2001) or at “the bottom of the heap”, as one research participant from this study commented. The power of this dominant literacy discourse, as argued by Foucault (1980) regarding disciplinary power, lies in shaping how people think about themselves and how they act in the world. The insidiousness of oppression is how it can be perpetuated through the internalization of deficit assumptions and stereotypes of the dominant groups (Freire 1985; Young 1992). The

perpetuation of this oppression is not only present at a macro-political level, but within the micro-politics of power relations amongst students and teachers. Magda Lewis (1993), whose work examines the oppression of women in relation to patriarchal institutions, makes comments about the nature of oppression that also apply to perceptions of people with low literacy:

What makes discourse political and hence a form of governance more powerful than brute force could ever be is that it is arbitrated by a set of social relations among groups of differentially empowered individuals in such a way that it necessitates the discursively disadvantaged to participate in the construction and legitimization of their own disadvantage. It is an attempt to minimize the critical moments and maximize the reproductive moments in the service of the dominant interest (114).

This ethnography works to describe and analyze the tensions and strategies within those critical and reproductive moments that occur within teacher and student relationships, and looks at how adult literacy education can work to both perpetuate and challenge oppression and stereotypes. The terms “adult literacy education” and “adult literacy” learner are used throughout this thesis, but not without concerns and drawbacks. The “literacy” qualifier immediately implies a deficit mode; a literacy student is considered someone who is without, who has not completed their education when they were supposed to and is thus deficient. In the epilogue to this chapter, I discuss my graduate student role in terms of being an academic literacy student and the issues related to that positioning.

What follows next is an examination of the individualism and deficiency perspective within education discourse in order to further question and challenge the positioning of student and the lack of mutuality within the teacher/student relationship. This thesis, along with Luttrell’s work, also problematizes the lack of emphasis on creating community within adult literacy education.

Education Discourse

A comment by Jane Gaskell (2001) that “it is radical to think that schooling would place the same emphasis on community that it places on individualism” (unpaginated), initiated a smoldering of questions for me about the lack of emphasis on community within schooling and education, and the powerful ideology of individualism. The next sections look at the emphasis on individual attainment within western education discourse that is expressed through the principle of meeting individual needs of the learner.

Nancy Lesko’s (1988) research presents pictures of the organizational features in secondary schools that support individualism and reveal the absence of practices that foster a more social view of life. She speaks of “radical individualism” (5) to describe the fundamental social principle that focusses on individual self-interest and self-development. The dominant

western worldview is anchored in the perception of the individual as the basic social unit. Lesko points out that when the individual is perceived as the building block of society, then what follows is the notion that the way to improve society is to improve its individual components. Hence the educational environment becomes a place where learning occurs by and for individuals. She maintains that this results in the reign of the autonomous individual and a diminishment of community.

Richard Edwards (1991), an educational theorist in the UK, furthers the argument about the regrettable lack of opportunity to experience groups and social relations within education. His concerns are centred around the power and politics of the concept of “meeting learner needs” and two of his arguments are pertinent to this study: he questions the naming of who is a learner and critiques the lack of social agenda within education. Edwards points out that even the notion of naming who is a learner is a political one:

We need to problematise and politicise notions of the learner and examine them as an outcome of power struggles and the ways in which practices and ideologies reflect/reproduce/subvert pre-existing unequal relations of power (13).

Discursive practices within education position the teacher as the knower, and the student as the learner who needs to know what the teacher knows (Freire 1997). The teacher’s knowledge and expertise are valued over that of the student, who is viewed from a deficiency perspective.

The second aspect of Edwards’ argument is that the scheme of meeting individual needs of the learner works to fragment learners and to maintain dominant middle-class values. He says that meeting individual needs can be viewed as part of a wider political program to encourage the fraudulent meritocratic dream that we can all make it individually if we are good enough, try hard enough, or are educated enough. This bootstrapism mentality that penetrates education is geared to preparing students to meet a status quo (Briskin 1990; Edwards 1991). Edwards points out that this agenda of education discourse masks the political nature of social relationships and serves to fragment potential sites of opposition by keeping learners isolated and fragmented. Likewise, there is critique by adult literacy researchers about the individualizing aspects of literacy programs that work to fragment and segregate learners in one-on-one tutoring or self-paced individualized learning modules (Horsman 1990; Rodriguez 1990; Rockhill 1998). Similar concerns are voiced by critical educators about the marketplace worldview’s individualizing effects on education and schooling - there is little education agenda for social change, for collective issues of social inequity, justice and democracy (Greene 1985; Shor and Freire 1987; Giroux 1988; Millar 1998). Generally, school is not a place where learners are

exposed to examining power issues, nor are they encouraged or supported to band together to make change.

Feminist pedagogy also challenges the ideology of individualism and the idea that we are each able to shape our lives through individual will and determination, and that any failure is due to personal inadequacy or laziness (Gaskell 1989; Briskin 1990). Jenny Horsman (1999), whose research examines the effects of violence and trauma on learning, declares that the dangers of individualism lie in the blame of the individual for their educational problems. The individual blaming often means the structural inequalities are not addressed, and that poverty and living conditions are not addressed.

Low literacy rates and people with low literacy are considered an impediment towards a prosperous economy. Jansen and Wildemeersch (1998) argue that individualization develops from an economization of social life where “economic growth and accumulation are the prevalent measure to appreciate the utility value of knowledge, skills and attitudes” (222). In dominant North American culture, the expected aspiration of every good citizen is paid work, and education becomes used as a commodity in fulfilling that goal. One of the key reasons for government involvement in some of the first adult literacy programs in Canada was the perceived need for people to have upgraded literacy skills to enter vocational training (Selman, Cooke, Selman & Dampier 1998). Jansen and Wildemeersch’s concerns about the dominance of individualized orientations in the concepts and practices of adult education are that they are “...closely connected to the erosion of social and normative frames of reference that traditionally gave meaning to the lives and experiences of groups and individuals” (217).

I see that the emphasis on skills and academics in schools and the ensuing individual competition leaves little room for collaboration or any agenda with issues related to democratic change. Schools are generally not a place where one experiences or has opportunity to exercise democracy. In this research study, I question what happens when there is a shift of focus of practice to the group from the individual. What goes on in an educational environment where the emphasis is on the individual-in-relation, rather than the individual, and how does this help to reposition teacher and student? This study describes the Reading and Writing Centre as a learning centred environment and posits that the “something different” that happens there is related to the repositioning and the democratization of relationships amongst teachers and students. What follows is a review of literature that examines educational approaches that work towards social equality and democratization within adult education.

An exploration of participatory education and learner-centred approaches can help further our understanding of the positioning of teacher as the authority and the one who knows, and gives a look at attempts towards more equitable repositioning. Participatory education is a philosophy as well as a set of practices. It is about student engagement in decisions that affect their lives directly within the classroom or educational environment. The goal of participatory education, based on principles of equality and justice, is to contribute to the building of a more democratic and humane society. The main characteristics of participatory education are the sharing of power amongst teachers and students and active learner participation in instruction and in management (Fingeret and Jurmo 1989; Tom, Fingeret, Niks, Dawson, Dyer, Harper, Lee, McCue and Morley 1994). Fingeret and Jurmo (1989) stress the importance of incorporating meaning and relevancy in literacy education through student participation. But how does that happen in adult literacy education?

Social literacy theory posits literacy as social practice, thus literacy and literacy learning vary with social context. The relevancy and meaningfulness of literacy practice and literacy learning come out of the content of people's lives. Rodriguez (2001) describes a model of community-based, student-centred literacy education that values learners' lives and experiences. Elements of this model include the use of learners' words and experiences and program goals that reflect local realities. As well, Rodriguez advocates a form of dialogic instruction to ensure that issues of learners' lives have a chance of becoming part of the educative agenda. Similarly, Gaber-Katz and Watson (1991), who conducted a participatory study of community-based literacy, stress the significance of including issues of learners' lives within literacy education while Malicky, Katz, Norton and Norman (1997) advocate for awareness of people's lives when creating programs and environments for their literacy education.

Participatory education is also about the sharing of power amongst teachers and students and active learner participation in instruction and in management. But how can power be shared amongst teachers and students when teachers are in positions of privilege and authority, when students are positioned as isolated individuals in competition? How can there be student engagement in decision-making given the education and literacy discourse that positions adult literacy students as fundamentally incompetent (Fingeret 1984) and at the bottom of the heap? Gould (1988) reminds us that freedom is grounded in agency, or the capacity for choice, and can be attained only through activities that individuals freely determine. How do adult literacy students attain that freedom? Learner-centred approaches are seen as a means for students to choose and determine the activities within their own education.

Learner-centred education, a key approach of participatory education, places a focus on the individual's involvement and participation in their own learning (Fingeret and Jurmo 1989; Norton 2000a). Learner-centredness is about accommodating the needs of each person, therefore the learners set their own learning goals and determine their own curriculum. Teachers place value on learners' prior experience, language, background and culture, and thus design their instruction to work toward learner goals (Fingeret, Tom, Niks, Dawson, Dyer, Harper, Lee, McCue and Morley 1994).

The basic premise, that the student is central to the learning process, is seen as a progressive alternative to teacher-centred education (Gaber-Katz and Watson 1991), where the primary focus is on students acquiring a prescribed content of a course or program. Teacher-centred and learner-centred are often dichotomized to show the contrasting methods and philosophies of the approaches. For example, in their work about the foundations of adult education in Canada, Selman, Cooke et al. (1998) discuss the primary philosophical differences between these approaches in relation to views on the purpose of education. They suggest that educators, who advocate learner-centredness with stress on the active role of the learner in creating and defining the value of what is learned, place emphasis on the value of education for its contribution towards individual advancement or social reform. The emphasis of teacher-centred education is on the importance of initiation into cultural traditions and the intrinsic value of education in itself. Thus it would be easy to conclude that learner-centred approaches have more potential for a political and social change agenda, whereas teacher-centred approaches can hide within a more neutral view of education. Yet there is no guarantee that a political agenda is included in either of the approaches or that one method or strategy will be more liberatory than another.

This lack of guarantee can be seen within adult literacy educational practices, where learner-centred approaches are manifested in a wide range of instructional styles and program delivery options ranging from collaborative and cooperative group learning (Hayes and Walter 1995), to the one-to-one approach between tutor and learner. Learner-centredness may include instructional practices that widely embrace whole language approaches and language experience, or be narrowly circumscribed to the lock-step, self-paced curriculum modules available in workbook series and computer programs. Thus the teaching approaches in themselves do not guarantee any politicization. This thesis argues that in order for something different to happen in adult literacy education, in order for students and teachers to do freedom, there is something deeper than the use of teacher-centred or learner-centred approaches. It is within the relationship

itself that equity and oppression are played out, and the relationship is built upon the day-to-day interactions amongst teachers and students. To help ensure that the day-to-day interactions are infused with more equity than oppression, this study suggests that there needs to exist a teacher philosophy that includes immanence and interdependence of humans and an educational environment that is centred on a mutual learning process. My research suggests that such a philosophy and learning centred focus contribute to more equitable relationships through an increase in teacher humility and student agency.

Quigley (1990; 1992), in his articles on resistance and attrition in adult literacy education, points out that since learner-centred education is designed to work with students and is based on their discourse, potential learners may find learner-centred approaches more relevant and acceptable and thus carry less need for resistance. This is not always the case; learner-centred approaches have their own tensions and contradictions, as illustrated in a collaborative research project that evaluated two learner-centred literacy programs (Fingeret, Tom et al. 1994). The researchers question the underlying politics of learner-centred approaches and point out that the agency resides mostly with the teachers since “the fundamental decision to provide learner centered instruction has been made by the teachers, unilaterally” (13). Another researcher from that project, Dyer (1994), describes the conflicts over students’ reluctance to accept learner-centred approaches and analyzes the gaps and differences between students’ and teachers’ thinking about learning and what it means to each of them.

Learner-centred education does not necessarily mean students and teachers are positioned more equally, but may actually reproduce power relationships inherent in teacher-centred education, such as power *over*. Wendy Luttrell (1996), in her feminist critique of adult literacy education, further discusses such contradictions regarding agency within learner-centred approaches.

Luttrell’s research includes interviews with working-class black and white women involved in literacy learning in the United States (Luttrell 1989; 2000). Her work examines women’s narratives of schooling, identity and knowledge in relation to the concepts of mothering and caregiving. Luttrell is experienced as a practitioner as well as a researcher, having worked in adult education, curriculum development and teacher/tutor training. Her feminist critique of learner-centred approaches in adult literacy brings attention to the imbalance of the equations - teacher equals agency and student equals learning (Luttrell 1996). She calls this imbalance a lopsided relationship and proposes that the roots of the imbalance stem from the caregiving approach in adult literacy education, an approach that lacks an emphasis on two-way exchanges

between student and teacher. Luttrell probes rather extensively into the roots of teacher as caregiver and proposes that these stem from the myths of the “omnipotent mother” who is perceived as able to cure all social ills.

Luttrell suggests that the caregiving approach has its origins in American politics and women’s idealized roles of moral mothers who are used to cure social problems. Within the culturally assigned role of women as caregivers, she points out that it is assumed only “natural” that women are perceived as best suited to the task of teaching basic skills. Luttrell reminds us that most literacy teachers/tutors are women and elaborates on the caretaking and maternal approach to literacy and its negative consequences. One consequence that is pertinent to this study is privileging the exclusive, one-to-one relationship as the primary source of literacy learning. Luttrell questions the learner-centred instructional approaches through expression of her concerns with the widespread assumption about the fragility of adults with low literacy. This fragility and vulnerability are based on a preconception that adult literacy learners are too embarrassed or insecure to work in a group setting. As well, Fingeret (1984) talks about the power of the image of nonreading adults as fundamentally incompetent. This deficit thinking underlies the rationale for individualized approaches that severely ignore the social view of life and education. Both Fingeret’s (1983) research with nonreading adults and Barton & Hamilton’s (1994) work bring to the forefront a need to acknowledge and value the social networks involved in literacy tasks in people’s lives. Their work also shows the importance of recognizing and acknowledging what is happening in people’s lives, rather than focussing only what is not happening or what is missing with regards to literacy.

Luttrell’s close look at the caregiving approach in adult literacy also brings to the surface how relationships amongst teachers and students can indicate a lack of politicization within the practice of adult literacy education. To politicize something is not to bring politics into where they do not exist, but rather to tease out and expose the power relationships that do exist. Caregiving approaches and caregiving language can serve to mask and perpetuate power relationships amongst students and teachers.

Luttrell agrees with the importance of identifying and valuing the caring, empathic and relational work that is integral to literacy education, but argues that the ability to facilitate self-development and positive self-esteem should not be seen as an automatic outcome but as an achievement. She points out that many literacy educators (predominantly women) do not count their work as intellectual – they do not see their own empathy, intuition or knowledge of care as intellectual or professional, and thus “perhaps not surprisingly, the intellectual skills and political

commitment it takes to transform people's lives is most often expressed through family metaphors and the language of love and caregiving" (356).

Quigley, an adult literacy researcher, also (1997) speaks of the caregiving approach in his description of "maternal humanism" approaches that situate the learner in a condescending position in relation to the instructor. Quigley's description is located in his discussion of the underlying philosophies of adult literacy teaching, where he outlines four perspectives of adult literacy education - Vocational, Liberal, Humanist, Liberatory. Horsman (1990) also discusses the limitations of the humanist approach and points out that literacy education is often moved into the realm of a charitable enterprise where "altruism...is the only requirement to be a teacher. Social work, not education is emphasized as the model" (196). The positioning of instructors as caregivers and literacy education within a social work model often works to make invisible or erase the political issues of literacy work both at a micro-political level of the teacher/student relationship and the macro level of how literacy education becomes situated.

This erasure is illustrated in Luttrell's story about a group of American literacy instructors' denial of state administrative efforts to professionalize their work. Luttrell explains that the instructors associate professionalism with lack of personal involvement with students, and comments that these same instructors also deny the political or socially transformative potential of their work.

In contrast, a group of literacy instructors, doing research in practice in Canada, have worked to document, validate and politicize this transformative potential of their work (Battell 2001). The emphasis of their work is to shift and expand the paradigm of literacy instruction and the language used to describe it. Evelyn Battell worked with a group of forty literacy instructors to explore together and learn how to document the changes, or non-academic outcomes, that occur in the lives of adult literacy learners as a result of their participation in literacy instruction. They developed documentation techniques that were field-tested by instructors, tutors and tutor coordinators. Their work names both the caregiving knowledge of people working in the literacy field as well as the student outcomes of that applied knowledge. This naming and politicization works against the existing undermining of literacy practitioners' knowledge and expertise that are strongly based on relationship within education.

Learning Centred Education

Luttrell declares that the main strategy of her critique is to subvert the politics of caregiving through a shift from the narrow focus on the learner to the learning process itself. According to Luttrell, centering on learning requires an emphasis on mutuality, dialogic

instruction and community. These three elements are used in the following discussion about creating alternative power dynamics amongst students and teachers, reviewing literature that supports and disputes assertions about democratizing relationships. I look specifically at discussions about the authority of the teacher and teaching leadership.

Mutuality, an important relationship aspect in feminist research and pedagogy, is seen as a means for researcher and participants, teacher and students to be involved in a process of learning and empowerment. For Luttrell, mutuality is a psychological force of mutual recognition amongst teachers and learners, who are both accorded more agency, intentionality and mutual interest in the learning process. For Tom (1997), mutuality is part of a “deliberate relationship” that teachers cultivate with students. She points out that teachers have a need to engage in a learning and helping connection with others. In a deliberate relationship there is awareness and acknowledgment that a teacher’s intellectual and emotional needs get met in the teaching relationship.

For Shor and Freire (1987), mutuality is part of the social process of a liberatory education, where teachers are redeveloping themselves along with the students. For Gore (1992), mutuality requires educators to exercise more self-criticism, skepticism and humility in their reflexive practice. Jennifer Gore, a self-declared post-structuralist feminist, advocates for a learning process of mutual empowerment in adult education. She problematizes the positioning of teachers as an agent of empowerment, stressing the need for theorists and educators to critique their own critiques of oppressive discourses. This involves the need to exercise humility and to be self-critical and reflexive about what and who is named as oppressive, as liberatory. Gore critiques the attempts of educators to share power or give up power in the name of empowerment. She points out how these attempts may become misdirected without educators’ awareness of the limitations of the institution and of how disciplinary power works to counteract well-meaning practices of educators working to share or give up power.

For Gould (1988), mutuality is an achievement within social relations – a form of full reciprocity. She declares that mutuality includes recognition by each person of the other as free and capable of self-development. As well, each acts with regard to the other in ways that enhance the other’s self-development on the basis of a consideration of the other’s needs, and both take mutual enhancement of each other’s agency as a conscious aim (77). Underlying Gould’s and others’ definitions are the prerequisites of equality and agency. As well, we can see that mutuality also implies a reciprocal relationship of respect. But given the positioning of the

person with low literacy, how can respect, equality and agency even be imagined, let alone experienced?

Jenny Horsman, literacy practitioner and academic researcher, has explored these issues through her research on the impact of violence on learning (Horsman 1994; 1998; 1999). While she was involved in an intensive women's course at a community literacy program, where they were putting into practice the results from her research, she wrote in an online discussion about her observations of the difficulty for students in handling respect:

I watched students really struggle to believe in themselves in the respectful environment we created. Students in the group just came to class and cried and went away again - and only later told me they were struggling with the misfit between judging themselves badly and being treated respectfully and without judgment in the group. Students who talked about how hard it was to believe in themselves enough to keep coming to class and students who said it was too hard to come to class because it was too hard to go back out into the world and be routinely treated so disrespectfully - after the experience of respect in the group.
 Jenny Horsman. (2001, October 06). Creating Change. Message Subject: Counselling Resources and other things. Message posted to <http://alphacom.alphaplus.ca/alphacom>

The students' experience of misfit and disrespectful treatment are experiences that have been shaped through the (il)literacy discourse and the ensuing stereotypes that were previously discussed. Many adult literacy students have ongoing struggles with issues of poverty, racism, and ill-health. The adult literacy field's responses have included caregiving approaches, as well as denial or disregard of the nature of students' lives, as illustrated in my story of the practicum supervisor who chose not to concern herself with students' lives. Horsman's story of her students' experience of respect brings out the contradictions and challenges when teachers do concern themselves with students' lives. I suggest that the importance of working on a process of mutuality and respectful reciprocal relationships within adult literacy education lies in its disruptive potential. The experience of respect is a misfit, a glaring contradiction to the world Horsman's students experience. I heartily agree with the idea that “[u]nless there are glaring contradictions between people's lived experience and the meanings provided by the dominant ideologies, they have no reason to construct meanings that differ from those of the dominant ideologies” (Sehr 1997:61). Awareness of the contradictions can give rise to what Maxine Greene (1985) terms an “imaginative awareness” that enables teachers and students “to imagine alternative possibilities of their own becoming and their group's becoming” (39). This study describes an environment where the group's imaginative awareness is lived daily through their vision of a learner-run centre.

Within a learning centred approach, if mutuality is a means to learn alternative possibilities within relationships, how can curriculum reflect this kind of learning?

Dialogic inquiry or dialogic instruction is all about teachers and students engaged in dialogue and creating knowledge together. Dialogic education is a term used by critical and liberatory educators to distinguish it from traditional education that posits the teacher as expert and giver of knowledge (Shor and Freire 1987; Freire 1997; marino 1997). The rationale for Luttrell's inclusion of dialogic instruction within a learning centred environment is that learners need to have opportunity to discover that personal and individual problems can better be understood as products of larger social inequities.

Shor and Freire speak of dialogic instruction as inquiry or “situated study” (50), meaning the curriculum is situated inside student thought, language and experience. This situated pedagogy involves a participatory process where students and teachers discuss, think critically and co-develop the sessions. Recent practitioner research in practice describes such situated pedagogy within adult literacy environments where instructors are exploring together with learners, and in doing so are creating alternatives to power *over* dynamics. One example is the work of practitioners engaged in research in practice with women who work in the sex trade (Alderson and Twiss 2003). They outline the instructors' challenges of learning about the women learning, the ways the women are taking charge and the ways they as instructors are changing the way they teach. Their learning environment reflects principles and approaches that include mutuality, dialogic instruction and building community.

Within each group, dialogic instruction can thus result in a unique curriculum that evolves through the interaction and problem-posing of teachers and students. A unique curriculum is a key characteristic within facilitative education and power systems that give opportunities for alternatives to hierarchical structures (Dunlap and Goldman 1990; Goldman, Dunlap and Conley 1993). Shor and Freire (1987) discuss the need for students and teachers to desocialize from education experiences within traditional structures that foster learned passivity within the student and place teachers in the position of the expert with knowledge to transmit. They suggest that desocialization involves the construction of peer-relations instead of authority-dependent relations. They, along with other educators, talk about the ongoing tension that exists between students' prior experiences of authoritarian education and a new liberatory class which proposes dialogue and self-discipline. Shifting away from authority-dependent relations requires a different use of teacher power and authority. What does a different use of power look like and how can educators work with teacher authority?

Authority of the Teacher

Feminist educators and researchers were most helpful here. They explore and articulate alternative approaches to power and different uses of power, looking at ways that combine knowing, doing and being. Exploring different ways of perceiving and exercising the authority of the teacher is given some help through the thoughtful work of feminist educators Jennifer Gore (1992) and Allison Tom (1997), who stress the importance of coming to terms with the existence of the inherent power that teachers have through their institutional roles and their particular expertise. Tom asserts that this power “is something we must own and use with responsibility rather than disavow” (11) and suggests ways to work with teacher power. Gore problematizes the meanings and presuppositions of empowerment within pedagogy, while Tom zeroes in on more specific concerns about power issues within teacher and student relationships.

Gore talks about the portrayal of teacher omnipotence when the teacher is positioned as an agent of empowerment. She problematizes the attempts of educators to share power or give up power in the name of empowerment. Using Foucault’s argument about disciplinary power, Gore talks about how these attempts may become misdirected without awareness of how decreases of overt regulation can increase through more covert means. Tom suggests overt and explicit acknowledgment of teacher power and authority, and has developed a set of principles that she frames as a deliberate relationship. By this she means the teacher works from a strong sense of responsibility to create an empowering teaching relationship with students through controlled, purposeful and conscious actions. Her theoretical position on power includes a deliberate use of power and authority through attention to one’s positionality as a teacher. She also brings attention to the shifting dynamic of power, manifest in the changing power relations between teachers and students as the teaching role shifts from expert to partner, and as student increase their use of power.

Transparency of practice, an approach that Tom develops, includes the practices of explaining procedures and intentions, and the teacher establishment of ground rules. Her rationale is to make explicit and raise awareness of the usual hidden norms of interaction amongst teachers and students. As well, the explanations and explicitness can open up possibilities of student opposition, thus “transparency of practice sets in motion a dynamic of empowerment” (1997:17). Tom explains that this opening up of possible negotiation of teacher authority is a key intent of this approach. She emphasizes that negotiation and challenges to teacher authority do not mean abdication of teacher authority.

The traditional authoritarian role assumed by the teacher is based on the expectation that the teacher must coerce, manipulate, or elicit compliance from students (Burbules 1986). Celia Oyler (1996) talks of teachers' attempts to avoid the hard place of authoritarianism by moving to the "soft place of abdicated authority" (23). Tom and Oyler both point out that this disavowal or abdication has its roots in a belief that power is repressive and evil, which maintains the narrow perception of power *over* as the only model.

Teachers can move toward collaborative work with students, but Tom points out that will not dissolve the status and privilege that accrue from the positions of teachers. Gore and Tom both maintain that teachers are not on the same level as students due to institutional hierarchies and practices that they work within. Thus the liberties of the students are shaped by the teachers and their institutions. And with that comes a responsibility for teachers to be aware of and work with the status and authority of their position.

Carol Gould (1988), a political philosopher, shares ideas about authority that stem from her development of democratic decision-making. She suggests that the concept of authority can be less hierarchical and more related to participation. Gould presupposes equal agency amongst people, thus one person cannot properly exercise authority over another, so authority is not understood as a hierarchical relation. Yet since power is a shifting dynamic, as Tom mentions, teachers cannot necessarily assume equal agency with students, but rather see it as their job to help develop it. This development does not necessarily mean a shift to traditional teacher/student positioning, for, as Gould suggests "...any association of agents in a common project, the authority is shared or joint, in the sense that each agent participates in codetermining the decisions" (221). Thus students and teachers work equally on a process of co-developing agency. Gould speaks of authority the way Foucault speaks of power - both authority and power are understood as constituted by individuals in relations. So authority, and power, only exist in relation, and are not abstract entities. Someone does not "have" power, or "have" authority, rather they are granted or assume power/authority within relations.

Teaching and Learning Leadership

But how can adult literacy education envision, let alone support students "granting" authority to teachers? This would involve teachers learning new ways of being and students exercising power, which would generate a major shift from the cemented position of teacher as knower with power and authority to teacher as learner. This cemented position is reflected in much of the literature and research in education, where, when the focus is on power and authority, it refers to teacher power and authority. When the focus is on learning, it refers to

student learning. Fortunately, the work of Norton (1992; 2001b; 2001c) and Horsman (2001a) opens up the research process and the literacy education process to include teacher/researcher learning and student exercise of power. Their work shares the struggles of literacy teachers and facilitators in the process of shifting power dynamics amongst learners and teachers. Through her descriptions of power dynamics within specific literacy projects, Horsman hopes to trigger “rethinking the problems of learner leadership and the complex conflicts that arise during attempts, in the literacy movement in Canada, to support learners taking substantial power and control” (Horsman 2001:77). Norton (2001b) describes her experiences working to share power and “devolve” power during a project with learners.

Other research in practice studies discuss shifting power relations through learner leadership and challenge conventional ideas about teacher-learner roles in educational settings (Campbell 1996; Norton and Malicky 2000). These studies look at participatory practices that contribute to both the transformation and reproduction of power relationships in adult literacy education. Pat Campbell’s study raises questions about social identity and privilege in relation to the fears and reluctance of literacy students to speak out and take part in community decision-making. In a later work, she argues that the limitations within participatory practices that promote student leadership and more dialectical processes are related to a product-oriented discourse within the field (Campbell 2001). Adult literacy programs, projects and proposals that receive recognition and government funding are those that are time bound and tied to products and results. She recommends that teachers develop mentoring relationships with students and take responsibility to teach and demystify facilitation skills and techniques.

These studies point to an explicit acknowledgment of power through learning and teaching leadership. Similarly, Briskin (1990), a feminist educator, also argues the need to name power relations of the classroom rather than masking them. She suggests this is done through teaching leadership rather than assuming it and argues that teaching leadership seeks to “equip students to use power (for those unused to it), to acknowledge their power (for those to whom power has accrued by virtue of their class, race, or gender) and to develop an appreciation of collective power” (451).

Teaching and learning leadership works to disrupt the deficiency perspective and can help keep the caregiving approach at bay through avoiding the use of helping as a way of addressing individuals’ needs and deficiencies. Instead, teaching leadership works with the notion of “change that focuses on assuring individuals and communities of their rights and responsibilities” (Kreisberg 1992:19).

Mutuality and dialogic instruction take place amongst relations with other people, thus Luttrell's third element of a learning centred environment – community – is a logical fit. Beyond brief mention about the need to include community for expansion beyond the one-on-one instructional approach, Luttrell does little to develop the concept of community within a learning centred approach. As well, I found a dearth of literature about the sense of community within adult educational environments. This is echoed a recent article by a UK researcher who looks at the difference and inherent value of community-focused provision in contrast to individual-focused provision (Pahl 2003). Like this study, their focus on community recognizes that learners have links with each other, often like to learn in groups and are members of communities which should themselves be acknowledged and valued. Their research team interviewed providers with the purpose of identifying the constituent parts and ingredients of community-focused provision. Their emerging concept of community-focused provision is characterized by many elements that coincide with this study's analysis of the Reading and Writing Centre, specifically a vision that was based in the hearts and minds of the providers, and delivery that includes a “holistic approach to learning” with “embedded basic skills”(Pahl 2003:17). Similarities of our studies' findings also include attention to the quality of the venue of the learning environment, a sense of community values, and learner participation and leadership in curriculum and evaluation. This ethnography works to build upon these joint findings through description and analysis of the use of group and development of community relationship within the Reading and Writing Centre.

For the purposes of this study, community refers to the group relationship within the educational environment rather than the larger community outside. Sarason's (1974) psychological definition of a sense of community works well to help understand and analyze the community relationship referred to in this study: “[t]he perception of similarity to others, an acknowledged interdependence with others, a willingness to maintain this interdependence by giving to or doing for others what one expects from them, the feeling that one is part of a larger dependable structure” (28).

The following chapters present a picture of the Reading and Writing Centre through the an analysis framework that uses Luttrell's elements of learning centred approaches and Dunlap and Goldman's facilitative power system.

Chapter 4: The Teachers

The learning centred environment of the Reading and Writing Centre is created and maintained through the teachers' philosophy and their facilitative power system. The Centre has evolved a facilitative power system through the teachers' consciousness of group and in their work towards the learner-run goal. My description and analysis of the Centre as a learning centred environment is structured through Luttrell's three main elements of dialogic instruction, mutuality and community. This analysis chapter looks at the teachers' philosophy and instructional approaches, while the next chapter is about the quality of relationships that form at the Centre through mutuality and community.

Teacher Philosophy

The philosophy of the teachers underlies the efficacy of the Centre. Kate and Christina have a political stance on literacy: literacy education is a right; there are social and economic reasons why some students fail in school and others don't; self-confidence, self-awareness and self-esteem are essential to success in a literacy program. Quigley (1997) outlines four working philosophies underlying literacy practice – vocational, liberal, humanist and liberatory – the Centre in action is an eclectic combination of all four, but the teachers' principles lean more towards a humanist and liberatory philosophy.

Kate, a self-declared feminist, shared stories with me about her background of political activist work and experiences working with people in lower socioeconomic groups. Christina talked about her experiences of always having worked with people who did not fit into the regular school system and feeling personal empathy with their sense of not fitting in: "I always felt that they were valuable people and really it was the system that was at fault for these people not being able to fit in there" (Chi 05/14/01). Christina's attitude is counter to the (il)literacy discourse of deficit and individualism that places blame on the individual.

The ethical framework that guides the work of the Centre's teachers is one of immanence - that all people, thus all students, have the right and the potential to exercise and use power. Kate and Christina acknowledge that the learning process includes them as well, evident in their goal and vision to be a learner-run centre. As teachers, they are willing to take risks, and to learn along with the students in finding out just what it means to work at being a learner-run centre.

Kate and Christina place an emphasis on learner agency through the provision of opportunities and skill-learning to exercise power and develop leadership. Underlying this emphasis is a strong consciousness of the group – awareness that as humans we are not isolated individuals, but are individuals-in-relations that shape and are shaped by people around us. The

teachers wanted students to have opportunity to develop more autonomy and leadership within their educative process. This is what prompted their move to a storefront setting. Christina told me that she and Kate did a “lot of talking. [We] had had several conversations on what it would be like to take all the fundamental classes off campus to a site of our own. When finally one year [exhales “fwooh”] it was happening” (ChI 05/14/01).

What do the teachers mean by learner-run? Currently at the Centre, it means teachers and students dialoguing and making decisions about the instructional program that include the curriculum content and evaluation. The teachers envision the eventual formation of a non-profit society headed by a student board that would work in partnership with the college and would actively run all aspects of the Reading and Writing Centre, including hiring teachers. A further aspect of this vision is to generate an income for the Centre to help the College cover the costs of having their own space and to upgrade resources such as computers and furniture. They have discussed and worked on ideas to operate their own business such as taking over the janitorial work of the Centre or do desktop publishing for the community. Christina expressed her doubts about how a learner-run centre would actually happen.

Something that Kate’s said to me all along is, ideally for her, that students have a society, an independent society and they hire us as teachers. So that actually, I have a hard time imagining it could ever happen. Because right now I feel Kate and I are helping people learn how to run the Centre so much, I have a hard time imagining that there’ll be enough people that know how to run the Centre. That we won’t have that job anymore and they’ll just hire us to be the teachers. But that is one view that we’ve kept in mind all the while (ChI 05/14/01).

Christina’s doubts crack open the contradiction of the teachers being the source of the learner-run goal. Is this what students really want? How realistic is it to have a goal of independence and autonomy when the students are dependent upon the teachers to be independent? This thesis explores the contradictions by looking at how the goal works as a process.

My own doubts about the realization of the Centre’s goal increased during my fieldwork. Initially I saw their goal as a Freirian ideal and was quite excited about the potentials. As I became more familiar with the Centre and the full, busy days, the constantly changing student group, and the realities of the Centre as part of the University-College system, I started to see a learner-run centre as an unrealizable goal, an unobtainable ideal. I felt sad for the Centre, sad that they were working towards something that would probably never happen. I was envisioning the goal solely as an end. But through further observation, reflection and more observation, as well as talking with students and teachers, my perspective shifted. I started to see the goal of being a

learner-run centre as a process, not just an end. I started to see that they already act and behave as a learner-run centre on a day-to-day basis. The process is visible through the student-named experiences of respect, equality, choice and freedom, through the touted and lived values of the Centre. The process is alive in the students as they enact the vision through the myriad ways they take on and initiate learner-run responsibilities. Steven organizes and makes lunches; Audrey introduces the idea of a fund-raising event and follows through with a group of students; Laura (a pseudonym) works on relationships with and amongst others.

The teachers are learners in this process as well. Kate and Christina are learning along with the students the limitations and possibilities, the joys and frustrations of what a learner-run centre can mean. The process is alive in the everyday moments of the teachers' thoughts and decisions. Rather than being in a state of mind of preparation towards a goal, they think, act, and make decisions and teach as if they already are part of a learner-run Centre. Teachers embody the learner-run goal and act as an essential force and influence on the students. This brings to mind a reference made by Elsa Auerbach during a conference keynote address, where she referred to Miles Horton's philosophy - that our goals and visions are what guide our journey and if you have a goal you can attain in your lifetime, it's the wrong goal. Thus the purpose of the goal is to instill and maintain a momentum in order to "keep hacking away at visions, dreams and goals" (Auerbach 2002:unpaginated).

So the teachers' vision serves as both a vision and a concrete goal. Kate and Christina exercise their authority within their teacher roles to work towards creating an environment that feeds the learner-run goal and the process of building student autonomy and self-determination. Their actions in creating a goal to work towards this vision are based on their years of teaching experience and being attentive to students – working with them to enhance student learning. Kate and Christina use their authority and privilege with mindful intention, with deliberation and ongoing reflection. They care about the quality of teaching they offer and they have learned through their experiences with adult students. Thus the learner-run goal has evolved through their consciousness and questioning of their actions with students and continues to evolve in the same way.

There are ongoing challenges and contradictions to this goal. The Reading and Writing Centre does not work well for every student or every teacher. Throughout the analysis I discuss the struggles of the teachers in working with alternative power dynamics. This is also a story of the struggles of students, who work to embrace, grapple with and also resist the many elements that contribute to the something different at the Centre.

One of the two key assumptions underlying their learner-run vision is that all people, thus all students, have the right to self-development and have potential to exercise and use power. There is an expectation of the teachers that students at the Centre will move towards more student agency and self-determination. Opportunities for decision-making and choices are integrated within the whole program, ranging from a new student choosing the colour of their file folder to group decisions about spending the Student Fund. During both individual and group interactions with students, the teachers direct students' attention to the fact that they have choices and are making decisions. Christina even jokingly engaged a student in a brief conversation about deciding not to decide. The other key assumption of the teachers' learner-run vision is the value and the use of the group in the process of increasing student agency and self-determination. Teachers hold the expectation that students will work at relating and communicating with one another and to participate in group activities and classes.

It is important to remember that this study is based on a moment of time in the life of the Centre. My description and analysis are grounded in my five months of fieldwork and data collection during early 2001. I have remained in close contact since that time with a keen interest in the continuing evolution and changes occurring at the Centre. My visits and ongoing communication with the teachers and some students assure me that the essence and philosophy of their learner-run vision is sustained through the latest developments at the Reading and Writing Centre. During their five-year anniversary celebration in April 2004 I listened to the speakers that included present and former students and College administrators, and I felt a strong confirmation of the Centre's continuing efficacy and its value as an exemplary educative environment

Facilitative Power System

I suggest that the Reading and Writing Centre has evolved a facilitative power system through the teachers' consciousness of group and in their work towards the learner-run goal. As introduced in the literature chapter, the four main components of a facilitative power system that I will look at are: decentralized decision-making, site-based management, teacher autonomy, and a unique curriculum. Whereas Dunlap & Goldman's research looks at relationships between teachers and administrators, this study focusses on relationships amongst students and teachers. This study looks at both teacher and student autonomy and at the autonomy of the Centre itself. In a facilitative power system, site-based management implies the decentralization of decision-making from the district to the building level. In the case of the Reading and Writing Centre, the decentralization is from their local university-college campus level to their storefront building

level, the Centre itself. As well, I am suggesting there is decentralization at their storefront location, in the Centre's move to shift more decision-making from the teachers to the students.

A facilitative power system is also characterized by a curriculum that is uniquely responsive to the people it serves. Dunlop & Goldman point out that, in a facilitative power system, differences in curricular strategies are permitted and encouraged because there is an attempt to allow for specific characteristics of students, teachers and the community in which the school is located. This study looks at some of the program differences and changes that students and teachers experienced after they moved classes from within the college campus to their storefront location.

In the following discussion about decision making, I include descriptions of the choices students have at the Centre and the ensuing challenges of those choices. This is followed by a brief discussion about how the decision-making process happens (through diffusion) and where it happens (student orientation and Monday meetings). Site-based management and the ensuing autonomy are the next two aspects of facilitative power that are explored, followed by the Centre's unique curriculum.

Decision Making

Having choices and making decisions are two prominent themes that emerged from this study. Power is exercised through the process of making decisions. For students at the Centre, making decisions is related to seeing oneself as a decision-maker, as a person with the right to make decisions and with the capability to make decisions. The teachers work with students to increase awareness about informed decision-making, which is having an awareness of the choices available and the consequences of those choices.

Many times during interviews, group talks and conversations, the students brought up the availability of choices at the Centre. They shared their feelings about being free to choose to attend classes or work on their own, to pick their own book to read, to talk in a group, or to choose to pass. They contrasted having these choices with their previous experiences of schooling. Students' freedom to choose stems from the instructional program at the Centre. Their program is a sophisticated approach based on the teachers' philosophy and political stance and includes both teacher-instructed group classes and self-directed individual work in the Inhale Room and Exhale Room respectively. The two rooms are also used for planning and executing the many non-instructional projects and activities that go on at the Centre. This combination of teacher-centred and learner-centred approaches signifies a learning-centred environment that allows for student choice. The teachers make an ongoing concerted effort to heighten student

awareness of the choices and opportunities available at the Centre and to acknowledge students' decision-making process.

The Centre offers instruction in basic and fundamental English and Math, courses that are articulated on the Provincial Articulation Grid. Classes offered include a wide range of topics, such as Morphographic Spelling, Novel Reading, Anger Management and First Aid. These classes are held in the Inhale Room, where most activities are teacher-directed, and last from one-half hour to two hours. Posted on the walls is a weekly Inhale Room Schedule. The following description is from the Student Handbook (2001):

Inhale and Exhale Rooms: Breathe in and Breathe Out

One of the rooms is called the Inhale Room. Whenever a group of people is working together on the same thing, it will be in the Inhale Room. In the Inhale Room, someone has made a plan for you. You can be a part of the action, or take in information, or listen to other people. It is the room where you breathe in new ideas.

The other room is the Exhale Room. It is the place to breathe out your own thoughts and ideas. You make your own plan in the Exhale Room. No one will tell you what to do, not even the teacher. You can read, write, work on the computer, play games, do your math homework or any other work you want. You can stare into space, or make a phone call. You can go for a smoke or a coffee. You make the plan. There is always a teacher in the Exhale Room to help you, when you decide what you want to do (13-14).

The Exhale room houses the Welcome Desk, the eleven computers, math manipulatives and books. Students in this room are self-directed and teachers follow their choices. They work here in various ways: to complete assignments given in the Inhale Room, to work on personal projects such as answering a letter from the insurance company or making a card, to write journals or work with the fraction materials to solve math problems.

Some people spend all the time in the Inhale Room. Some people spend nearly all the time in the Exhale Room. Most people spend time in both rooms. You decide. Some students say that freedom to choose is the best thing about the Centre (Student Handbook, p14).

But freedom to choose does not ensure making decisions. Doing freedom is grounded in agency and the capacity for choice. Students do not necessarily see themselves having the rights and responsibilities of choice and decision-making. There may be internalization of the oppressions of low literacy stereotypes. Many students spoke with me about debilitating schooling experiences where they felt insignificant and powerless. Traditional schooling often

does not support student agency and can contribute to a learned helplessness. All this can work to undermine an adult literacy student's confidence and self-esteem and to cloud the awareness of self as a person with rights and responsibilities. The behaviour of some students when first starting at the Centre, their reticence and shyness, can be interpreted partly as an internalization of stereotypes and an expectation of experiences similar to their previous schooling. Kate said that many students starting at the Centre need time to "soak up the respect" that is accorded to them as a student at the Centre.

Students unused to respect and decision-making also express themselves through loud, obnoxious and very disruptive behaviour. Students exercise their power and influence at the Centre both by assuming responsibility and also by not assuming agency and responsibility, as will be described later. Students who continue to see themselves from a deficit perspective, and persist in the role of no-agency, "tell-me-what-to-do" can exert much influence and power in the relationship dynamics amongst other students and teachers. Becoming socialized at the Reading and Writing Centre often involves a process of desocialization, of unlearning.

For some students, the agency involved in choice and decision-making within an educational environment was something that took time and repeated experiences to become accustomed to and to know how to use. Richard spoke with me about his difficulties in getting started on his academic work at the Centre, in choosing what to do and in making a plan for himself. During our interview together Rene talked about not having had choices in previous schooling experiences. An English course he was taking with Christina was not working out for him and he was unable to act on rectifying the situation until he had a conversation with Kate. He related this story, using his self-deprecating humour, about having to be reminded by Kate that he did have choices at the Centre:

And there was another English subject that [pause] bothered me [pause]. I was heading out. Kate, I guess she spotted me right away. [She asked:] "What's going on Rene?" [I said] ah, this course that Christina is teaching me [pause]. And Kate says [his voice changes, more projected] "You got, you got choices." Ah I says why don't you hit me with a two by four, I says (ReI 03/12/01).

The sensation of being hit by a heavy piece of wood graphically illustrates the strength of the impact of Rene's awareness that yes, as a student he does have choices. He has rights as a student to make choices that affect his life. He can leave the class or he can stay. In a story I'll tell later, Rene also found out he could say "no" to a teacher without the sky falling down upon him.

It is not a given that students see themselves as having choices and as making decisions. As an adult literacy student within an educational institution, having choices and making decisions can be unfamiliar and very risky. Making decisions and being aware of choices requires an awareness and a certain level of self-respect.

Diffusion Of Decision-Making

My observations and analysis suggest that decision-making at the Centre is not always an explicit and conscious process, but that decision-making is also diffused throughout the interactions and role-taking of teachers and students. Decisions are not always concentrated within one person or a group taking action from a range of choices. An example of such diffusion is reciprocal talk (Hurty 1995), a form of decision-making that is used informally throughout the day and acts as a power strategy to establish trust. Kate and Christina's style of leadership and instruction involves talking with students in informal ways, being available to students, being willing to talk things over and honour confidentiality. Their reciprocal talk is both speaking and listening to get a feel for the perspective of others and to verify understanding. They involve the students in group and individual discussions to check out ideas or plans, since the students are the ones most likely to be affected. Reciprocal talk is a power strategy because it is often essential to getting things done in decision making and problem solving.

My own experience of such decision-making and problem solving occurred through a shift of my research agenda in response to taking into account the ways and needs of the students. I had originally planned to post a sign-up list to schedule interviews with research participants, a procedure used at the Centre for participation in field trips and other events. But through my reciprocal talk (observations and conversations) with students I learned that it would be more effective and efficient to adopt a less formalized and more impromptu interview scheduling.

Diffusion of decision-making also occurs through the fluidity of roles, with both teachers and students assuming responsibility for the myriad of tasks and responsibilities that include the physical upkeep of the rooms and materials, and organizing and hosting events at the Centre. They claim that "we are all teachers here" (FN 10/04) and that all members of the Centre have opportunity to assume tasks elsewhere attributed to only teachers, such as initiating ideas for courses offered at the Centre and making the decisions about curriculum content. There are ongoing opportunities for students to assume responsibility in their academic work, their work for the Centre and within interpersonal relationships. The experienced students decide what to

tell new students, they decide what to say and how to help one another. This occurs both informally throughout the program and formally through the group orientation.

The group orientation occurs during the first week in September. A formalized buddy system pairs up an experienced student with a new student. A short ritual that has evolved during group orientation involves positioning new and old students on two different sides of the room, and asking the seasoned students to tell one thing that they feel is important to know about the Centre. Kate said that every year she is surprised with what students decide to tell. Old students tell new students: you can feel safe here; you choose what you want what to do; you can ask any questions here; wash your coffee cup; ask anybody for help. Each of the decisions of what information to pass on to new students contributes to the values and desired behaviours that make up the Centre. They are deciding what is important at the Centre and for the Centre. Thus it is both students and teachers that help shape this knowledge of what the Centre is all about.

When a new student starts during the semester, the Exhale Room teacher responds with an individual orientation and assessment. I observed several different individual student orientations by both teachers and noticed that right from the initial contact, the students' own accounts of their education are requested, respected and honoured. The student and teacher sit down and talk together to discuss and decide on a program of study. Christina or Kate asks the student their view on where they are with reading, writing and math. All new students are given a short list of words to spell to determine the level of spelling instruction they need. Each student is supplied with a large folder that stays at the Centre for "Keeping Track" of the academic work they complete. In the folder are prepared sheets for each course they are taking in English, Math or Computer. A refrain, heard many times during student orientations and after, alerts people to the roles that students can and do assume, and to the abundance of resources within the Centre:

If you need a stapler, need the photocopier, just go use it. If you need someone to show you how to use something, just ask anyone, a student or a teacher (FN 02/24/01).

When Laura started at the Centre a month into the term, Kate gave her an individual orientation. Laura chose a red file folder to keep track of her English, Math and computer work. Together they went through each of the subject sheets that "tell you what to do", such as the required ten pieces of writing. Kate explained to Laura:

Sometimes you'll write and want to share with everybody so we'll make copies and share it in Writing Group, sometimes you'll write and not to show anyone,

or sometimes you'll show one of the teachers, and say don't copy this (FN 03/26/01).

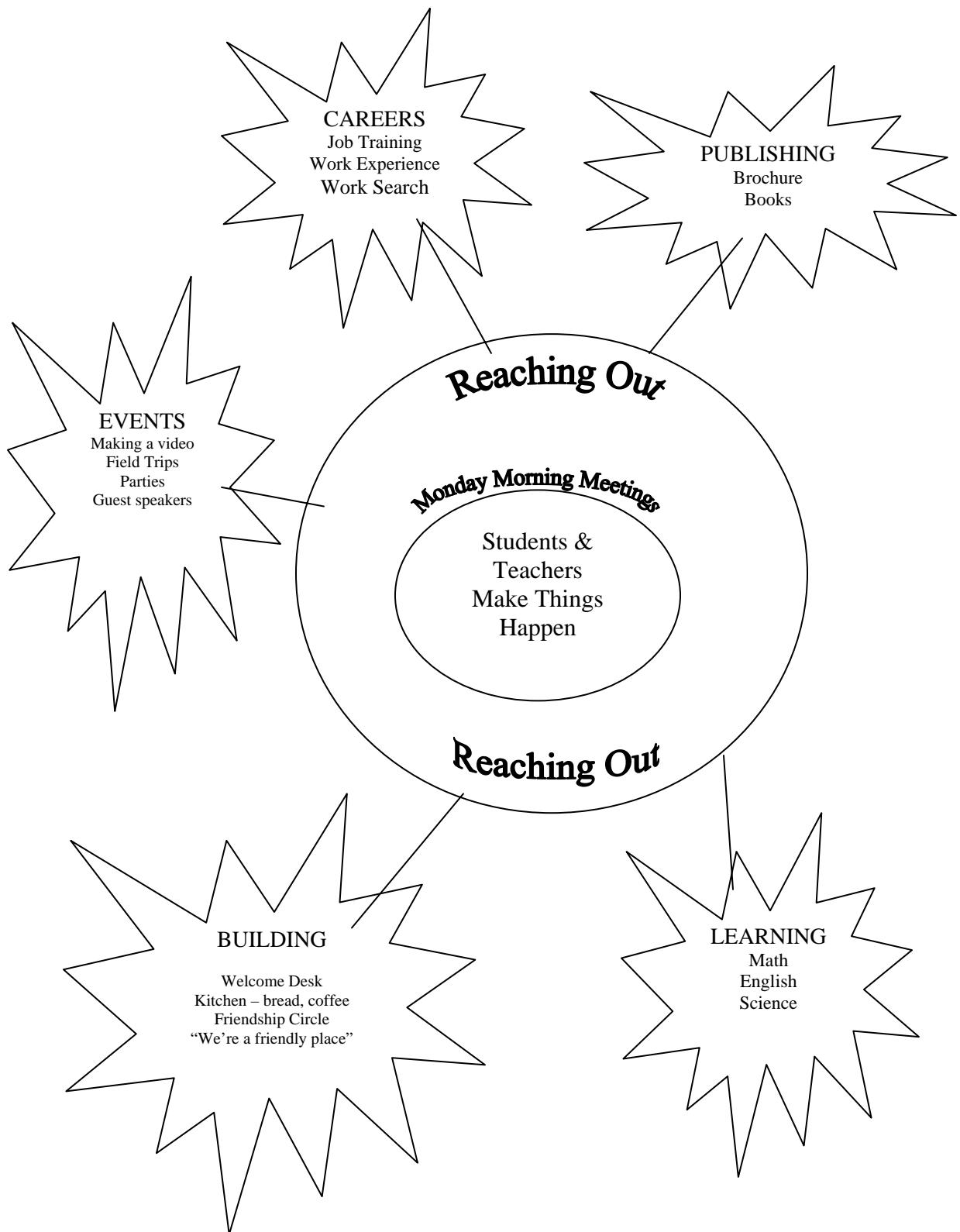
Also during the orientation, Kate asked her "Read a book once a week, do you think you can do that?" The Centre has an abundant collection of books that are displayed with the covers facing out from three bookshelves lining the walls of the Inhale Room. Students have a range of choice of fiction and non-fiction in short easy-to-read books to longer more complex reading. The books are generally adult subjects. Laura replies, that yes, she would like to take the books home to read. The type of book is the student's decision, but it is the week time frame that eventually shapes the kind of reading the student can do at any one time. Carolyn commented to me that she was initially overwhelmed at reading a book a week until she found books to read that were manageable. The students recently decided to organize all the Centre's books according to the difficulty level of reading. Most of the group decisions are formalized within the weekly Monday Morning Meetings. What follows is a description of those meetings and some of the kinds of decisions that occur.

The Monday Morning Meetings are a regular weekly event held in the Inhale Room, and attended by students, teachers, and sometimes guests. According to the poster on the wall in the Inhale Room (on the following page), the core of the Reading and Writing Centre is "students and teachers making things happen". Discussions and the main decisions of the Centre occur during these meetings where students serve as Chairperson and Writer. The agenda for the meetings is drawn up by the Head Leaders group after discussion weekly Thursday meetings and consultation with the teachers and then written by them on a large flip chart. The role of Head Leaders will be discussed in more detail later in the section on leadership. The Chair is responsible for ensuring that everyone gets a chance to speak, for maintaining order and keeping the meeting moving. A wooden gavel and base are available for use by the Chair. The Writer's job is to write notes about decisions and events on the agenda flip chart paper.

The positions of Chair, Writer or Head Leader are chosen through a voting system at the Monday meeting. First a teacher writes on the blackboard the names of all students at the Centre and then reads aloud each name. For the benefit of new students and others, sometimes a short description of the person is given if they are not present. Then each students and teachers vote by writing the names of their choice on a piece of paper. During a couple of the meetings I attended there was a brief discussion whether I should be included in the voting procedure. I declined, explaining that I was not there all the time. A student sitting beside me joked that sometimes neither was she. The average attendance at the Monday meetings during my

fieldwork was between ten to twelve students out of the twenty students that attended regularly, and the thirty-five students that were enrolled.

Reproduction of the poster on the wall in the Inhale Room:



Other meeting rituals include rounds, where each person is given an opportunity to speak without interruption or to choose to pass. The rounds and the choice to pass are also used routinely in most of the classes and group activities. The rounds help to assert that everybody's concerns and views have inherent value. Through reminders and brief comments, the teachers act as facilitators to maintain the respect of turn-taking in the rounds and to make clear that passing is a choice. Students who have attended longer and are familiar with the Centre also assume the duties of facilitator, such as letting others know when they are interrupting. Not all students are receptive and accepting of other students assuming the authority of facilitator. During one of our Group Talks, when Audrey turned to Steven to tell him that she was not finished talking and to please stop interrupting, he chose to leave the room at that time, then returned about ten minutes later.

Steven talked with me about his reluctance to take on some of the Centre's acceptable behaviours, such as saying pass. With his speedy style of speech and movement, many broad smiles and occasional bursts of laughter he talked about his experience of Christina teaching him to say pass, one of the "tricks of the trade" at the Centre:

Well there was one time Chris wanted me to read and I didn't want to read. And she says "Please read" and I said I ain't reading it. And I made a big deal about but I should of said "I'll pass". I should learn that. She [Chris] will not let me say, "No I don't feel like it, I don't want to", and I'm making the big deal about it and she's going: [whispers] "Say pass Steven." So I'm learning. You know what I mean; she's showing me the tricks of the trade (StI 04/17/01).

For Steven, learning to say pass was perhaps a process of unlearning a need to explain and justify the decision to not participate. Students at the Centre are encouraged to make decisions to participate in the way that makes them feel safe. Teachers and students at the Centre work with one another and with new students to act in ways and make choices that will not embarrass themselves or make them feel bored.

The discussions at the Monday meetings often meander from the current agenda topic to students relating brief stories of their experiences, such as Rene's telling of a man who graduated from Grade 12 at age fifty-seven, or Audrey sharing her experiences of a student speak-out where they tell their stories publicly. Occasionally, when one person monopolizes discussions during a meeting, Kate gives reminders to the Chair that their job is to give everyone a chance to talk. These reminders are given in various ways. Kate may assume a teacher stance and ask questions such as "Do you know what the job of Writer/Chair is about?" and then proceed to explain when necessary. Kate or Christina may give non-verbal cues to the Chair (nods, eye

contact) that someone else needs a turn. During a meeting that Judy chaired, Kate quietly asked that attention be directed to Audrey, who wanted to speak. Judy had not seen her hand, being preoccupied with two students who had been speaking several times (FN 02/26/01).

Also there are silences. Sometimes the silence lasted only a minute or so, but initially I felt rather uncomfortable, not having experienced such extended silence with a group of people in a meeting. After subsequent similar experiences, I saw that others appeared relaxed and did not exhibit signs of tenseness or discomfort. I saw that the silences offered a space to think about the current issue or topic and to give people time to respond.

Decision-making in the group settings includes formal and informal systems of voting. Sometimes they use written ballots, other times a show of hands or nodding of heads is taken as indication of people's choices. Decisions were sometimes clear and definite, such as choosing a location for the next field trip. People put forth ideas, various dates and transportation are discussed, and then a decision of the field trip location is made with a show of hands. At other times there was more involved discussion, such as during the meeting when Kate and Christina proposed a change to the afternoon Inhale Room schedule. Most students had a say and voiced their opinion about the current and proposed schedule, and many had questions. Often a subject is brought up and discussion continues on to further meetings before a decision is made. Most times the Chair uses the voting procedure that asks "all in favour?", and closes the decision after choices have been discussed. At other times consensus is reached through nods or simply the lack of anyone voicing to the contrary.

Occasionally there is no visible or apparent vote at all. There were times at some meetings when the decisions appeared unclear to me and very indefinite. When I questioned students after such a meeting, most of them felt that a conclusion had been reached. An example was a Monday meeting discussion about who would do the dishes. Various students had talked about their feelings, experiences and opinions of doing dishes at the Centre, ranging from suggestions of using styrofoam cups to everyone taking responsibility to clean up once in awhile. No conclusion was ever articulated, but everyone appeared to leave the meeting knowing what it was. When I talked with three different students after the meeting and mentioned this, they shrugged and told me that everyone had "said their piece", "things were said that needed to be said" and they would continue to go on, "business as usual". In reflecting upon this style of group decision-making, it appeared that people felt they had addressed the relevant facts and that through the process of talking, they had sifted through the issue to shake out the truly significant facts. In the case of the doing dishes, Rene, the person who had put the item on the agenda,

informed me that he was fine with what had occurred at the meeting because “things were aired”. Students perceive the opportunities and actions of saying their piece and having things aired as meaningful dialogue that contributes to the mutual respect amongst the group. This can be seen as an example of reciprocal talk amongst a group.

Teachers work to take a backseat role, to get out of the way in the meetings. Within their role as teacher, they experience struggles in learning how and when to let go, and when to hang on. Christina talked about her struggles in learning how to facilitate the process of Monday meetings within her teacher role:

Well I learned about myself, I tell you when I first got into those Monday meetings I was [short laugh] immediately aware of how much power I can muster. Of course I'm a very powerful woman if I want to be and when I was less experienced in the Monday morning meetings I would just [voice rises, laughing] power up if I had to. It was the wrong thing to do. And I'd see even, and I'd be sitting there and I'd be really angry with myself because I did that (ChI 05/4/01).

Christina's term “powering up” means to take over, to take full responsibility, and to assume the right of telling others what to do. This is a useful phrase to describe the usual tendency within a hierarchical organization and within the traditional teacher role with its accompanying privilege of power. Those on top are expected to power up, to power over. There are struggles and tensions when those in a powerful teacher role work to equalize power relationships. For Christina, this involved questioning and reflecting upon where her role of decision-maker began and ended. She shared with me her reflections on a specific Monday meeting when she was dissatisfied with her behaviour towards a student. In reflection, she saw that she was not clear within herself what decisions she had already made and what she was asking of the students. Christina said she felt she needed to learn how to use power differently. So she decided to make a rule for herself:

When I take things into the Monday morning meeting now I try to make sure [that I'm clear on what] I'm bringing in. That if I've got decisions that I've made, that I want to hold, I see them. I own them. I say, “this is what I think, this is what I think we should do”, and I ask the asking part. But it took me learning, took awhile to see that (ChI 05/4/01).

Jenny Horsman (2001a), practitioner and researcher, has discussed similar struggles of being explicit about control within learner leadership activities. Like Christina, she found she needed “to be much clearer about the control I intended to keep” and to make clearly visible her own role and sense of responsibility “so the group could explore together what was open to negotiation by the group” (95).

Decision making at the Centre occurs within a range of academic and vernacular literacy practices that allows students to move from the known to unknown, first making choices and decisions that are familiar. Vernacular literacy practices are those that are common and a part of students' daily lives, such as finding a recipe, choosing a birthday card or reading instructions. At the Centre, students can decide to help plan and make lunch that week, to make a card for a family member, or to read a passage from the Student Handbook. Students have opportunity to gauge and determine their own decisions and risk-taking. They can make choices to work at their literacy learning through a range of familiar and unfamiliar practices, within a group or on their own. This range of choice is a key component of the instructional program and of building relationships of trust and safety within the Centre. The range of choices is possible through the autonomy afforded the Centre through their site-based management, the second element within a facilitative power system.

Site-based Management & Autonomy

Site-based management implies *participative* management. Kate and Christina wanted to have their own site in order to have more participative management within their literacy program and more autonomy within the classroom. When they moved the fundamental English and Math classes to their storefront location, the teachers anticipated changes – more independence and autonomy for both students and themselves as teachers. This happened both in concrete terms and in psychological terms, changes from within and without.

The move from classes at the College campus to a storefront location, in September 1999, increased the sense of autonomy at all three levels – student, teacher and the Centre itself. Having their own space means having their own resources and different access to resources, thus resulting in increased freedom and independence for students. They have their own photocopy machine and eleven computers. At the college, students had to ask permission or pay for access to a telephone and photocopier, and they had scheduled times to use the one computer lab on the college campus. The Centre has two telephone lines, one for the students and one for the teachers. The student phone number is the one on is on the Centre's brochure and is a way for the general public to contact the Centre directly. The teacher line is on a message machine and used mainly by the teachers.

Their increased autonomy opens up opportunities for making decisions about the Centre's schedules and policies. Their decisions have resulted in changes related to being able to fully act on the community nature of their program by responding to the needs and lives of the participants. Students and teachers decided to loosen their adherence to the College's calendar

and follow instead the holidays similar to the K-12 system, since many of the students are also parents. One previous restriction was the constraints of the College's trimester system. Students were required to register three times a year instead of once, as they do now. Policy-making is evolving at the Centre, with students and teachers deciding to create policies regarding bringing children to school and payment for students who do work for the Centre.

Having the three tools (photocopier, telephone, computer) so freely accessible helps to facilitate decisions and actions amongst the group since the process is more visible and people can be a part of the action in some way. For example, during a field trip planning process, a small group watched Del access some information on a Website that he brought to the Monday Morning Meeting. People made phone calls for field trip information and for personal use (not all students have home telephones). Information about fares and schedules were photocopied and passed out to other students. The planning of the field trip became a part of the experience of more students, either through doing it together or observing the process.

Site-based management at the Centre means students are managing the site along with the teachers. The whole process of organizing and managing becomes demystified because it is more visible and shared. This allows students to independently perform the related jobs using these resources. Kate talked about the growth of a sense of ownership and responsibility during that first year of their move:

This year we have again a grant to go on a field trips. We've had these grants for many years in the past and always the students have had a big part in planning the trip, but always I had done huge amounts of it because of the situation at the college where if they wanted to make a phone call, you know they had to go through an involved procedure – go to another building, ask permission from the department secretary, make the call, and maybe they can't get through. And no one can call them back. And so this time I have done nothing to plan the field trip. And other people have. I have in fact done nothing and we are going to Tofino, the week after next [laughs]. And so, people did [a lot], people got money from various people, they got extra money, they got a donation. So they do, in fact own it in ways that I didn't know if it would have been possible. I didn't know what shape it would take, I knew something would happen, but I didn't know (KaI 02/00).

The move from classrooms in the college to an off-campus location physically situates the program within the community, making it more physically and psychologically accessible to potential adult literacy learners. Students can walk in off the street to register. Margaret, (self-chosen pseudonym) a student interviewee, discovered the Centre by walking past it during her time downtown. Potential students can also choose to drop in to see the Centre without making their way to the College with a decision or commitment to return to school.

Another benefit for students having their own site and not being within an educational institution is an increase in their comfort level. A few students shared their feelings with me about no longer being located at the College. Rene was uncomfortable going to the College at all, even to buy his textbooks, and Richard said:

Yeah, I always felt people were judging me, you know not so much the students in my immediate class but other students in the school (RiI 03/6/01).

Audrey also felt judged, commenting “It’s a big building [the College] and there were other students there and other students would think that we were nothing”. Christina expressed her interpretation of students’ status at the College:

One of the major reasons we wanted to get off campus, was because, while we were on campus our students were always measured by the CAP [Career and Academic Preparation] hierarchy and found to be at the bottom. Which is an unfair assessment of them. But everyone at the college, or in CAP, they all intend to do grade 12. So our students were at the bottom of the heap, looking up at Grade 12, which is an unfair assessment of our students’ abilities and place in life. And so to get them off campus, that, we’re not compared anymore and we’re not at the bottom of anybody’s heap. We’re on the top of our own heap! (ChI 05/14/01)

The process of self-development, of doing freedom at the Centre means exercising one’s autonomy, and is expressed and experienced through the teachers’ and students’ choices and levels of decision-making. Being autonomous means not being controlled by others or by outside forces. For adult literacy students, autonomy can be a process of becoming aware of the outside forces that have had control over their lives – forces that include the influences of previous schooling experiences and the stereotypes and stigma associated with low literacy. To exercise autonomy within a educational environment may be a process of coming to see oneself as deserving and capable of autonomy. The Reading and Writing Centre allows students opportunity to imagine, choose and act from their own vantage point, of their own volition. Building on skills of decision-making and awareness of choice strengthens autonomy.

Teachers are also in a process of strengthening and learning to exercise their own autonomy. The Centre itself acts as an autonomous unit within the university-college system due to the exercise of teacher autonomy. Kate exercises a high level of autonomy that she has earned through her work and experience with the College. She sees and uses the College as an ally and support. She builds and nurtures relationships with college administrators at various levels. Christina felt less experienced and more distant in her relationships with the College. She talked about her worry of being fully open and honest about their dreams and goals for the Centre,

concerned that College administrators may not be fully supportive or in agreement. So during her repeated interviews to apply for her non-permanent position of teacher at the Centre, Christina felt she needed to be on guard and careful about what she could say. She experiences her autonomy in her relationship with Kate and within the Centre where she said they “go to bat for themselves” (FN 03/16/01).

Teacher autonomy at the Centre is expressed through their innovative curriculum and curricular strategies, where they feel a freedom to decide with the students whose forms of knowledge will prevail and what learning is legitimate. Kate believes that two students, who have been at the Centre for a long time and have no plans of moving on to the College or to paid work, make legitimate use of the place in their work of maintaining their literacy skills. Kate and Christina’s autonomy is also enacted through their openness to change with the student group, their lack of rigidity and their creative improvisation in their teaching. They have a trust in themselves as good teachers and feel a freedom and opportunity to fully live out their ethical and vocational obligation to teach well.

There is also a deep sense of trust and autonomy in the relationship between the two teachers. Kate expressed how much she valued Christina’s leadership and independence within the Centre. During Christina’s absences when she was sick, Kate became even more aware of the extent of decision-making and work that Christina assumed. Christina said she thrives on the level of independence and freedom she experiences at the Centre. She explained:

Kate doesn’t really care [laugh] what I’m doing until she needs to know and I feel that same way about her. I don’t mess with what Kate’s got on her mind but I support what Kate’s got and I feel vice versa. She doesn’t mess with I’ve got going on, but she supports me. So we share knowing on a need-to-know basis, so I feel extremely comfortable going out and developing anything I want.

Anything I want and bring it back to the Reading and Writing Centre and we’ll find a way to do it if I want us to, [pause] which is a real liberty. And I think that’s how our students feel too, maybe, maybe we all, maybe that’s rule #1 about the Centre. We’re willing to try anything (ChI 05/4/01).

Yet there are limits to the “anything” that students can try because there are concrete limits to student autonomy within the Centre’s facilitative power system. Firstly, there is the contradiction of the teacher-initiated learner-run goal that is kept alive through the teachers. The student body at the Centre keeps changing. Other than Del, Audrey and Rene, most students attend the Centre for three months to a year. Christina commented to me that it is always hard to build a core of belief and principle when the people are always changing at the Centre. The sense of group is always tenuous and she said they work with students on leadership skills, then “we

always keep shooting ourselves in the foot" (ChI 05/4/01) because those students often move on to the courses at the College.

A second limitation to student autonomy is the lack of infrastructure. There is no system in place for students to truly run the Centre. I commented to Kate that much of the Monday meeting agenda comes from the teachers.

Well I'm kind of stuck. I mean, I think that right now we are in a stuck place because we don't have any structure. [pause] But I think that it's true, huge portions of the agenda are generated by teachers. And partly [pause] so I think that might always be that way, it's partly because the structure is the way it is. Anything that comes from the college comes through us (KaI 05/3/01).

Without an infrastructure that helps to define the communication between the College and the Centre, there is no system of communication and power sharing from the College level to the student level. Thus the student leadership roles are limited - the Head Leaders serve as a kind of student council, with their decision making limited to within the Centre.

Unique Curriculum

Kate and Christina's strong sense of autonomy and freedom are apparent in their creativity and level of risk-taking in relation to developing curriculum. There are three aspects of the Centre's unique curriculum that I would like to draw attention to: the mutual work of teachers and students in developing the curriculum, the teachers' consciousness of the group, and the approach of literacy as social practice. Although an analysis of curricula is not a focus of this study, I will give a general description of the organization of their courses, then discuss the style and content of instruction that relate to relationships and power dynamics. I will show examples of students and teachers working together to create the curriculum. This is followed by ways curriculum is shaped by the teachers' approach of literacy as social practice and their consciousness of the group. The main example used is the Centre's writing program, specifically Kate's Never Fail Writing Program.

Every student that starts at the Centre is given a folder to keep track of their coursework. The outlines of the requirements for the two Math courses (010, 020) are each on orange coloured legal-sized paper, the three English courses (010, 020, 025) are on pink. The outlines are clear and basic; the math outline takes up less than half the sheet, the English course outlines fill the page, with spaces for students to keep a brief record of the spelling test marks, to write the name and date of their ten pieces of writing and the books they read. Students can attend the Centre and only work individually to complete these basic courses, but most of them become involved in the wide range of courses and activities at the Centre. The teachers now regularly

open each new year with courses on life skills, and they repeat certain theme units that are popular with students, such as Heroes or Learning.

Through the teachers' dialogic inquiry approach and their reciprocal talk, teachers and students work together to develop the curriculum at the Centre. Some of the courses that ran during my time of my fieldwork were: Self Esteem Workshops, Homonyms, Math Games, Anger Management, Team Building, Phonological Awareness, First Aid, and a session on Earthquakes. There is a constant process of negotiation with individuals and with the group as to "where to from here? – what classes should we run next, what novel should we read". The possibilities and issues are brought up with the group or with individuals and the decisions are made together. When the Reading and Writing Centre first opened in the fall of 1999, teachers and students spent a week together discussing and articulating what they wanted the Centre to be about. They used Pecket Well College as a model to establish their core ideas and values. Pecket Well College, in northern England, is an adult basic and community education centre that "was set up and is run by a group of disabled and able-bodied people working on their reading and writing difficulties. It offers a wide variety of courses which are planned and run by the participants themselves" (from brochure). It opened in March 1992 as the first residential college in Britain for Basic Education and works to break down the barriers between tutors and students. They offer weekend and week courses, as well as daily drop-in help with reading and writing. Peckett Well students manage the funding and finance, the building, employment, publicity, outreach and events; they also hire facilitators to run workshops, courses and programs.

Teachers and students at the Centre studied the literature and philosophy of Pecket Well and worked together on articulating their own values and program goals. They wrote this up on two posters that hang in the Inhale Room. The poster that outlines their program goals and events was introduced in the section about the Monday meetings; the second poster lists the Centre's values:

1. *Students bring new ideas.*
2. *We build confidence.*
3. *We ease pressure with a short week.*
4. *We move to and from Inhale & Exhale Rooms. We don't get stuck in a box.*
5. *We are not afraid to speak out.*
6. *We ask for help.*
7. *Students find things out for themselves.*

Christina and Kate continued to confer with students for their ideas on courses and activities. Students initiated a First Aid course, a unit on Spirituality, and an earthquake information session.

The Centre offers courses and activities that are learner-centred, teacher-centred and group-centred. Teachers and students work together on informal and formal evaluations of these courses and activities, with the teachers continually checking in and assessing with students to determine where and how changes can be made to increase the level of efficacy. The teachers choose and develop curriculum activities that help to demystify both the content and the process of learning and teaching and allows for a shift in power dynamics.

For example, they used a morphographic spelling program (named “Spell & Yell” at the Centre), a prepared curriculum that is based on studying morphemes, the smallest components of meaning in language, and building words from that understanding. Every morning, while a student group attended this spelling class with Christina or a substitute teacher, Kate worked with students on teacher-led spelling exercises she has developed and that serve as a prerequisite to the Spell & Yell class. Kate would choose a word ending, such as “_and”, and then ask students to spell words such as “band, land, sand”; then she gradually added on appropriate morphemes such as “_s”, “_ly” or “_ed”. The transparency of their spelling curriculum creates opportunities to discuss and understand the content and process of the learning. Kate and the students often paused during the spelling session to discuss the idiosyncrasies of the English language or to puzzle over the meaning of some words.

As well, Kate had recently developed an effective math curriculum based on the same principle of making transparent and using the basic building blocks for a deeper understanding of the learning process. Kate’s curriculum, “Math by Morphs”, works to ensure the meaning of basic mathematical terms (add, subtract, multiply, divided), while students are engaged in the process of learning to use them to compute. This style of teaching works to reveal and make visible the basics, the building blocks of the learning process. Student agency and empowerment are fostered through such teacher transparency of practice, as will be discussed further in a later section.

Christina used her awareness and concerns about the physicality of learning to plan both her classes and the physical set-up of the Centre. She talked with me about her own learning through teaching experiences about placing importance on students using their bodies as well as their minds in the learning process. She explained that at the Centre they arranged the furniture and resources in the two rooms, not for efficiency of space and traffic, but rather to encourage the physical movement of students. She pointed out that the physical movement in and between the rooms also puts students in contact with one another, and commented: “I love the fact that

our students are physically free in the Centre” (ChI 06/11/01). Unfortunately, we did not have the opportunity to further explore and discuss her creative curriculum ideas.

At the Reading and Writing Centre there is a lot student writing going on. Writing is considered a social act. The writing process and reading one’s writing are a social affair at the Centre – there are ongoing writing groups, writing marathons, and the Centre regularly publishes broadsheets of student writing. Kate and Christina use a “process approach” (Fingeret, Tom et al. 1994) to writing. This consists of the use of dialogue and an abundance of prewriting techniques to generate ideas and overcome fears. Their approach includes a focus on positive feedback to help build on what students are already doing and do know. The elements of their writing program that I want to highlight are: writing as a social act, value of the vernacular and the teachers’ consciousness of group.

Kate, when speaking with students in Writing Group, when addressing the public at their Book Launch, or when giving her Never Fail Writing workshop to literacy instructors, always stresses that we write for an audience: “Your writing is meant to be read by someone” (FN 18/04/01). This simple and profound fact often becomes lost in literacy programs that do not view literacy as social practice, where the context is forgotten and the focus becomes narrowed to the skills of writing and reading, rather than writing and reading as social processes.

The Centre regularly publishes student writing. Students can share their writing with the teacher only or with the writing group when they choose. They also have opportunity to move to a larger public audience through publication of their stories in booklets and in broadsheets that are distributed, and through public readings. As well, the Centre has published two books by students that are sold and distributed internationally. The authors of the published books are both First Nations women who have shared stories from their lives (Frenchy 1999; Dick 2002). Publishing contributes to identity as an author, to one’s sense of self as knowledgeable, and also creates a body of literature that reflects life experiences of people whose voices are usually absent (Fingeret, Tom et al. 1994). Student writing can help work against powerlessness and disengagement. Literacy educator/researchers Gaber-Katz and Horsman (1988) point out that “[i]t is within this sphere that the stories demonstrate their power and they make visible the class, race and gender bias in language” (12). The writing process at the Centre helps create connections and shared experience.

The value of the vernacular means an acknowledgement of the varying dialects and grammar used in speaking and writing and giving equal respect to those differences. My focus on writing and on vernacular language is twofold. Writing and language are inextricably bound up

with power and authority. I argue that valuing the vernacular at the Centre helps build a sense of community through students' feelings of equality, and through their understanding and acknowledgment of the inequalities based on the power of language in speech and writing. They come to recognize that they do not have to solely identify as an isolated individual with deficiencies. Students' non-deficit perceptions of similarity with others comes through the acknowledgment and acceptance of vernacular language in writing and through vernacular literacy practices.

Kate and Christina's political awareness and style of instruction contribute to students' freedom to express themselves in speech and writing. In supporting the writing process at the Centre, teachers work to focus on the positive with students' writing, to build on what they are doing well and to support what is happening. This includes respect for the students' ways of speaking and writing. The students' dialect is acceptable in speech and writing at the Centre. Kate and Christina value the vernacular. They show this through their work with students to help them understand that dialects are appropriate in certain places, such as homes and communities; standard English is appropriate in most school and mainstream social settings. Kate explains to students that the wrongness of "I seen" in speech or writing is related to one's standing and status in the world. In a class called "Big Words", students learn to pronounce and use words that can be influential in certain settings when spoken or written. This approach that values the vernacular and increases students' awareness works towards the goal of bi-dialectism, a term defined by Christian & Wolgram (1989) as the ability to use a standard variety of one's language, while at the same time maintaining the native variety and being able to switch between them when needed in certain situations, using the language that is socially acceptable in the situation.

Bi-dialectism was also apparent at Pecket Well College, the place that the Reading and Writing Centre used as a model during their initial set-up and discussion of values and goals. People at Pecket Well feel quite strongly about being able to use their own language in their writing. When I was in England in 2003, and visited with the College's directors, one of the first things I was told during our introductory lunch was that they write in their own words. They explained that for formal letters and funding proposals, they use the Queen's English, but it was very important for them that they are free to use their own dialect for the non-formal writing.

The rituals and activities of the Weekly Writing Group at the Reading and Writing Centre formalize the process of fostering respect and reciprocity and contribute to the sense of community. The writing groups are led by Kate Nonesuch using the Never-Fail Writing Method

that she has developed. This method is based on the premise of learning about writing through a focus on the positive and building upon the strengths of each person's writing. Each week, all students are encouraged to submit a piece of writing. If they can, they are asked to type the story on the computer or get help to do that, and then Kate makes copies for the people attending the class. During the class, a similar routine is followed for each piece of writing submitted: each student reads aloud his or her writing, there is an open discussion with any comments or questions, then a formalized routine of feedback is followed. Kate works to reassure new students:

We don't kill anyone here, we don't laugh unless they tell a joke. Someone reads their work, then we tell them what we like about their work. We try to say what is good about it. We think about being positive (FN 17/04/01).

During the writing groups I observed, all the students were actively engaged – focussing on their copy of the piece being read, some students using a ruler or their finger to keep track of the words as they read along. Sometimes someone laughed aloud in response to what was being read. A few people commented generally about the reading, but the most discussion occurred during the medal-giving routine, where every person (including the writer) has an opportunity to positively comment on a specific aspect by giving a “medal” for one of the following aspects of the writing piece - details, organization, beginning or end. Kate writes those four words on the board and discusses what they mean for any newcomers to the writing group. As they do a round of medal-giving, Kate makes a mark on the board, giving a visual representation of the votes given. Some students simply said either “details”, or “the ending was good”, others commented more elaborately about the medal they were giving to the writer.

Next, each person is asked to use a highlighter pen to mark their favourite sentence on their copy of the writing piece. They take turns to read their chosen sentence aloud. I observed the writers while others read their favourite sentence from the pieces of writing. The absorbed attention of the writers was reflected in their facial expressions or the way they held their bodies - often leaning forward over their copy, emitting a smile or slight headshake, especially when the same sentence was read by many different people. Several students spoke with me about the strong effect of reading their own writing with others, about often being surprised by themselves and how their writing was received.

During writing group, when students make comments or discuss the similarities and differences of the choices of the medals and the sentences, Kate often leads this into a talk about the strengths of the piece of writing, and gives a mini-lecture on the characteristics of good

writing. There is always an emphasis on the positive, on what students are doing well. When a new student pointed out Audrey's "mistake" instead of giving a medal, Kate's response was:

Can I ask you not to mention that, it's a typo, I don't know if I typed that, or if Audrey typed that, we're not correcting, we're looking at what we like about the writing (FN 17/04/01).

The writing group builds a sense of safety and trust through the formalization of social practices of respect, reciprocity and responsibility and through the emphasis on positive responses.

According to students' evaluation of the Centre in June 2001, the writing group encourages individual writing and contributes to an atmosphere of support and comfort. Students at the Centre do a lot of writing and two or three times a year their pieces are compiled into collections that are printed and distributed locally. The students of the Centre are involved in selling and distributing the formally published books. They organize the book launches that are hosted at the Centre. Other students of the Centre, as well as the book authors, read their own work at such public events.

The effectiveness of Centre's writing program stems from the use of the student group as audience. Receiving support and feedback from the group, rather than only the teachers, is another way that power and authority become diffused at the Centre. The teachers learn along with students about the process of effective writing and they learn more about students' lives. The Reading and Writing Centre writing program becomes a means of communication amongst students and teachers as well as a means to improve skills and complete the English 010, 020, or 025 courses.

The teachers work to balance individual needs and group needs. A key approach already discussed is the physical set-up of the Inhale and Exhale Rooms, allowing for individual and group work. Classes are offered over time periods ranging from six weeks to the three months. Often the same class, such as the first level of Morphographic Spelling, will be offered consecutively. This type of scheduling has occurred in response to teachers' observations, students' style of attendance and individual student's needs. Students can choose not to attend every class if they feel they are bored or do not need to. As well, students whose lives do not warrant regular attendance, or students who need to repeat a class know they can pick up the same classes in a following session. Christina talked with me that they, as teachers, use the needs of the larger group to make decisions about how and when to press on and move ahead.

This consciousness of the group and the teachers' social practices approach to literacy are the heart of the unique curriculum at the Centre. The Centre's uniqueness is further explored

using the framework of learning centred education, which includes the elements of dialogic instruction, mutuality and community. The final section of this chapter will further describe and develop the mutual work and relationships of students and teachers through a focus on dialogic instruction at the Centre.

Dialogic Instruction

The open-endedness of the learner-run goal, with its lack of prescription and formula, creates openings for a mutual learning process for teachers and students that requires constant negotiation and dialogue. Dialogic instruction at the Reading and Writing Centre is a working philosophy of the teachers as well as one of their instructional techniques. Kate and Christina take a political stance in their positions as literacy instructors. They work towards helping students become aware of blocks and barriers to learning that are related to the dominant education and literacy discourse. Intrinsic to their interactions and relationships with students, and to their teaching, is a strong sense of immanence – that each student is deserving, capable and has the right to live to their fullest potential. This manifests in their attitude of sincere respect for each student.

Dialogic inquiry permeates everything Kate and Christina do. Their main strategy is teaching leadership. In their work at helping students learn, the teachers place great emphasis on student choice and decision-making. This is an ongoing struggle because most students' self-perception and expectations of school can work against receptivity to learning leadership within an educational environment. As discussed in the literature chapter, the adult literacy student population is generally seen from a deficiency perspective and this perception is often internalized. Students see themselves as being on the bottom of the heap and expect others to define and respond to them that way as well. They are familiar with being intimidated and coerced by educators, social service workers and people of authority. They need to learn and trust the something different about the Centre. Students soon sense that it is okay to "admit" to being an adult literacy student, that there are others who share their skill levels in reading and writing and mathematics. During the interviews, most of the students expressed some feelings of relief, surprise or comfort that they were not the only ones involved in literacy learning.

Thus dialogic inquiry also becomes a way of instilling trust with and amongst the students, where they learn that their opinions, experiences and input are valued and important at the Centre. Dialogic instruction takes place when students first start at the Centre, when teachers work to engage students in dialogue about both the context and the process of their learning.

During individual orientations with new students, Kate and Christina ask questions and listen attentively to the answers so that together they can make decisions about the student's program.

Dialogic instruction is about teachers and students engaged in dialogue and creating knowledge together. This occurs through academic work, through students' work for the Centre and through social interactions within the Centre. Students work with one another as well as with the teachers; they help one another and are actively engaged in making the small and big decisions that are the lifeblood of the Centre. Students make decisions about what to tell other students, about what a person needs to know.

Dialogic instruction at the Centre involves teachers working to create opportunities for students to build on success through recognition of knowing what they know and taking on new material. Christina starts every new class with a discussion about what the students know about the topic. I participated in one of Kate's classes during the first week of September, where there were many new students. Kate had written a short two-sentence paragraph on the chalkboard that was an excerpt from a poem by a black American writer talking about her family and the power of being told stories by her aunt. After Kate explained the background to the paragraph, she asked that everyone read the paragraph aloud together. Then she took the chalk brush and erased three small words (articles) and asked everyone to read it together again, then did a round and asked individuals to read it alone. She continued to erase words, individuals continued to "read" the gradually disappearing paragraph until no words appeared on the board. Students smiled and laughed a lot, there was much encouragement of one another and a strong feeling of camaraderie and group. People talked together about their surprise that they could still "read" the paragraph and remember all the words that had been on the board. So from the beginning, during the first week at the Centre, students become engaged in activities that set them up for success and give opportunities to work together and support one another in experiencing a sense of accomplishment.

The three main components of the teachers' dialogic instruction approach that will be discussed are: teaching and learning leadership, push pedagogy and transparency of practice.

Teaching & Learning Leadership

This section describes what teaching leadership means at the Centre. Some of the challenges and contradictions of teaching leadership are broached in an exploration of the differences between sharing power and getting out of the way. This is followed by an outline of the student leadership roles, with specific focus on the challenges and the roles of Head Leaders.

Further challenges and contractions of teaching leadership are looked at in a discussion about the differences in experiences and values between teachers and students.

This thesis argues that Kate and Christina's focus on leadership works to equalize relationships amongst teachers and students and contributes to the creation and maintenance of their facilitative power system. Leadership is the capacity to use and exercise power. A focus on leadership, rather than empowerment, implies the presence of others, and an interdependence that arises through the mutual influence and affect of others. At the Centre, teaching and learning leadership is about placing the process of student empowerment within a context of others and within a community relationship. Through my ethnographic work at the Centre, I can now agree with Briskin (1990) that teaching leadership directly is one way of addressing inequities in students' ability to claim classroom power.

In this study, learning leadership skills is considered part of the students' process of self-development, of doing freedom at the Centre. Teaching and learning leadership are seen as one way to help students and teachers desocialize from education experiences within traditional structures that foster learned passivity and place teachers in the position of the expert with knowledge to transmit. At the Centre, teachers and students are learning how to work together to create a learner-run program, and Kate and Christina use the teaching of leadership to better facilitate this process.

Teaching leadership stems from the goal to be a learner-run centre. When I questioned Christina on how things were going in relation to how she and Kate had initially envisioned the Centre, I was surprised to hear that they had not predetermined the specifics about the Centre and how it would be run.

I think that's about the only thing we knew clearly, that we wanted a Centre where there was as much opportunity as possible for the students to run the Centre. And we also totally knew that they wouldn't know how to do that (Chi 05/14/01).

Thus much of the instruction is built upon both teachers and students learning how to do that, how to be a learner-run centre. One main strategy is the teachers' focus on leaderships skills and interpersonal skills that enhance possibilities for people to control their lives. These are skills related to speaking and listening, to making decisions, and to awareness of choices at the Centre. These are decisions and choices within the areas of the mundane day-to-day maintenance, in the instructional practice and in the larger projects within the community. The skills involved in decision-making, making a plan, and working on specific learning skills in

reading, writing and math are skills that contribute to learner leadership, through either building on skills within interpersonal interactions or through building self-esteem and confidence.

The capacity to use and exercise power at the Centre means there needs to be a place and opportunity to do so. Kate and Christina practice “getting out of the way”, a term they use to describe their practice of making room for students to exercise power and leadership within the Centre. Much of the literature about adult education and adult literacy talks about “sharing power”. My analysis of the power system suggest that there is more happening at the Centre than simply sharing power.

To understand how getting out of the way differs from sharing power, it is important to remember that power, the capacity or ability to act effectively, is relational. Power is not a thing to have or to share, but rather is exercised, is played out in relationships. To share power implies there is some thing to be shared, as with a bag of candy that is passed around. Teachers sharing power implies that they share a certain amount of their power with each student; that they use their authority to dole out power to the students. But at the Reading and Writing Centre, something different happens. People don’t have power, but rather they exercise it. The teachers at the Centre work with power as a verb. The sharing of power does not come from the teacher to the subordinates, rather, the teacher/authority acts in a facilitative role to enable the enactment of power by all people within the setting.

When power is given the status and action of a verb rather than only a noun, then “sharing power” takes on a different meaning. Sharing power is sharing an action, not some thing someone has. Thus sharing power is really the sharing of the doing of power. So teachers at the Centre share the doing of power, such as decisions about money that will be described later. Students make decisions how money is spent, they share the doing of an action. Similarly students share the doing of actions usually ascribed to teachers or to authority, such as making curricular decisions or scheduling decisions.

Kate and Christina use their position to create an environment that allows for the facilitation of power – making it easier for others to enact power. They are conscious of “powering up” and also of powering down. Kate and Christina get out of the way so students can get in the way. The “way” is comprised of the actions usually attributed to teachers or persons with authority and not usually to adult literacy students. When the teachers get out of the way, there is a way for the students get into - roles for students to assume and a concrete place and means to get in the way to exercise power.

The idea of sharing power in education is usually limited to inter-relational dynamics, whereas getting out of the way involves the creation of structures that can better facilitate the exercise of student power. The structures at this time of the Centre's evolution, consist of the autonomy of their storefront location and access to resources, their regular Monday morning meetings for group decision-making, and the formalized student roles. These structural factors contribute to a shift in power relations, rather than simply a sharing of power within relationships.

The Centre has formalized student roles of Chair, Writer and Head Leader, but students assume leadership roles and responsibilities in other ways as well. They initiate and carry out fund-raising projects, supply lunch for the group (menu-planning, shopping, cooking and clean-up), and assume housekeeping and general maintenance of the Centre. The teachers have applied for grants to assist in creating a small business. Kate informed me that in February 2002 the Centre was given a grant to create a small business and supply training in computer graphic design. A group of students chose to become involved and take on roles associated with the business of creating and selling the products.

Regardless of one's level of knowledge about the Centre, everyone at the Centre is expected to take responsibility to help one another out, especially with new students or visitors to the Centre. Both teachers and students communicate this to new and continuing students in a variety of ways. As of September 2000, all students receive a Student Handbook, which is read and discussed together as a group. Many times during my observations, I would hear students and teachers echoing the words: ask for help, ask anyone for help, there are no stupid questions, go in the Inhale Room if you want to be told what to do. New students find out information casually from one another, through observation and through asking questions of both students and teachers.

The Head Leaders, a group of four to ten students, was initiated by Kate and named by the students. A comment by a student has continued to serve as the Centre's definition: "We're all leaders here, some of us are Head Leaders". Kate felt they needed a more formalized group that takes on specific responsibilities at the Centre. The teachers envision this group as a steppingstone towards a student board that would eventually run the Centre. Kate explained:

My idea was that it'd be a start for people to act in a board like manner. It'd be a start for people who were taking leadership because they were elected, you got elected therefore you have some authority (KaI 02/00).

This authority is exercised through responsibilities that include gathering information from students and teachers to plan the agenda for the Monday meetings. Each week they meet to discuss issues and problems that will be brought up at the meetings. Head Leaders spend time preparing agenda items, taking time to think through the possible concerns and issues involved. They also discuss field trips, weekly lunches and helping new students.

During the interviews and group talks students spoke about their understanding of the Head Leader role as a way of “[Teachers] trying to give us encouragement to get into leadership” and as a means for students to give guidance to other students (Carolyn). The role is “just like work...a job” (Del). For Laura, who really enjoys being a Head Leader, the job means being available to help others and acting as a role model for other students. When I asked Richard, one of the student interviewees, what other things he does at the Centre besides his schoolwork, he answered “not a heck of a lot really”, then proceeded to tell me about “the group that is the politics behind the organization”, referring to the Head Leaders. His perception of Head Leaders is they make decisions for the group and “speak for the whole class, for the school itself”. He equated Head Leaders with local government politicians who make decisions, such as how money is used. Richard told me that at this point in time he was not involved with the Head Leaders, as no one had asked him to take part or join. Most students either volunteer themselves or are elected for these formal roles. Richard seldom attended Monday meetings and did not participate often in the Centre’s events, so perhaps most students were not fully aware of his presence at the Centre.

Students who assume Head Leader positions expressed a responsibility and pride in the work that they do. Student leadership roles can be seen as one way of assuring individuals and the student group of their rights and responsibilities. This assurance works to avoid the use of helping as a way to address individuals’ needs and deficiencies, working to disrupt the deficiency perspective and keeping the caregiving approach at bay. Students start to see themselves as capable humans who can work with one another and with teachers to create and maintain an educative environment.

Not all Head Leaders act in the role of helpful guide. Two Head Leaders wanted to act as “attendance police” to exclude specific students who had not been attending regularly from going on field trips. They talked together about monitoring the daily sign-in sheets to keep track of students’ attendance and informally discussed this with other students, who did not respond to the idea. Kate attempted to dissuade them, suggesting that at the Centre they want to encourage, rather than discourage people and to be more inclusive of all students. She explained how

teachers routinely telephone or try to get in touch with students who are absent and suggested they think less about punitive measure, and of the possibility of working together to connect with absentees.

In their need to police others, the Head Leaders may be operating more from a place of scarcity than a place of abundance. The field trips are paid out of the Student Fund of money and students may see a need to protect and save this fund by not spending the field trip money on those students who do not attend as often as others. Kate's encouragement to be more inclusive suggests a shift to a paradigm of abundance, where the value of relationships gives precedence to sharing the resources and including everyone who is interested in attending field trips.

Head Leaders are students who usually attend fairly regularly and do not stay away for weeks at a time. Judy commented during one of the Group Talks that, yes, Head Leaders are supposed to be students who attend regularly, but that isn't always necessarily so. I heard from teachers and students that most students go through times in their lives when they are unable to attend regularly. During my fieldwork, there were five Monday meetings. Of the nine students I interviewed, six were Head Leaders and they all attended either four or five of those Monday meetings. The three students who were not Head Leaders each attended 1-2 of those meetings.

For the teachers, the process of the Head Leader group is one way of finding out what skills and experiences are needed to build a student board at the Centre. Kate is interested in involving students in board training, and has applied for grants to work on this project that would involve studying local boards, such as the Alano Club, an alcohol and drug-free environment, where Audrey, one of the students, works as a volunteer every afternoon.

Emphasizing the importance of leadership keeps teachers mindful of their own leadership – of being able to teach leadership rather than assuming it and practicing getting out of the way. The teachers struggle with knowing how to help create and maintain learner leadership. They are aware of the differences between teachers and students – differences in background, experience and values. Teachers remain the final authority through their position within the educative system. Kate's comment to me that "students put teachers in a place and expect them to be there", points out that the teacher position is maintained by students as well as by the educational institution.

When students and teachers are sharing the work of running the Centre, the teachers find they need to maintain their authority and awareness of the bigger picture. Christina explains:

So you can't just give a job away when a person actually doesn't know how to do the job, so right from the very beginning and all the way along we are trying to give something to people, but we have to see - do they know how to do it? If

they don't know how to do it, what do they need to learn? Once they do learn it how much do you watch to see? Are they actually doing it in a healthy way, and [pause] how much is it different from how I would do it and does that matter? (ChI 05/14/01)

The difference in how a teacher would do it in relation to the student is an issue related to power dynamics. The teachers have different educational and socioeconomic levels, and more access to a wide range of life experiences that makes for differences in perceptions and values. Both Christina and Kate talked about their struggles in dealing with those differences in their teaching. They constantly questioned and reflected upon the boundaries of their responsibilities, what they based their decisions upon and how to own and use their power and influence responsibly.

Kate struggled with her practice of getting out of the way in two incidents she related to me. The students produced a brochure for the Centre. Kate reflected on her feelings and motives that made her question the quality and caliber of the student-produced brochure. It was important to her that the brochure was clear and accessible to people who they wanted to reach, potential students. But she found herself concerned that it did not look like a professional product that the University-College usually produces and she questioned whether that mattered. She could have acted on those concerns, shared them with the students and exerted her influence and authority to change the brochure. She chose not to; the brochure has been used and appears to work just fine. Another incident was a field trip to one of the neighbouring islands where as a group, people from the Centre toured several artists' studios. Specific students assumed responsibility for the jobs of spokesperson and of presenting the honorarium to each of the artists. They were identified as a group from the Reading and Writing Centre and no one was introduced or identified as student or teacher. Kate found herself questioning the novelty of being one of the group and not being identified as the teacher. She talked with me and also wrote about her experience in a literacy instructor's online conference:

Last month we went on a trip to Salt Spring Island. We visited the studios of four artisans, each of whom gave us a demonstration of his/her craft. At each stop, a designated student led the way, introduced the group to the artisan, and at the end, said thanks and presented the card we had made. I had a good chance to practice letting myself be represented by learners. Did I feel the need to let the artisan know who was the teacher? Did I feel the need to intervene when the student was inaccurate or inarticulate? Did I feel the need to intervene, when the student was wonderful, to say how wonderful s/he was? Could I just be in the crowd of folks from Malaspina?

The power to be correct. The power to get things done the way I think is right. The power to put on a good show in front of the public. Those are hard ones to give up (Nonesuch 2001).

The teachers at the Centre recognize that they can never be on the same level as the students. The status and privilege of the position of teacher exists within the institutional hierarchies and practices. Christina and Kate work to change the practices by exercising more collaborative kinds of leadership with students and with one another. In their leadership roles as teachers at the Centre, they use their positions to model and to teach collaborative leadership skills, such as Kate's use of participatory authority. In the process of teaching and learning leadership, both teachers and students work at unlearning and letting go. Teaching leadership works with the notion of change that focuses on assuring individuals and communities of their rights and responsibilities.

Push Pedagogy

Students spoke with me about their experiences of drifting and roaming during their first weeks at the Centre while they felt things out, and about their avoidance of working on certain subjects. I observed and talked with some new students who were experiencing difficulties in doing academic work. The Centre was quite different from what they were familiar with and they were not used to the range of independence and choices. The students could not get started on or maintain their academic work. To address these difficulties that students experience, Kate and Christina have developed their push pedagogy, a strategy that helps to name and articulate the challenges in the learning process.

I first heard the term “push” in a conversation between Kate and a student who was spending most of his time in the Exhale Room, never choosing to attend classes or meetings in the Inhale Room.

Student: I just need to be pushed.

Kate: Do you want me to push?

Student: If you like.

Kate: It's what you like.

They continued to talk and Kate suggested that the Math class group in the Inhale Room would keep him moving and is more important than his own Math book. She suggested ways to make it more comfortable for him to go to a group class (FN 09/12/00). Engaging in a conversation about pushing gives name to hidden norms of interactions amongst teachers and students.

Teacher pushing behaviour can be experienced as coercion when it is not explicit or articulated, thus the power dynamics are masked. Kate and Christina work to remind students that they are

free to choose to accept a push. One strategy of push pedagogy is a focus on student responsibility to have a plan when they are working in the Exhale Room.

Awareness of choice is an important feature within the Exhale Room. The student's role is to choose their own activity and be aware that the teacher is there to help meet their needs. The teacher's role is that of resource person, individual instructor and guide. Kate and Christina will also greet newcomers when students are not assuming that role at the Welcome Desk. The students' choices may range from doing math proofs or a workbook, writing a letter or sending email, chatting with friends, writing a story, playing a computer game, or reading a book. The teacher's role in the Exhale Room is to follow the student's choice of activity, using that choice to guide their interactions. When Christina described the flurry of working that room, she talked about needing to know what 15 students are doing at any one time, where they are in each of their subjects. She said she needs to constantly remind herself how to move from one interaction to the next – to give herself a short period of time to clear her thoughts, emotions, and intensity of each interaction with a student in order to move clearly and openly into the next one. During my week of working as a substitute teacher, I learned that you also need to maintain awareness of what is going on in the whole space of that room, as well as being involved in the one-to-one interactions. There is quite a challenge to keep a balance of energy and awareness.

A strategy the teachers have developed to help negotiate this busyness in the Exhale Room is to ask students "what's your plan?" Kate explains to students that "what's your plan?" helps her as a teacher to organize her work with them in the Exhale Room. If someone is doing math proofs, she knows to check in briefly and often. If someone is reading, they can discuss together when the person is finished. Kate explained:

Well I guess with everybody, I do want to ask them "what's your plan?" because I want to know whether they have a plan or not. What's your plan is a way of saying: I expect you to have a plan, or at least, if you have a plan I'm prepared to work with you, if you don't have a plan, I don't know (KaI 05/13/01).

There is no value judgment as to what the student chooses (play computer solitaire, work on writing etc). The teacher explains to the student that she needs to know so she can assess how often to check in. With a new student, the teachers check in fairly often on whatever they're doing or they match them with a buddy, a fellow student. When students do not have a plan, the teachers choose to give their attention to students who are focussed and working. Through observation and discussion with students, there was no evidence of authoritarian or coercive attitude toward students, rather both Kate and Christina simply put their energies into instructing and supporting students who were working. Christina commented:

When people are playing Gameboy or Tetra in the Exhale room, I still like to go up to them and say, Kate taught me this, “have you got a plan for the day?” You know, just to ask them, and I don’t spend much time with them, but I let them know that I’ve noticed what they’re doing. And I still do that, but it’s true, I work with who’s working (ChI 05/14/01).

Several times, during my observations in the Exhale Room, there was a definite buzz and energy flow when the majority of the students were working. When I spoke with the teachers about that, they said yes they were aware and often hoped that the other students would also get caught up in that kind of energy and that it would draw people in (from the smoking group outside) or others who were wandering.

Having different rooms in which to inhale and to exhale is an acknowledgment of different learning needs and preferences. Some students say they make choices based on the subject matter, the other students who are in attendance, or the type of instruction, be it teacher-centred, learner-centred or group-centred. Having a choice of whether to breathe in new material within a classroom setting or to take time to absorb, synthesize and exhale is a way for students to find out about their own style of learning and living, and to resocialize to their own rhythms and preferences rather than having them dictated or set out.

Teachers and students assume different roles in the two rooms, depending upon the activity. The Inhale Room classes are mainly planned and led by the teachers for groups that range between five to fifteen students. The students sit in chairs at horseshoe-shaped tables, while the teacher assumes a standing or sitting position at the opening of the horseshoe and in front of one of the chalkboards. Some classes, such as Morphographic Spelling and Writing Group, have a similar routine for each session, with the teacher directing and facilitating. Kate often makes suggestions that students take on the role of leading the Writing Group, but none have come forward. As previously mentioned, the Exhale Room teacher assumes a different set of roles in relation to the students’ choices of activities and needs.

The fluidity of roles allows for a range of interactions and opportunities to exercise different kinds of power. Being transparent about the practice of asking “what’s your plan?” and informing students of the rationale allows room for negotiation. It also opens up students to the fact that teachers are doing their job and want to do it well. A couple students spoke with me about performing a certain task (search for information on the Internet, help a new student) because they wanted to help out the teachers, who were often very busy. Acting this way, with regard for others on the basis of a consideration of the other’s needs, is a key element of mutuality.

I questioned students about teacher behaviour in the Exhale Room since I was curious about their experience of having the teacher regularly “check up” on what they were doing. In my probing about student response to teacher behaviour in the Exhale Room, I expected to hear some resistance or resentment from students. I wondered how the pushing was different from the “hovering” behaviour of previous teachers that some students talked about during interviews. They had related stories from their schooling of teachers constantly “at them” and “in their face”, hovering over them. Judy explained:

[At the Centre, you] actually learn something, you’re actually interested, you’re not like, pushed. You don’t have somebody hovering over your back almost, like “do you get it now, do you get it now?” like that pressure kind of thing? Like all schools had. There’s nothing like that [here]. Yeah and it’s so easy to learn because there’s no pressure, there’s nobody pressuring, there’s no deadlines, there’s no, nothing like that (JuI 03/26/01).

Instead of resistance and resentment, I was hearing from students a receptivity to teachers’ approaches and their willingness to push. Students interpreted the push relationship in various ways. Judy and I were in conversation:

Judy: But for me it’s different, me personally, because I’ve always been, if I’m not told or had to do something I wouldn’t bother with it or do it?

Bonnie: Ah, okay.

Judy: So if somebody is kind of like going “well what’s your plan?”, so you got to come up with one to give them one, it gives you, like, that’s where I need that boost, because if somebody didn’t really care “oh go make something”, then I just wouldn’t bother.

Bonnie: So you see it as a boost and a caring

Judy: Yeah

Bonnie: Yeah

Judy: Someone’s interested in what you’re doing, so if they care you should care (GT2 05/30/01).

The students know teachers want them to be working on their academics rather than playing computer games. Some students need teachers to assume the role of teacher as authority and take an active pushing role with the student. Steven commented that he believes all students would just sit and talk with one another if a teacher didn’t push them to work. Del sees teachers as “pushing me to go on”. At our first Group Talk, during a talk about pushing, students said the teachers help to keep them interested, telling them “you ought to try it, you ought to do this, maybe you shouldn’t, and they give encouragement”. Students see pushing as a sign of caring, encouragement and as aid to motivation.

Bonnie: Okay, what does the “Push” feel like?

Audrey: Just to get us motivated? Just to get us going (GT1 05/15/01).

Bonnie: And you don't feel they push [to Judy]? It doesn't feel like a push to you?
 Judy: No, they just make it look like fun
 Bonnie: Ah okay, okay
 Judy: Like they make it so you want to do it (GT2 05/30/01).

Steven views the pushing relationship as a choice of the student and also as a form of encouragement.

There is some [pushing], they don't push you, if you don't want to do it you don't have to. It's good for them to just say "Hey, you got to, I know you can do it, just try your best and I'll come back and see you right?" (GT1 05/15/01).

Laura and Judy talked about their aversion to doing Math work and their understanding that, when they felt ready, the teachers would be there to help them. They assume responsibility for what is happening and what can happen.

I haven't been able to connect into my Math book. I keep thinking of I'll get them to help me with my English, that's how far I'll let them. But I won't let them help me with my Math, but [pause] I've got to learn to put that wall down and get them to help me (LaI 05/01/01).

Judy: But, yeah I have to get through that [Math] book but you see I'm supposed to be working like, I'm supposed to be working on that book all the time and I don't?

Bonnie: You seem drawn to the reading and writing, yeah.

Judy: Because I know that better, do what you know and I know I got to do that math, and I will.

Bonnie: Mm-mm

Judy: Yeah because she's like, Kate is willing to help me any single time at the math in the afternoon or whatever go over, like I can have her undividing attention anytime I want but it's just Math. I just know, I can go up to her anytime I know, because she wants me to work on my math too.

Bonnie: Does she approach you to work on your Math at all?

Judy: No.

Bonnie: She's letting you/

Judy: She knows I hate math, yeah [laughs] (JuI 03/26/01).

Students' and teachers' open acknowledgement of a "pushing" relationship is a sign of recognition of the power differentials within the student and teacher roles. Students at the Centre feel they can choose to accept or reject the teachers' offers to help without penalty or retribution. The push relationship, rather than reinforcing domination, is a sign of the respect, choice and freedom that students experience at the Centre. Kate and Christina honour and respect students' choices and students' resistance.

Students engage in some pushing behaviour with one another, usually in the form of encouragement or helping one another. New students are always reminded to "ask anybody" for

help. Helping and pushing may be subtle, such as Judy offering Steven the use of her pen when he decided not to engage in a writing exercise in class because his pen refill was stuck.

Some students prefer to ask other students or to work independently rather than asking the teachers for help. Steven commented that he was not comfortable with teacher hovering and helping:

Now, I don't really ask that much anymore [of the teachers] because I know, I figured it out, took me awhile, but at least I learnt. I had my classmates help me instead of my teacher (GT1 05/15/01).

This strategy did not always work well for Steven, especially when he wanted to be working faster than his present pace. During conversation with me, he said he sometimes needs the teacher's guidance and expertise, but has difficulty accepting their help. He chose to jump ahead several lessons on a computer writing program and was experiencing difficulties in understanding and following the directions. Initially he did not want to admit this to Christina, who had sat down beside him at the computer and asked how things were going. Steven avoided directly answering her, working to change the subject when she asked if he would demonstrate his work with the writing program. He later told me with a laugh that he appreciated Christina's direct style of her "calling me on things". He also accepted her offer of help to go back a few steps and explain the directions.

Christina commented to me that, when they do something at the Centre, it is not always foremost in her mind that it is geared to student independence. She said there's something to be said for students being able to accept teaching, and that that is a key component of their program as well. And by "teaching" Christina means the exercise of teacher authority as well as academic guidance. In the teaching at the Centre, there is a fine balance in knowing when and how to push, encourage and support. The teachers work at listening and waiting for students to move on their own, and at judging when and how to move in to give a nudge.

Richard also struggles with how to keep a momentum in his school work, how to push himself. He has the understanding that it is his responsibility, yet he also has the expectation of the teachers to do the pushing. Richard talked about the boredom of having to repeat the same classes in high school three times:

And I [would] find stupid things back then to amuse myself. But instead of going to the teacher and [telling them], "[I have] done this, can you give me something more challenging?" [I said nothing]. Even though it seemed fairly obvious, they [high school teachers] never saw that, they never saw the fact that I was bored. Here [at the Centre], they say - Chris says, "You know if you're bored move on" (RiL 03/6/01).

Richard repeatedly talked with others and me about his struggles in getting himself organized and creating a structure to his schoolwork. The freedom and choice can be overwhelming work for Richard, whose skills and experience do not support making learning decisions and social decisions for himself. He feels like an outsider at the Centre and experiences difficulty in asking anyone for help.

Laura and Carolyn disagreed with the use of the term “push” in a similar way that others objected to the use “power” - Laura wanted to use “influence” instead. They wanted to use other language to described the push relationship. Laura questioned me after I read out a list to her that I had compiled about teachers’ roles.

Laura: Did I hear one that teachers push to do something else?

Bonnie: Yeah

Laura: They don’t push to do something else, they suggest. My opinion, that they suggest (LaI 06/9/01).

During a telephone interview with Carolyn, she said “They’re [teachers] there to kind of push us [laugh] in the right direction, and get us, get our brain going”, so I asked her:

Bonnie: What’s it like to feel pushed?

Carolyn: It’s not being pushed

Bonnie: Gently prodded? [laughs]

Carolyn: Get me motivated to get my math done.

Bonnie: I see, okay

Carolyn: Not pushing

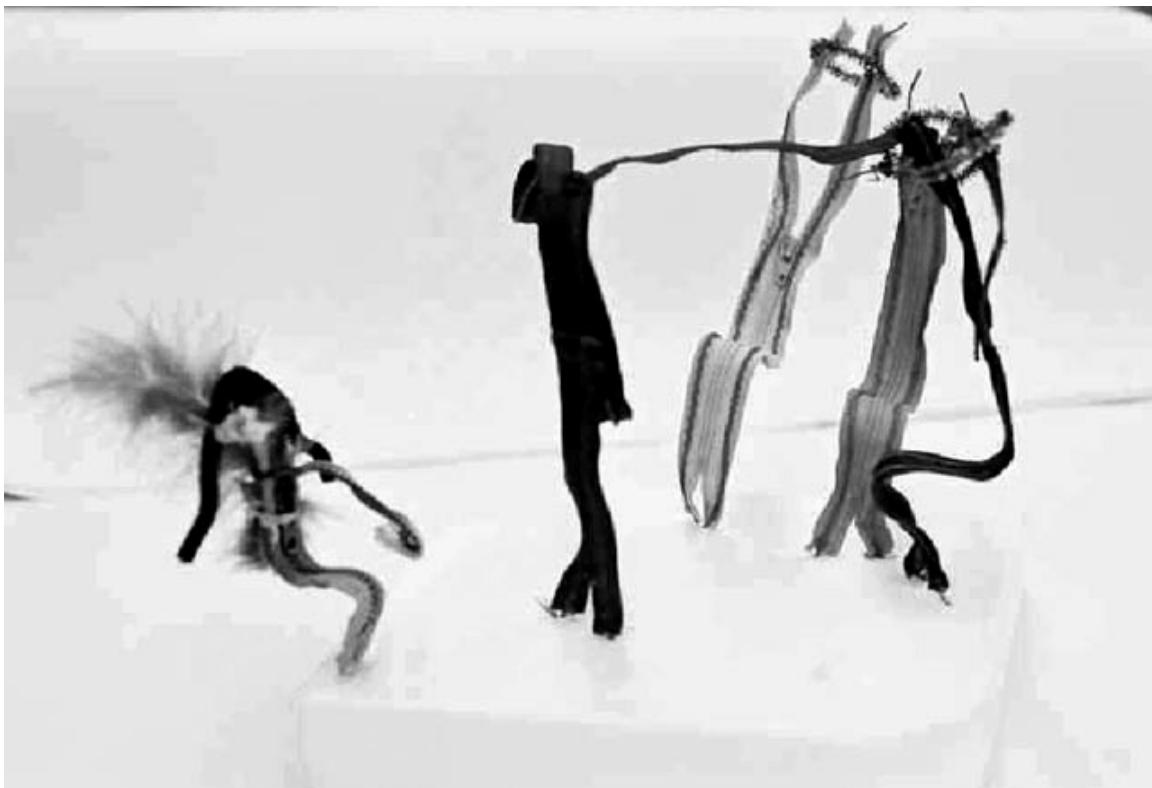
Bonnie: Okay

Carolyn: Never, I guess I said that wrong [laughs]

Bonnie: No, no you’re saying

Carolyn: They don’t push, they don’t push (CaI 06/9/01).

I was curious about Carolyn’s repeated insistence that the teachers’ behaviour to students was not pushing. After my reflection on the sculpture-making activity (described in chapter two), I understood more fully how Carolyn viewed the teachers’ style of working with students. Carolyn’s sculpture is a depiction of her earlier schooling years where she felt bereft of teachers’ help and attention.



In the sculpture, Carolyn's zipper figure of herself is off to the left side, adorned with feathers and beads and a contrasting colour of zipper to represent her First Nations heritage. She shows how the teacher was always with the "same-coloured students" who were like angels and could do no wrong, depicted with gold halos over their heads. Her pleas for help and attention are ignored by everyone. For Carolyn, this experience is in sharp contrast to the help and attention she receives as an adult student at the Centre. In my probing about how students experienced Kate and Christina's "do you have a plan today?" question, I had not fully acknowledged what the perhaps novel experience of having excellent teachers was like for students with a history of ineffectual schooling – to have teachers who pay attention to students, who check in with students, who sincerely care about students and who are effective when helping students. So for Carolyn, the use of "pushing" to describe this attention was highly inaccurate.

At the Centre the push relationship between student and teacher is an acknowledgement of the teacher's role as a support and a resource in the process of students assuming responsibility for their own learning. Both students and teachers continually reinforce through action and through words the Centre's values, written on a poster that hangs in the Inhale Room:

Our Values

1. Students bring new ideas.
2. We build confidence.
3. We ease pressure with a short week.
- 4. We move to and from Inhale & Exhale Rooms. We don't get stuck in a box.**
5. We are not afraid to speak out.
6. We ask for help.
7. Students find things out for themselves.

Pushing is used to help students keep from getting “stuck in a box” and to help them “refuse to be bored”- a rule at the Centre that is discussed in the section on responsibility. Push pedagogy is an example of the teachers’ transparency of practice, where procedures and intentions are explained to make explicit and to raise awareness of the usual hidden norms of interaction amongst teachers and students.

Transparency of Practice

Kate and Christina’s practice of explaining also builds a sense of trust and stability within the teacher/student relationship. Three main components of Kate and Christina’s transparency of practice that will be discussed are: sharing knowledge, authenticity and teacher presence, and the use of emotions.

Kate and Christina share information and knowledge with students. In both the Inhale and Exhale rooms, they routinely explain to students what they are doing or hope to do, and why they are doing it. This happens in the full group meetings, classes and during individual encounters. They explain why certain Math or English assignments may be important, or what a new field-testing project is about, or what they hope to achieve with a project or class they are proposing. The Student Handbook evolved from this need to communicate the what and why of the Centre. During my fieldwork, the surprises that occurred for me often were connected with Kate’s consistent responses and behaviour towards students regarding her ongoing, constant communication with students on daily maintenance issues, as well as on larger issues. She sees the Centre as the students’ place and she enacts their learner-run goal on a daily basis, through her day-to-day interactions and decisions about sharing knowledge.

Kate’s style of teaching is largely based on making visible the ongoing process and the inner workings of teaching. This includes the curricula teachers chose and have developed, as described in the section on unique curriculum. Good teaching at the Centre is inherently tied in with demystifying both the content and the process of learning and teaching and allows for a

shift in power dynamics. Student agency and empowerment are fostered through teacher transparency of practice. This became even more apparent to me when I assumed the role of teacher during a week of substitute teaching during September 2002. While I was leading the Spell & Yell class, two students felt free to express their confusion during the course of the lesson. They also were able to offer suggestions, based on how previous teachers followed the lesson, that helped me to be clearer and to enable them to follow my instructions.

Another experience of student assertion and initiative impressed me during that week. Wayne (a pseudonym), a new student, approached me and asked if we could speak privately. He had been in the two classes I led in a reading and discussion of the Student Handbook. He said he wanted to ask me something, but he didn't want to "step out of line or act out of bounds" (FN 09/12/02). We went outside into the alleyway. Wayne's request was to learn to handwrite. He wanted to write, rather than print, his own signature. His tense body language and the tone of his voice spoke of his worry and concern about stepping out of a student role and making a request of a teacher. I responded with great glee and gratification, and explained that yes, this is what the Centre is all about – making decisions and choices about your own learning and using the teachers as resources. A couple months later, Kate told me that Wayne chose to address a group of tutors who were interested in doing work at the Centre. From his stance as a First Nations person, he spoke about his experiences and concerns about racism in education. Kate elaborated upon this event in a recent email, where she wrote:

The situation arose when we were thinking of having some tutors come to help out at the Centre. I wanted the students to feel some sense of control over the tutors, so we invited a group of potential tutors to come over to the Centre for an afternoon meeting. Prior to the meeting with the tutors, I had a planning session with the students. Among other things we came up with a signal that students could use to disengage with a tutor whenever s/he wanted. The student would only need to say, "I need a break" and that would tell the tutor to stop, without questions. Sort of like "pass." I said that we would ask tutors to come on a trial basis and that after a couple of weeks the students could decide to "fire" any of them. I led a discussion about what students knew about tutors and what things they wanted tutors to keep in mind. We also made a list of things we wanted to tell tutors about the Centre. Wayne brought up the issue of racism. He or someone he knew had had an experience of racism from a tutor sometime in the past; I'm not sure what program, not necessarily at the College, but not at the Centre. So we listed "no racism" as one of the things we wanted to tell tutors. I think Wayne may have agreed to chair the whole meeting with the tutors; in any case, he spoke to the item on racism, and was very eloquent about his feelings and experience, and very clear with them that racism would not be tolerated. From that meeting, about three or four tutors agreed to come to the Centre; two of them still tutor there once a week.

I think that he was able to speak and chair the meeting because of his training in his cultural traditions; reading and writing had nothing to do with that. He did not learn those skills at the Centre, although he developed confidence in using them there. I think he felt comfortable to use his talents/gifts at the Centre because it was a safe place; because he did not experience racism there, he wanted to point out to potential newcomers that this was a special place, and that racism would not be tolerated (06/20/04, email correspondence).

The routines and physical set-up of the Centre serve a similar purpose as transparency of practice, in that they help set in motion a dynamic of empowerment through the trust and stability that students gain from familiar routines. Students know what to expect in the Inhale and Exhale rooms respectively and can make their choice based on that knowledge. Students know the routine of Spell & Yell and can feel confident to correct and help a substitute teacher. Students know that the weekly Writing Group follows the same procedure and may one day accept Kate's offer to facilitate the class.

Through the routine classes that are offered every six weeks or so, students also come to understand that they can choose to step in and out of classes in order to maintain a level of challenge and to take responsibility for their own boredom. As well, if they are absent for a month or so, they can step in and pick up where they left off in the spelling classes or in writing group.

Issues of money at the Centre are explicit and up front, due to the teachers' transparency about practices involving getting and spending money. The learner-run goal and the actions and behaviours of living the goal on a daily basis serve to help shift areas of responsibility from solely the teacher to the students. And one area is money responsibility and money decisions. Students and teachers share responsibility and decisions about the Student Fund. This became apparent when I was drafting the consent form and puzzling over how to pay people that I interviewed. I discussed some alternatives with Kate. Kate then took this issue to the student group to discuss at their Monday meeting. She explained the issue and students discussed it, made a decision, and they created a policy that solved my problem and set them up for similar future events.

Christina explained to me how the amount of spending money for a five-day field trip was equalized amongst students. Kate spoke with each student and asked outright whether they had any of their own money for the trip. She then reminded them that as a group they had decided that each student would have thirty dollars and explained that whatever amount they had would be topped up to \$30 from the student field trip fund.

There are two other examples related to money and sharing responsibility. Kate was paid to facilitate an on-line discussion about teaching. She approached the students for help in the form of ideas and discussion groups, and then asked them to make a decision on the amount of money the Centre should receive for that help. Kate said she loves when the students can get paid for thinking and writing because adult literacy students are seldom paid to write and think. Another example is the teachers sharing information with students about the process and costs incurred by the University-College when hiring a substitute in Kate or Christina's absence. The students were asked to help decide a course of action for a specific day, and whether to direct the substitute money towards a full-day First Aid course that some students had requested.

Kate works to explain and be consistently explicit about what money the student group controls, what money she controls and what money the college controls. When a student author spoke with me about her feelings of exploitation regarding the publishing of her book, I spoke with Kate about this. Later, there appeared on the wall a poster of a thermometer that outlined the costs of publishing the book and measured the ongoing income from the amount of books sold to date. The poster was used for individual and small group discussions about writing and publishing and the costs involved.

The teachers' authenticity and presence are the components of the second aspect of the teachers' transparency of practice. In my research journal, I reflected on the powerful force of Kate and Christina's authenticity and presence:

I think about this Centre, think about the two strong women who spearhead this place – and that a big part of what works here is how they are and who they are, that they share their humanness with the students. That they use themselves in the process of their teaching, they give of themselves (RJ 04/17/01).

Kate's presence and authenticity come from the freedom she experiences through the shifts of power dynamics with students:

Sharing power with students is a liberating experience. I can take off the mask that says, "I know everything, and I'm in charge," and be much more myself than ever before. I laugh often with genuine delight.

from Draft of "Getting Out of the Way" online discussion introduction
(03/26/01).

Christina's genuine laughter and delight with teaching were heard often through the walls of both rooms at the Centre. Kate believes in being her "authentic self" (KaI 05/13/01), and this leads to what Tom (1997) describes as "teaching from a place of personal presence" that involves "being a genuine person in our interactions with students"(19).

I think I'm my own self there. More often than I used to. One thing I've learned to do is be my own self there. And maybe I'm better at separating myself into pieces (KaI 05/13/01).

During the first class of a new course, Christina shared her emotions about the experience of teaching this course for the first time and explained that when the students share their opinions and feelings about how it is going, this will help and benefit her teaching.

Being a genuine person can also mean being willing to use one's self as a lesson and stepping into tensions between teachers and students. During a field trip, when a student made a derogatory comment about women bus drivers and dykes, Kate responded from her stance as a lesbian to take issue with the comment and to confront the student about his lack of respect. Another time, Kate responded to a male student's repeated offers to sit on his knee with a personal concern about her own safety and took the issue to the College administration for help to find a way to best handle the situation.

Being present as a teacher at the Centre means working with the presence and the emotions of the students. This use of emotions is the final aspect of transparency of practice. The teachers acknowledge and accept the emotions of students as expressions of their own authenticity. Kate and Christina show their respect of student emotions through their work with students to use those emotions in the learning process.

Kate acknowledged that she uses students' emotions to get them to write. She's aware that when they're charged up with feelings, they are present, they can be receptive, so she encourages them to write their feelings, to write their story instead of talking to her about it. This is also a strategy she uses to disengage from students' sometimes long stories about events in their lives. Christina has more difficulty with this and talked with me about how she sometimes feels stuck listening to long stories about their weekends. Kate channels students' stories into writing. The students' writing then becomes a tool for learning and teaching, either within Writing Group or through the Centre's formal and informal publishing of students' work. Kate explains that writing from the heart is an effective tool because then the readers also become emotionally engaged. They are affected by one another's stories and the "teachable moment" opportunity is there again. Kate discussed this during one of our interviews:

Kate: I'm really interested in teaching, so I keep looking for that moment when the person is interested in learning and I try not to do anything that will interfere with us reaching that moment. I think that that's kind of a guiding thing for me.

Bonnie: Remember when you talked that the moment is sometimes triggered emotionally. Using the tragic life story [as motivation] to

write, and that works well, and you were worried about being manipulative, of using their feelings?

Kate: Well, I think [pause] I think that is true. That I use their feelings. But writers don't write from their heads, they write from their guts. And I also know that [the] teaching moment doesn't come when people are focussed on anything else. If they're focussed on being angry, then that's not a moment when you're going to do much teaching. I can't keep away those other things. I use those experiences to get them to write. When teaching math, spelling I try not to cause them to have negative emotions, or positive emotions that I think would interfere with what I'm trying to do at the moment (KaI 05/13/01).

Kate talks about taking hold of "teachable moments" through the openings of students' emotions. She often suggests that students write about what they are feeling and believes that we write from our hearts and not only from our heads. During September 2001, when I was substitute teaching at the Centre, many students returned, not having heard about Christina's death during the summer. We spent time with those that we had to share the news and at times I found it quite difficult to maintain composure. Kate was the one to inform Margaret, a student who Christina had helped relocate to a women's shelter the previous spring. When I observed them talking together, Margaret was visibly upset and shaken, her face furrowed with disbelief and sorrow. Kate continued to talk with Margaret, and the next time I passed the table, Margaret was writing. She was writing about Christina and what their relationship meant to her. Later, when she read that piece during the memorial service at the Centre, we all cried together.

Kate and Christina work to enable students to understand what power they, the teachers, have over them through teaching leadership, transparency of practice and push pedagogy. These are strategies and tactics by which students can be empowered to take control of their own learning. The dialogic instruction at the Centre can be seen as a means for students to analyze the social and political structures that constitute their lives, by beginning with those which are socially and politically the closest – their relationships with the teachers and with one another. Ideally, this enables students to recognize and challenge the structures, hierarchies, privileges, rhetoric, rules and regulations of the Reading and Writing Centre. The next chapter looks at the struggles and work towards mutuality and community in the relationships amongst teachers and students.

Chapter 5: The Relationships

Much of the energy at the Reading and Writing Centre is directed into learning about and working through interpersonal relationships. This first section looks at what constitutes mutuality and its relation to student ownership and equality, while the following one discusses the community relationship at the Centre.

Mutuality

I needed to shift my own perceptions of power and power dynamics before I was able to see and more fully understand the experiences of the people at the Centre. When I started my fieldwork, I was very intent on questioning and discussing power and authority with the students. As the weeks passed, I struggled with finding ways to engage people in this topic. They wanted to talk about their feelings and their stories related to experiences of respect, responsibility and equality. During that time I saw a PEANUTS cartoon by Charles Schulz that resonated with my experiences at the Centre and helped me understand something different. Charlie Brown stands on the pitcher's mound and discusses with Lucy the feeling of being up on that mound. Lucy insists it is a feeling of power. Charlie disagrees and describes the feeling in a myriad of ways, whereas Lucy responds each time with certitude that it must be a feeling of power. Charlie says "I think it's something that has to be experienced", so Lucy tromps up to the mound. Standing there, she asserts "Oh yes, Charlie Brown...I see what you mean! It gives you a feeling of power!" Charlie Brown sighs.

Perhaps the teachers and students were also sighing in response to my curiosity and repeated questioning about people's experiences of power at the Centre. While I listened to students during my fieldwork, they repeatedly talked about their experiences of respect, reciprocity, equality and choice. It began to sound like a chant in my head. I finally stopped to listen more closely and to reflect upon what that chant meant. I began to see that it was not that people were not talking about power, but rather they were talking in a myriad of ways that I was unable to hear until I moved to something different, which was away from the concept of power as authority and the narrow definition of power as *power over*. During the process of this research study, I often needed to disrupt my own preconceptions and to acknowledge my assumptions in order to hear anew the students' and teachers' experiences of the Reading and Writing Centre. I was forced to reflect further in order rethink and deepen my understandings and interpretations of their experiences.

People who attend and visit the Centre experience “something different”, whether they are students, college administrators, visitors research participants, or substitute teachers. This section identifies the something different as an expression and experience of mutuality. The substitute teacher, quoted in the first chapter, remembers to not wear her teacher’s cap because at the Centre, “this is something else”. Mutuality is cultivated within a deliberate relationship with students, where teachers are engaged with the students in a process of learning and empowerment. At the Reading and Writing Centre, students’ experiences of mutuality were described in terms of respect, responsibility and equality.

Respect

As discussed in the literature chapter, the adult literacy student is positioned at the bottom of the heap and lives within the stereotypes and images of fundamental incompetence. To move to a place of self-respect and mutual respect can be a long hard adjustment for some people. The teachers at the Reading and Writing Centre, aware of such struggles, work with students to attain deeper levels of respect through their daily interactions and through the instructional program. The next section outlines what respect means to the students and how leadership roles instill a group respect.

During conversations and interviews, students and teachers initiated and talked about respect, using the term to describe some of their experiences with people at the Centre. Respect had a range of meanings for the students I interviewed, mainly centred upon consideration and regard for one another. Some students equated respect with reciprocity, in the form of a direct interchange between individuals:

You show respect to me, I'll respect you.(Steven, during a class discussion)

Here they seem to respect you. And they're willing to help you out and you're willing to do the same thing. They do a good favour for you and you turn around and do something to help them out. In a small way. I don't mind doing that, dropping things, to help someone else out (DeI 03/13/01).

For Del, respect is related to a sense of responsibility to others and consideration of others' needs. I observed reciprocity amongst students and teachers that involved both formal signs of respect - the use of please and thank you, greetings and responses of “good morning”, offering newcomers coffee - and forms of reciprocity that were more broadly social and involved common activity and awareness of one another. Many students appear ready to help out when they can, such as offering to carry in the bags during the bread delivery or readily sharing information with new students. One afternoon a small group gathered around a student at a computer to help figure out a printing problem.

To Carolyn, respect means a lack of pressure and coercion from other people, which helps contribute to her sense of belonging and place. Carolyn had been at the Centre about three months when we had our interview. At 42 years, she was one of the older students at the Centre, where she was currently working on her math, attending reading classes in the Inhale Room and serving as a Head Leader. She was also enrolled in an English class at the college campus. In a soft-spoken voice and with her gentle manner, she spoke with me about her experiences of returning to complete high school at different times since her early twenties, first with her local First Nations Band office, then through Manpower, a federal government department. During her schooling experiences as an adult, she either felt pressured into vocational training or ignored. When she applied for funding from Manpower to return to school, she was told they wouldn't help her because she didn't need any education for her job as a waitress, work she'd been doing for years. She had doubts and fears about returning to school again and talked about her feelings of nervousness when she first came to the Centre. During our interview, we talked about the feeling of group and sense of community at the Centre:

Bonnie: You feel that [sense of group]?

Carolyn: Big time. The first week I was there, I knew I belong there.

Bonnie : How did you know?

Carolyn: Because they introduced us around and said, "on your own time", you know, and no pressure anywhere from any of the students or teachers. [pause] I think they got more respect for each other than any other place I went to (CaI 03/13/01).

The respect within the group, and also the respect from the group is an important factor. This kind of respect is exemplified by Judy's experiences at the Centre. Judy is fast-talking, wiry young woman who gesticulates with quick sharp movements as she speaks. She grew up in Newfoundland, worked at her father's logging camp as a cook from age 13, and has worked as a snowmobile mechanic. Her reasons for returning to school at the Centre were to be doing something besides getting high on drugs and to "keep Social Services off my back," but she "was surprised, yeah, because I started it [school] for totally different reasons than why I'm keeping on going." She is now considering going on to the college and taking nursing, showing an increase in her self-determination and self-reliance. At the Centre, Judy has assumed the roles of Chair and Head Leader, and has helped with the fund-raising bake sale. The only thing she does not yet do at the Centre is use the computer.

Judy served as Chair for a few months of Monday morning meetings. She was willing to take on this new responsibility and to take on the risks of learning as she went along. During one of those first few meetings, a student had to remind Judy that we were waiting for her to assume

her role as Chair in order to start the meeting. “Oh yeah”, she smiled as she jumped up from her seat, found the gavel and reseated herself near the front. When Kate asked if anyone had told her what the job of chairperson was about, Judy, in her colourful personal style, chirped out “Nope,” then listened intently while Kate explained some of the expectations of the role of chair (FN 03/5/01). Over the next few months, teachers and students occasionally reminded Judy that it was the Chair’s responsibility to ensure that everyone got a chance to speak during the meetings. Judy complied and became known for her boisterous and sometime deafening use of the gavel.

During our second Group Talk, Judy explained that she was okay to assume leadership roles at the Centre, but “no way” would she do that kind of job at the College or outside the Centre. She felt comfortable with the group at the Centre and was supported by their belief in her and their respect for her. The role has helped Judy see herself differently. She said that “respect is when someone takes you seriously I guess and stuff like that because I’ve never been taken seriously”. She believes that her “power and authority comes with the respect that people give me thinking I can do something” (JuI 03/26/01). In her leadership role as Chair, Judy was learning to take on the respect from the group.

Christina maintains that this respect of the group is integral to self-esteem and feelings of empowerment. She commented, in writing, during an online discussion amongst literacy practitioners:

I think a student who is well respected will feel more powerful, will display their power, talk about, share what they know. The student needs to feel respected by all the people in the room, not just the teacher. That’s how building relationships becomes so valuable. Christina Patterson (2001, May). Getting Out of the Way.
Message posted to First Class, Literacy BC online conference.

The respect and reciprocity experiences of students at the Centre are capacity-building and sustainable and thus contribute to the undercurrent of abundance that permeates the Centre. The mutuality of the Centre includes both students and teachers, thus the respect Judy and other students of the Centre experience is diffused amongst students and teachers. It is not only the teachers who are taking Judy seriously and thinking she can do something, but students as well. The teacher is often the only one with the authority to give – knowledge, approval, marks – to the student who receives. As well, at the Centre, there is diffusion in what students receive respect and approval for – not only academic work and accomplishment. The respect Judy receives is for what she does, what she gives to the Centre in her role as Chair. Judy’s accomplishments and learning within her role as Chair benefit both Judy and the rest of the

group. Her accomplishments and learning are part of a group process, and not solely an individual achievement.

Within adult literacy programs that endeavor to be respectful environments, some students may experience the respect as a serious misfit between how they view themselves and how they are treated in the world (Horsman 2001b). The students I spoke with may have spotlighted their experience of respect because of the contrasting lack of respect they experience outside the Centre. They experience the Centre as a place that helps disrupt the expectations and associations of deficit model thinking, where low literacy is equated with deficiency on a broader scale. During our interviews, many spoke of being teased, ostracized, and excluded due to their low literacy or lack of schooling. Several students talked of their initial reticence in returning to school and the contrasting welcome and “at home” feeling of the Centre. Audrey told me that when she’s inside the building in the Reading and Writing Centre, she can feel free, as “no one can call you names and no one can hurt you”. But it’s a different story when you step out, Audrey says, because people do and say things that are upsetting. She commented: “It’s a jungle out there” (AuI 04/02/01).

I was interested in and curious about how students’ experiences at the Centre affected their life outside. Although the scope of this study was to look at students’ experiences within the Centre, I had opportunity to get to know Audrey more during my visits to the Centre after my fieldwork ended. She spoke freely and proudly about all the changes in her life, changes that she attributes to her experiences at the Reading and Writing Centre.*

Experiences of respect within this adult literacy program can act as a process of desocialization, where students and teachers unlearn their own histories of schooling and relearn their rights and responsibilities of respect. This serves to help disrupt the deficit thinking of the (il)literacy discourse which maintains stereotypes that are not conducive to respect. Disruption and desocialization occur through relearning to see one’s self as a human deserving of respect and capable of respecting self and others.

Thus for some students, the experience of respect and reciprocity is not something they expect from others in an educational setting. Their experiences of respect within the Centre are a disruption of the external and sometimes internalized stereotypes of people with low literacy. Steven shared stories from his past about social workers and teachers who did not believe he had problems with reading and writing because he was so polite and well spoken. He explained that his usual reticence to accept help or to ask for help was based on not wanting to appear slow or

* See Audrey’s story in Appendix E.

stupid. At the Centre, he has been impressed that the teachers really do give suggestions that can help and that students are willing to help one another as well.

I like this class because everybody gets along. If you're stuck they'll help you. And they don't, they don't put you down, know what I mean? (StI 04/17/01)

Generally, the student group assumes responsibility in helping to create and maintain a respectful, safe environment. This responsibility includes acting in ways that ensure one's own and others' well being, such as "no put-downs and no name calling", an item included in the Student Handbook (Sept 2000).

When the put-downs do happen, both the student group and the teachers struggle with their own responses and ways of dealing with the situation. During the last weeks of my fieldwork, a new student who started at the Centre caused great disturbance within the usual friendly and peaceful atmosphere with loud public announcements about what other students were doing wrong, such as mistakes in spelling or grammar, or using the wrong book. Initially the student group made attempts to include this student, such as offering a cigarette in the smoking group outside or showing where things were at the Centre. Teachers took time to talk with the student individually to explain why such behaviour was disruptive or damaging to people. Kate and Christina both struggled with their own irritation and anger. The responses to this student's harsh comments and interruptions included other students avoiding eye contact with him, shifting their bodies away or leaving the room.

Usually when there is a lack of respect exhibited by individuals, the group serves to help restore some balance. Rene spoke with me about the frustrations he felt when students interrupted one another. I asked him how this was dealt with and he commented: "You straighten them out yourselves, you know, as a group". During a field trip, when a student made derogatory comments about women and gays, a teacher confronted him at the time and then later students avoided sitting next to him. Some of them said they believed he needed to be taught a lesson about how not to behave:

We all, we all felt bad, but he was just an instigator, everybody kind of didn't like what he said on the bus so we just said, next trip we'll let him sit by himself, then he'll know (StI 04/17/01).

Teachers also use the group to respond to disrespectful behaviour, through support and encouragement of more positive behaviour, such as Christina's story about dealing with a student's snide attitude of snickering and sneering laughter during one of their classes. She said she believed in the power of the group in the class, who was behaving in a friendly supportive

manner, explaining to me: "People can bombard him with happy laughter." In her teacher role, she said she chose to ignore his disrespectful behaviour in hopes of the effect of the group. There was limited effectiveness to this strategy since the student's disrespectful behaviour abated somewhat in that specific class, but continued to be disruptive outside the class. The effect of the student within the Centre brought into sharper awareness the desired values and behaviours of the group and revealed how precious and precarious is the group harmony within that environment.

Kate and Christina view students' behaviour as meaningful action upon the world and know that often some behaviours symbolize resistance. Kate had talked with me about equating students' attendance behaviour with resistance.

I did start thinking [that] not getting into a power struggle with students is a way of honouring their resistance of not being turned into a white middle-class person. Lots of them fear that when they come back to school, they will in fact have to become a white middle-class person because when they were in school before, it was white middle-class people who succeeded and the teachers tried to turn them in, you know their behaviour had to conform to white middle-class behaviour. So now I just think of it as – okay so people who come to class have a resistance, call it their identity, [they] have a resistance to having that identity changed, and so by not getting into power struggles with them I am in fact encouraging, and honouring that resistance (KaI 02/00).

But sometimes the issues of students who are disruptive are more involved and complex than resistance. When Kate and Christina experienced difficulties with a certain student, they asked for help and guidance from the counselors within the College system, they tried working out a buddy system, and they tried an individual work program with the student. When none of these alternatives worked and the behaviour continued to be disrespectful or disruptive, the student was asked to leave the Centre. A student must be able to achieve some level of harmony within the group in order to participate in classes and group activities. The group influence may not be strong or effective enough to be received by a student who cannot figure out how to be respectful.

Responsibility & Reciprocity

Responsibility is another major theme that emerged from this study - responsibility to one's self, to others and to the Centre. Students are expected to take responsibility for their own learning. As previously described, the set-up of an instructional program within the Inhale and Exhale rooms creates opportunity for choice and responsibility. Kate explained their rationale for setting up this structure.

This format gives them an opportunity to strike a personal balance between input and output, and “forces” them to take some responsibility for their learning. It also allows lots of time for students to practice other skills—dealing with the public, helping each other, developing confidence, asking and answering questions, etc.(10/08/99, email correspondence).

The separate rooms also help to separate the different tasks and duties of the teachers, thus forcing them to rethink their roles and the boundaries of their responsibilities. Both Christina and Kate talked with me about the different experiences of each room and their ongoing awareness of which “hat” they were wearing at the time – that of leader, assistant, supporter or guide.

Students do not always feel comfortable with this level of responsibility and choice. Del expressed frustrations with the style of guidance given by the teachers at the Centre. During our interview, he said:

- Del: You want to try and finish something and they [teachers] want you to drop it and get into something else. It's kind of discouraging for me.
 Bonnie: So how do you deal with that?
 Del: I just drop what I'm doing and then go along with whatever they want. And that makes the rest of that not important.

Del is monitoring his own behaviour, exercising disciplinary power, based on his perception of traditional teacher/student roles, where the teacher’s suggestions and ideas always take precedence over the student’s. Del’s history as an adult student includes experiences where he did not feel like he was doing anything because of the tendency for his instructors to take over for him, to do things and finish things for him. Del’s frustrations may be related to the difficulties that other students spoke with me about, such as difficulties with having to make their own decisions and having the freedom to structure their own day. Many of these students have experienced authoritarian relationships in education and are unaware of the possibilities of negotiation with teachers. As well, their difficulties may be related to a low level of unlearning the deficit and stereotyped perceptions related people with low literacy - that they have the right to make their own choices and to have those choices respected. One new student spoke with me about how different the Centre was for her because she was unfamiliar with “the way they do things” and the choices available. She had expectations of being told what to do and missed being given daily assignments and exams. Some students opt to spend all their time in the Inhale Room with teacher direction or to avoid that room completely, other than to get coffee or use the student cubbies.

Responsibility to the Group

The teachers and some students exhibit a sense of responsibility and care towards the Reading and Writing Centre. This responsibility is expressed through the respect shown to one another, and through the expectation that each person (students and teachers) share what they know with others.

Bonnie: How does someone new find out what the rules are here, or what's allowed, what's not allowed.

Rene: Well, now yeah, well you kind of feel your way through I guess. And you're told – "you ask". You're told when you come in "ask anybody" (ReI 03/12/01).

Student responsibility towards the group takes different forms. Del often takes responsibility to find out information on the Web. He interprets his increased responsibility as a form of reciprocity in helping one another out and helping out the teachers. Del explained to me that "teachers are good at getting information that the students wouldn't know about", so by students assuming responsibility for the things they can do "that would help, encourage us to do part of it, instead of dumping the whole works onto the teachers" (GT2 06/30/01). The Centre's vernacular practices, described in a later section about work for the Centre, create openings and places where many students first choose to assume responsibilities, which contributes to their sense of ownership and belonging. This may involve making the coffee, helping with cleaning and maintenance tasks or initiating a fund-raising activity. Generally, I observed that the students who assume these kinds of responsibilities are the same ones who are most engaged in responsibilities associated with group decisions regarding educational practices, such as working together with teachers to evaluate classes and programs at the Centre.

Students talked about acting on behalf of the group, for the good of the group. Rene had some fear when I first started the research, but he said that disappeared very quickly after he and I started talking and communicating about this study. After things were explained to him and he felt more reassured that there was not going to be anything really scary, he explained why he chose to participate: "I went along because I think it might be a good thing for the class and for other people" (GT1 05/15/01). Laura also expressed her feelings about doing things for the student group:

Bonnie: As Head Leader, as Writer, you getting voted in, and people coming to you - so what is that like for you? What does that mean for you?

Laura: It feels good that I'm there for them, it feels good that I'm there to help. That I'm doing something. It gives a little spark, it just gives a little spark and just makes me feel

good (LaI 06/01/01).

Sehr's (1997) term of "communal ethic" helps to explain how this sense of care and responsibility comes about. Sehr explains that an ethic of care and responsibility is based on empathy for others, and a belief that people have an impetus to work together to help all members develop to their full potential. This communal ethic provides a motive for people to work toward public goals, instead of purely individualistic or private goals and gives the little spark that Laura mentions. A valued member of the Reading and Writing Centre is someone who feels and exhibits a responsibility to the group. Membership and the sense of community will be discussed more in a later section.

Experiences of respect, reciprocity and responsibility contribute to student agency, affecting student relationships with the teachers and with other students. There is an interdependence between student agency and the teachers' participatory authority at the Centre. As introduced in the literature chapter, participatory authority is a reformulated concept of authority that is compatible with agency and participation, and presupposes equal agency amongst people. The teachers at the Centre work towards student acknowledgment and exercise of their rights and responsibilities. As well, Kate and Christina explicitly acknowledge their own authority as teachers and constantly communicate this to the students. They let students know through their transparency of practice that they, as teachers, use their resources and authority to better serve students at the Centre. An example of their transparency of practice is sharing knowledge about the College's policy and costs regarding the hiring of substitute teachers. They wanted students to knowledgably participate in a group decision-making on how to best use a period of time when Kate and Christina would be absent from the Centre. Students and teachers discussed and made a decision about hiring a substitute or organizing a special course. Kate and Christina exhibit an interesting juxtaposition of humility and pride with regards to their position of authority and privilege. Kate joked about the increasing requests for her to present publicly about the Centre, saying "I'm famous because of you guys" (FN 04/15/01).

When Kate brings agenda items to the weekly Monday morning meetings, she is clear about what she will own, what she will be responsible for. She works to facilitate a shift of rights and responsibilities from teachers to students. There were two incidents during Monday meetings where Kate was pushing students to take on more group responsibility in decision-making. In the first one, she informed students that she was going to be paid \$750 to facilitate an on-line discussion with literacy instructors. She wanted to have weekly discussions with students who were interested in helping her in this job. Kate explained that she needed the students of the

Centre to make a decision or policy about what they should be paid for these discussions. One of the students felt that this was not their decision:

Student: We're going to offer you our time. We're here as students,
you're the teacher [voice goes up & trails off].

Kate: I hear you're giving the decision right back to me and I'm
not taking it (FN 03/26/01).

In this situation, Kate did not want to be the sole decision-maker and was able to communicate that her position as teacher did not always mean the right and responsibility to make decisions that affected others at the Centre. The group continued the discussion, and together they made a decision about the amount of money the Centre would receive.

The teachers often use historical examples (of what students have done before at the Centre) to encourage more involvement in decisions and activities with which students may be unfamiliar. There was another incident where Kate was pushing students to take on more responsibility as a group in decision-making. She explained that the Reading and Writing Centre was expected to give a shortlist of students who would qualify for an upcoming Learner Award. She asked the group "Do you want to do this? First, do you want to decide, or do you want teachers to decide?" Laura spoke up first, saying the teachers should decide, then they can check back with everyone. All the other students voiced agreement or nodded their heads. Kate decided to push and asked them "Why do you want to bat it back to the teachers?" Kimber, a student, said she does not know half the people being nominated. The rest of the group was silent and no more reasons were given. Kate reminded them that in March, for a First Aid course that had a limit on enrolment, the students took on the decision about who would get in. She emphatically made the point that an issue was taken on by students at that time, and that the group made the decision. Kate continued to narrate that this time they are deciding to give it back, that they are deciding not to decide. She said thanks, she would be happy to take on the responsibility (FN 05/14/01).

When Kate opens up a decision usually made by teachers to the students, she is bringing to students' awareness one of the many management activities that go on at the Centre. As well she is pointing out that students can choose to become involved or not. What struck me about this incident is how she points out that they, in fact, have made a decision. When students do make a decision, there is no judgment from the teachers towards the students. Kate, in giving choice, in taking responsibility is modelling a way of being within a participatory, democratic setting. She is working to transfer decision-making, and thus power, to students. Kate was working at sharing power with the students through sharing the decisions and responsibility of

the Learner Award. The students were telling Kate that they lacked information and knowledge to make decisions and take on the responsibility of the Learner Award.

In both these incidents, Kate was demonstrating how her authority as a teacher, understood as the right to exercise the power to decide or to act, has its source in the agency of the people of the Centre. This is participatory authority. Kate creates acknowledgement of and gains permission from the students to act upon a decision they have made together. The authority is shared or joint, in the sense that each agent participates in codetermining the decisions.

Norton's (2001b) work on the complexities involved in shifting power relations helps us to understand what is going on at the Centre. Norton differentiates between "devolving" power – passing on power and responsibilities to people without consultation or preparation, and "sharing" power. Sharing power involves the creation of situations in which information, skills and knowledge gained by experience are passed on. When teachers share resources with students, they are sharing power. At the Centre, Kate and Christina focus on learning leadership skills and creating opportunities for students to exercise decision-making as individuals and as a group. They are aware that, as in this situation about the Learner Award, students do not always have the information, skills and knowledge to make decisions and to take on responsibilities. As well, Kate uses a situation like this to impress upon the students that they are giving her the responsibility of the Learner Award in their decision not to take on the decision-making. She thanks the students for the responsibility, which serves to both humble herself within the teacher role and point out that the role does not imply that assuming all responsibilities and decision-making is a given. This is an alternative authority to the usual teacher authority of power over – that one's authority in certain roles or positions is recognized as being given, not assumed or taken.

"Kate's rule" can be viewed as another example of participatory authority. I heard Christina and several students often remind one another of Kate's "Don't Be Bored" rule. The rule means that each person is expected to act upon the times when they are bored or are boring by making changes to what they are doing. I see this rule as a humorous mockery of the traditional dominant authority that exists in rules and within the teacher role. The idea of a "rule" in schooling implies a control or command from an authoritative source. "Kate's rule" gives a twist to that controlling command because it implies that the student determines and dictates the action. Often people follow rules without questioning their reason or source. Giving name to the rule as "Kate's" implies that others could create and name a rule. The naming may also serve as

a reminder that it is people who create rules, thus it's people who are able to challenge or change them. Challenging teachers is seen as a student's display of ownership at the Centre.

Ownership

Ownership involves assuming responsibility and requires a level of confidence and familiarity. When leading a class or activity in the Inhale Room, Chris and Kate explain their agenda to let students know what is going on. Students who attend classes come to know the routine of morphographic spelling, of novel reading, and of the math class. This familiarity contributes to a sense of ownership. Their familiarity and confidence were apparent during the week I filled in as substitute teacher in September 2001. Some students let me know that I had altered the routine, making it difficult for one student to follow. Judy took the role of spokesperson, prefacing it with "this is not my place to tell you", and informed me of the routine they were familiar with that worked best for the class.

Saying "no" to teachers, individually and collectively is perceived as a sign of ownership at the Centre. Students also display ownership of the Centre through their sense of group belonging and responsibility towards others. For some students, exhibiting signs of ownership may be indicative of a new level of empowerment. Ownership is intricately woven with feelings of safety and belonging, themes which are taken up in the final section on community.

Kate views student participation in group meetings as a sign of ownership. She observed changes from when the Centre first started to six months later:

Early, I guess Oct, November, we had the Monday meetings, and so we would go around, and people wouldn't talk, people would pass. For awhile in the Monday morning meetings [lately], if there's an issue on the table and there's a round, every single person has something to say. And that's pretty amazing. So I like that and I would take that also as recognition of ownership (KaI 02/00).

Students' ability to say "no" to teachers is seen as a sign of ownership. At the Centre, doing dishes and keeping the kitchen clean regularly surfaces as an issue. Usually one or two people take on the responsibility for a period of time, then they get upset that no one else steps in to help and usually they address this at the weekly Monday meetings. Kate attempted to get students to agree to pay someone to do the kitchen clean-up on a regular basis, using money from the Student Fund. They opposed this idea, somewhat to her surprise.

They said "no". They'd rather go off on a field trip. And so [laughs], I was really ticked off, but [laughs] anyway, they said that they'd rather do the dishes themselves, they didn't want to pay somebody to do that. I think that was an important step in feeling that they owned it. Maybe it was just an important step for me in figuring out that they really owned it [laughs] (KaI 02/06/00).

Students saying no to teachers, either collectively or individually, can be difficult for both the student saying and the teacher hearing the no. The structure and definition of the student/teacher relationship does not easily lend itself to students asserting themselves through saying no. The teacher role is a traditional position that exercises power over the student; hence saying no is most often viewed as a challenge or resistance to that positional power. When Kate reflected upon her surprise, she saw the no as a definite movement toward increased student agency.

Choosing to leave a class or the Centre is another form of saying no. I was in attendance during one of Christina's classes when a student left during a drawing exercise they were doing. The student returned later when the class had moved on to another activity. I spoke with both the student and Christina later about this incident. The student said she left because she did not like to draw. Christina said students at the Centre can feel the freedom to leave, to walk out of a class, and she commented that it is the coming back that may be difficult. Her perception is that students need a sense of trust of the place and the people in order to feel free to walk back. This includes being able to leave a class and return, or to leave the Centre and return. Kate and Christina reminded me that many students, unable to attend regularly because of the nature of their lives, have returned to the Centre after several months or a year's absence. There are also students who attend a very short time and never return.

Two students talked with me about their experiences of saying no to teachers. Del talked about his difficulty in saying no.

I do things when I'm asked but then [pause] it's pretty hard for me to say no [to teachers and students] (Del 02/13/01).

Rene shared a story during our first Group Talk about saying "no" to Evelyn Battell, when she was substitute teaching at the Centre. Evelyn teaches fundamental classes at Duncan campus and has shared and supported the process of the creation of the Centre. When Rene first started telling his story he had a twinkle in his eye and spoke with pride and with humour about Evelyn's surprise that Rene said "no" to her:

I said no to Evelyn at Christmas time, remember. Yeah, that went round, she went and got Kate and she says Rene says no! [laughter from others] Yeah, that was the Christmas party, I was playing on the computer, someone was in the kitchen making Christmas dinner, Evelyn came over and asked me something and I said no. More or less a joke, but it was no and I guess I hadn't been able to say no (GT1 05/15/01).

Being able to say no was a cause for celebration at that time, yet during the telling of this story, Rene related the doubt that he still felt about saying no. He thought that perhaps Evelyn was

offended and that was the wrong thing for him to do. As he spoke, his whole body expressed this doubt - he sank lower in his chair, his shoulders rounded and hunched, his voice dropped several tones as he relived that worry and doubt about saying no.

In contrast, Audrey prides herself on her new ability to say “no” to people in all areas of her life. She views this action as an important change in her life and attributes its beginnings to the influences of Kate and Christina and her experiences at the Centre. Several students have commented on Audrey’s confidence and manner at the Centre, speaking with a mixture of admiration and resentment. One student said that Audrey thinks she “owns the place” and is the “Queen Bee”, yet this same student also praised Audrey’s initiative and offered to help Audrey with the activities that she organized.

Equality

Equality, a theme that emerged from the data, is also a component of a facilitative power system, which is defined as relationships amongst equals. Initially I rejected using facilitative power as a framework of analysis, because I did not perceive students and teachers as equals. But I shifted my decision as I began to look closer and reflect upon the students’ experiences of equality at the Centre. The students’ assertions of “feeling equal”, “everybody is equal here” included their feeling a sense of equality with the teachers. I began to see equality as a relative process, rather than a state of being to be attained, and I questioned further what being equal means to the students.

Equality at the Centre means people are equally valued and all have equal rights and responsibilities. Most students perceive that no one is better or favoured by the teachers. Carolyn’s explanation of being equal at the Centre was “being part of the group” and not always being on your own. Carolyn explained that equality meant giving of one’s time and energy into the Centre, such as participating at Monday meetings by saying something, or helping out with a job on the field trip organization. Both Carolyn and Steven said that equal means performing equal work, taking on equal responsibility. Thus for some students, to feel equal as a member of the Centre means being equally responsible, where everyone pitches in and helps out with dishes, lunches, and is involved in class participation. One student, who talked about feeling on the edge or on the outside of things at the Centre, did not share equal responsibilities - he did not usually attend the Monday Meetings or involve himself in any activities outside of his own academic work.

Power imbalances and feelings of inequality amongst students are related to student level of involvement and responsibility within the Centre. The fax machine incident illustrates how

students that are most involved and knowledgeable about the Centre exhibit an authority that is both respected and resented by other students. A decision was made at a Monday meeting to give a used fax machine to Audrey for her work at a volunteer organization in the community. Steven, who was not present at that meeting, had also expressed interest in having the machine and was upset with the decision because he thought students and teachers had reneged on a promise that he would get the machine. Judy was the only person who voted for him; Steven felt betrayed by the others. He said the other students and teachers were playing games with him because he believed that they had wanted him to have the machine but they changed their mind. Steven inferred that his not showing up for the meeting was not an issue; rather that Audrey's presence at the decision-making meeting was like "crying to the teacher" (StI 17/04/01) to get what she wanted. Steven wanted to feel equally valued and have people "stick up" for him, even when he was not there. He rationalized that he didn't really want the fax machine, but that it was important the other students knew how he felt and made apologies to him.

A sense of equality means experiencing a sense of safety as well. The teachers work with students to create a safe environment, as will be elaborated upon later. An equitable environment is a place where people feel safe enough to laugh, to speak their opinion, to take on leadership roles.

Kate and Christina, as teachers, do not feel a sense of equality with the students. In the context of their position and role within the college, they do not view themselves as equal to the students because of the privilege and access to resources allotted to this role. They talked with me about the disparity in socioeconomic standing and education level between themselves and the students.

The teachers acknowledge this disparity and work with it based on their sensitivity and awareness of students' lives, readily sharing their teacher privileges and their access to resources and knowledge. Kate is up front about the different reasons why teachers and students are at the Centre, she explicitly states that she is an employee of the College and is paid to teach. There are big differences in the socioeconomic status of the teachers and students. Kate and Christina are aware of the last week before social assistance cheque day, they know many students are physically hungry. As described previously, the Centre supplies food and drink and has a weekly free bread delivery.

There are also inequities amongst teachers and students due to the life histories of students who are First Nations, students with abuse and trauma histories, and students with disabilities. Feeling a sense of equality is an important step in challenging hierarchical structures.

The teachers work to democratize power relations and create an equitable environment. They work to create opportunities for students to experience success and to increase their self-esteem and confidence. As well as success and self-confidence, the Centre shows us that the process of students' self-development also includes building an awareness of people's rights and responsibilities within an educational environment.

Most adult literacy students have a history of schooling where the norm is individual competition, authoritarian structures and a teacher/student relationship of power *over*. The students often have the perception that teachers know best in all areas and the expectation they will be told what to do. They often have internalized the deficit perspective and stereotypes of people with low literacy skills. These perceptions of themselves and of educative environments contribute to the perpetuation of inequity and marginalization of adult literacy students, and of the adult literacy field itself. These perceptions help set up the students to be powered over, to be taken care of and to be told what to do. The inequities continue as long as people believe they are less than; as long as people feel they are not equal human beings to those in positions of authority; as long as others are always making the decisions that affect their lives; and as long as this inequality is internalized.

In contrast, when humans feel a sense of equality, that as a human in this world, they do have inherent worth on a par with other humans, then there is more likelihood of awareness and opposition to inequities. The experiences of equality that students experience at the Reading and Writing Centre open up awareness and create opportunities for students to desocialize and to change their perceptions. They experience something different at the Centre – respect, reciprocity and responsibility. They experience ownership and belonging. They experience working with teachers and other students. Their experiences help shift how they see themselves and what they are capable of doing.

Some students talked about the influence and the difference of the teachers' knowledge and education.

I think that everybody there is equal, it's all equal – but the teachers when they do the classes, when they teach - there's power (MaI 04/18/01).

This power of teacher knowledge elicits mixed feelings from students. Richard expresses his different feelings of equality with the two teachers, feelings that may be in response to their different styles of relating to students.

I find her [Christina] to be very nice, very easygoing, [pause] very, very smart, but yet very approachable. And even though I know she's like, this very educated person, being a teacher and that, to look at her or to talk with her, I

don't feel like that, I feel like an equal, very much an equal with her. And with Kate, it [the feeling of equality] fluctuates too much you know. Especially when it comes to, like spelling and that [pause] and math. And you know, it fluctuates, there's times [pause] I'll be like this and other times it's down here [motioning with hand to show levels of equality] (RiI 03/6/01).

Kate describes herself as "business-like" in her general approach with students and she always gives an intense focus to teaching and learning. Christina spoke of her own tendency to often get caught up in listening to students' stories about their life on the weekend and finding it difficult to extricate herself from these long conversations and "get on with things".

Richard had also talked about feelings of intimidation related to teachers' voices, saying a large booming voice was harder to handle than a softer, more gentle voice. Often during spelling sessions, Kate plays with her voice, using a big theatrical voice for emphasis in description or specific words. I asked Richard if he ever watched the smile on Kate's face when she was playing around this way, and he said, "No, I just look at my computer". Teachers can inadvertently contribute to students' feelings of powerlessness and intimidation through display of their relatively sophisticated knowledge and broad experience. As experienced adult literacy instructors, Kate and Christina do not often make assumptions about students' general knowledge. This awareness became apparent to me through reflection upon some of the teachers' comments and questions to students that initially surprised me. For example, when starting a new novel in class, Christina engaged students in a discussion about the geography of Canada. Kate asked students if they knew the name or location of certain agencies in Duncan. I realized that this was a strategy the teachers used to ascertain what students knew about a certain topic. Kate and Christina worked to equalize and level the knowledge base of the student group.

The teachers at the Centre have an explicit awareness of their inherent power as teachers and are aware of boundaries in their relationships with students. This awareness is a key responsibility of a thoughtful, reflective teacher engaged in a "deliberate relationship" (Tom 1997) with students. During conversations and interviews with me, Kate and Christina often shared their ongoing reflective process, displaying very conscious, deliberate actions that were purposeful in their role as teachers.

All the students commented on how well the teachers listen, understand and help them in both academic work and personal issues. A few of the female students I interviewed considered their relationship with Christina and Kate as "friends". The teachers do not see themselves friends of the students, Kate explained:

I don't see those students as my friends although the line certainly is getting thinner than it was before since we've been at the Centre. People see understanding and patience as being friendly and I see understanding and patience as being teacherly, not friendly, so there's that. I'm not particularly patient with my friends, for example. There's not enough equality there for me to see it as a place where I would find friends, because, well, I'm paid to be there, by definition I don't have friends there even though I have people there that I like, or I enjoy or I respect, or I understand, or whatever. I think I see that as a mistake for them to see me as a friend, but, [pause] I hope it's a fleeting thing, and I mean there's not much I can do about it (KaI 05/13/01).

Christina's response was similar to that of Kate:

- Bonnie: [asking from a list of interview questions she had given Christina in advance] What's included within your teacher role? Based on observation of some recent incidents, I put down here: advocate, counselor, friend - what else, what do you see?
- Chris: It's funny, you know the only one that offended me, that stuck in my brain of that list was "friend". I'm not very many students' friend.
- Bonnie: Well, that's directly from one of the interviews "I see the teachers as my friends", and the reason that was said was [the students] are being listened to, there's understanding and support. And that's how this person interprets "friend".
- Chris: That's good for them. Then in my view, then they may see me as their friend, but I don't see me as their friend. And I don't try to be their friend (ChI 05/14/01).

As a teacher, being aware of the power differential with students does not change the power dynamics, but perhaps helps change the nature of the relationship to one of mutual respect. Many students at the Centre equate the respect they experience with a sense of equality. Plus many students really like Kate and Christina, so perhaps the combination of respect, equality and amiability means friend to them. The teacher position carries a lot of weight, and Kate and Christina both struggle with ways to use their vested power and authority. Kate's concerns are connected with the fact that "they like us" and she expresses worry about possible unknowing use of coercion in her relationships with students.

Level of knowledge is also an issue within feelings of equality in the relationship between teachers. Christina commented about her personal work in learning to function within the Centre and being an effective teacher:

I'm learning and I'm very aware too, that I want to be an equal partner with Kate. I don't want her to feel that she's responsible for teaching me the things that I don't know how to do, you know, like I will learn from her, but it's not her responsibility to teach me (ChI 05/14/01).

Kate mentioned to me several times her appreciation of Christina's autonomy, her ability to plan and work things out on her own. During Christina's absences throughout her illness, Kate became especially aware of the level of interdependence that had grown between them. She missed her teaching partner's presence and ability to share the responsibilities and many decisions and activities at the Centre.

For Christina, there were other challenges to equality between teachers that were related to her status as a part-time employee at the College (22 hours per week), with Kate being full-time (28 hours). When they were setting up the Centre, Kate worked to get extra paid hours for Christina, who explained:

It's always the dilemma, I only had 12 hours a week then so I didn't want to work too much but I didn't want to not be involved. I totally wanted to be involved with all the decision-making, in terms of how to set the place up, so Kate tried to get me hours - as much as possible, especially initial set-up hours so that we could equally determine the way the place was going to run. And I really respect Kate for that too because she could have had a different view on our power. Kate has gone out of her way in many ways to make sure that I have an equal opportunity (ChI 05/14/01).

Christina struggled with the desire to be more fully involved as an equal team member with Kate and with her reluctance to work for free. Kate supported Christina's need for more regular hours and works within the confines set by the union and worked with the university-college administration to creatively juggle and arrange for more hours.

Christina said that she and Kate balance their times in the Inhale and Exhale Rooms, and that "right from the beginning when Kate and I got started, Kate's never been greedy about the fun stuff". Her example of the fun stuff was the theme unit on Pecket Well that she worked on with the students when they first opened the storefront location.

This thesis proposes that the elements underlying the experiences of mutuality at the Centre are diffusion and abundance. The diffusion occurs through a combination of educational and vernacular literacy practices, which broadens the roles and the relationships amongst students and teachers. The teachers at the Centre take on different roles and thus interact with students in diverse ways according to where they are and what they are doing. In the Inhale Room, they facilitate and run teacher-led classes and activities. In this room they also participate in meetings and events that are led by students. In the Exhale Room, teachers act as supports and guides with students who choose their own work. On field trips, teachers act as both leaders and followers. During special events and lunches, the teachers are often in the background or behind the scenes. Thus the traditional teacher/student relationship is one of the many relationships

within the environment, rather than the relationship. The teaching and learning becomes diffused throughout all these various roles and activities where teachers and students take on roles of leadership, teaching and learning.

Students and teachers engage in literacy practices outside the Centre as well. The Centre connects with individuals and groups within the Duncan community. During my fieldwork there were regular visits to the Intercultural Centre for group discussion and games with recent immigrants who were learning English. There was a bake sale at the College campus and several students worked to help a community library group with their book sale. So students and teachers are doing everyday kinds of things together, such as walking through downtown Duncan together, finding a meeting room in a maze of hallways in an unfamiliar building. They get to experience one another in settings that are not strictly school-related. The student/teacher relationships, as well as the student/student relationships, become more diffused within the many contexts of the Centre's activities and people dynamics.

Abundance also contributes to a sense of mutuality at the Centre. As described previously, there is an atmosphere of plenty for all and an overflowing fullness. This includes an abundance of time. Christina and Kate work to give students equal time and attention and seldom give the impression of a scarcity of time. The Centre is not open Fridays to give students time for appointments, errands and life in general, and to give teachers preparation and planning time. This abundance helps keep the scarcity paradigm at bay by dispelling the need for competition and hoarding. Students feel a freedom to equally partake and to give.

Community

Community, Luttrell's third element of learning centred education, is a theme that kept surfacing throughout the analysis process of this research – the students' experiences and the teachers' group consciousness kept coalescing into a concept of community relationship. At the Centre, the group of people consists of teachers and students. I am using the term community relationship to name people's experiences of respect, reciprocity and responsibility and the group dynamics that occur at the Centre. The elements that I have discussed - facilitative power, dialogic instruction and mutuality – all are contingent upon relationship with others, and specifically group relationship. Thus community relationship is at the heart of the Centre's power system, their instructional approaches and their experiences of mutuality. Community relationship is key to the disruption and abundance at the Centre. There is disruption of hierarchical authoritative teacher/student relationships, of stereotypes of adult literacy learners and disruption of perceptions of what literacy education entails. The values and interpersonal

relationships contribute to an inner sense of abundance that is reflected in the concrete abundance of the venue of this educational environment.

This last analysis section describes what community means and how the sense of community is integral to the efficacy of the Centre. I will use the examples of the “work for the Centre” that students talk about and perform, and the issue of safety to explain some of the ways their community is generated and sustained.

What Community Means

Community is a very broad concept which means many different things in many different contexts. I drew upon two main sources to help define how I am using the term and to understand how the sense of community contributes to the efficacy of the Centre. One is Sarason’s (1974) definition of community, introduced in the literature chapter, with four main components: a perception of similarity to others, an acknowledged interdependence with others, a willingness to maintain this interdependence by giving to or doing for others what one expects from them, and the feeling that one is part of a larger dependable structure. These four components are used to frame the previously discussed experiences of people at the Centre. Students’ perception of similarity to others is apparent in their sense of belonging and equality. There is a lack of deficit thinking in students’ approach to their work and relationships with other students who are learning about reading and writing. Being “on top of their own heap” at the Centre contributes to student agency and a strong sense of themselves as a group.

The acknowledgment of interdependence and willingness to maintain it is expressed through the students’ stories of reciprocity and responsibility. This is illustrated in the following sections on Work for the Centre and Group Responsibility for Safety. The Reading and Writing Centre serves as a larger dependable structure where students feel ownership and a sense of group, expressed literally through the use of the pronoun “we” and “our school” when students and teachers refer to the Centre (interviews). Steven talked with me about his feelings of dependability and the security of continuance of the Reading and Writing Centre, commenting, “this school’s not closing” (StI 04/17/01). In British Columbia, adult basic education programs are often the first to feel provincial funding cuts to college. The Centre is becoming more well-known each year in the Duncan community and has been recently adopted and is strongly supported by the fundraisers of the Malaspina Cowichan Campus Foundation (December 2003 visit to Duncan).

The second source to help understand community and how it shapes learning at the Centre, is Ralf St. Clair’s (1998) article about using the notion of community as an analytical

concept for exploring adult education. He proposes that creating community affiliations is a central impetus towards new ways of knowing and understanding. The new ways of knowing within the Centre occur through students' experiences of respect, reciprocity and responsibility, experiences that are signifiers of community relationship.

St. Clair points out that the process of creating community affiliations can be thought about in Vygotsky's concept of the zone of proximal development, which is defined as the range of actions the individual can perform as part of a group, but not independently. This concept is illustrated in Judy's comment about being able to assume a leadership role at the Centre, but "no way" would she do that on her own in a class at the College at this time. Learning leadership roles at the Centre is one way of knowing that is valued at the Centre and becomes a part of individual's repertoire through their connection to the community group at the Centre. St. Clair explains:

The concept is dynamic, as actions move from being beyond the individual, through the zone of proximal development, to being achieved by the individual alone. Entering into a community relationship would parallel this movement, with the strategies for action offered by that community becoming part of the individual's repertoire of responses. The ways of knowing and meaning-making valued by the community become available to members as they develop affiliation with that community. The discursive and cultural formations of the community shape the perception of those involved in that relationship, and the individual contributes understanding to that community (12).

Thus through the community relationship at the Centre, students have the opportunity to learn with and through the group, garnering support to build on their learning through their sense of community. Some students did not feel connected and a part of the Centre's community, such as the student who was asked to leave, and Richard, whose experience was being on the fringes and of feeling like an outsider. Students who do not connect to the community may be those who do not find the Centre useful. To be a valued member and "successful" at the Centre requires a community connection, which means a respect for self and others, a sense of responsibility and reciprocity with others.

How Community Comes About

The teachers play a key role in building and sustaining community at the Centre in two main ways - through their social practice approach to literacy and through their consciousness of group. Underlying the teachers' approach and consciousness is a value of the vernacular, meaning an explicit acknowledgment and acceptance of not only the students' language, but also social literacy practices. Kate and Christina work to integrate vernacular literacy practices into

the program and curriculum at the Centre. This will be illustrated through description and analysis of an important area of activity – Work for the Centre.

Doing freedom is one way people at the Reading and Writing Centre describe their process of learning and teaching literacy. As presented in this thesis, their literacy learning is a process of self-development. The Reading and Writing Centre, as the name suggests, is about reading, writing and numeracy. Students are doing literacy in their process of self-development. Doing literacy is an apt phrase to describe the Centre's social approach to literacy. Students are not simply learning the skills of reading and writing and numeracy, they are learning about doing literacy in meaningful contexts. Students do not wait until they reach a certain reading or writing level, or achieve a certain credential before they participate in the Centre's activities. The reading and writing programs at the Centre create spaces where people can freely do literacy - write and read with others no matter what level they are at. Students experience a freedom and confidence to do literacy with others at the Centre, apparent in their experiences of respect, responsibility and reciprocity with others. As well, they are doing literacy within a meaningful social context, through both vernacular and academic literacy practices.

The physical set-up of the environment is an ingenious combination that makes room for a wide range of academic and vernacular literacy practices. Since the teachers are open to and aware of local culture and perspectives on literacy, they build this knowledge into the learning program of the Centre. They talk and listen to students and work together with the students in creating the curriculum, discussing courses students need or are interested in. While I was there, a student initiated a First Aid Course and they talked about having a Food Safe course. Prior to my fieldwork, Christina worked with the students on a unit about spirituality, a choice of the student group. Displayed on the Inhale Room wall was a large visual depicting their experiences in this class, showing an array of multi-coloured handprints on a giant sheet of paper.

Teachers do not violate or devalue students' vernacular practices, but rather they are integrated and included within the program. During my fieldwork, there was a week when a special tutor was available to work with students on filling out yearly Income Tax forms. One student worked with a teacher to fill out her child-care subsidy application. Steven had dreams of running his own catering business, and was working to create his own recipe book on the computer. Students make cards and banners that are taken home or displayed in the Centre. Students initiated and ran a fund-raising Bake Sale at the local College campus.

Through my observations and interviews with students, I began to see and differentiate between the academic work the students do, and the work they do for and at the Centre. Work at

the Centre involved the daily maintenance (opening up and closing down the rooms, making coffee, tidying up, answering the student telephone), fund-raising activities, food shopping and preparing lunch, staffing the Welcome Desk, acting in the roles of Head leader, Monday meeting Chair or Writer, and supervising the weekly free bread delivery. My awareness of the work at the Centre began when Laura differentiated between her own work and her work for the Centre. She helped me begin to see how the academic/non-academic work of the students and the instructional/non-instructional work of the teachers were all inter-related and merged within the activities of the Centre.

I'm helping setting up a meeting for the next Monday. And helping out the students and I'm helping out the teachers. I'm putting my work into [pause] the work [of] the school (LaI 05/01/01).

Laura was a student who started at the Centre early in my fieldwork and came to be respected and well liked by many students and the teachers. She was twenty-one years old and a member of the Cowichan Tribes. She grew up on Vancouver Island in several different foster homes. Laura said she quit school many times and has had alcohol problems. After her mother's abrupt death in 1998 she felt she could not go to school. She's been on medication and attends weekly counselling. In returning to school this time, she talked about "turning her life around". At the Centre, Laura displayed an ever-present smile and cheerful disposition, enjoyed making friends and had taken on the roles of Head Leader, Writer and Chairperson at the Centre. She wrote and publicly read stories about her personal experiences. I watched people gravitate towards Laura, who would usually respond with a ready smile, a receptivity to talk with others, and an inclination to help anyone. While sitting at the computer checking her email, she always acknowledged the numerous approaches by various people. Laura worked at her relationships with people through reflection and puzzling through various incidents and behaviours, reflections that she shared during interviews and conversations. She displayed a sense of commitment to the group through her work for the Centre. Laura said she believes that students serve as exemplars for one another in working towards their goals. She was voted into the roles of both Head Leader and Writer, an indication of the group's recognition of Laura's connectedness and sense of responsibility to the Centre.

The non-academic work of the Centre is an important feature of building a sense of community relationship. Some students were actively involved in many of these activities; others were not involved at all in work for the Centre. Of the nine students I interviewed, two of them seldom were involved in any work for the Centre. Teachers said that participation varies each

term with each different group of students. Four of the students that I interviewed exhibited a commitment to the Centre and all four experienced a high level of connectedness to the group. Both Rene and Laura spoke with me about making decisions that were for the good of the group at the Centre. Del and Audrey were constantly doing jobs around the Centre (watering plants, staffing the Welcome Desk, washing the coffee cups, arranging the chairs). When I commented to them about my observations of their work, they replied that it was important to them that “things are kept up” at the Centre.

Students’ work does not go unrecognized. Christina and Kate value and acknowledge the work that students perform in the daily activities of running the Centre through on-the-spot comments to individuals, during the Appreciation ritual in Monday meetings or during group gatherings such as classes or events. During the end of most Monday morning meetings, there is an agenda item entitled “Appreciations”. People can and do use this time to say a brief thank-you to people like Rene, Laura, Del and Audrey for their ongoing work for the Centre. Initially I found the formality and naming of the ritual very unfamiliar and awkward. People expressing appreciations exhibited such sincerity and humour that I was soon caught up in the spirit of it and joined in to voice my own appreciations publicly.

The work that students do at the Centre is generally appreciated and respected by both teachers and students. In a discussion with Judy about a bake sale that Audrey initiated, Judy commented “Well, Audrey practically did it”.

Bonnie: But she couldn’t have done it alone.

Judy: Yeah, if it wasn’t for her - nothing - we wouldn’t have did that
(GT2 05/30/01).

Steven voiced similar feelings about Audrey’s work.

Bonnie: I think what I’ve noticed about people that have been there longer, they take on more jobs to do and/

Steven: Yeah big time. They travel, they raise more money for our class. Like Audrey, she’s awesome (StI 04/17/01).

Students see one other as models and inspirations. During our interview, I asked Laura what the difference was between students who attend regularly and do jobs for the Centre and those who do not.

That they’re making the effort to reach their goals and that when they’re doing that they are influencing other people so the other people know that they can do it too (LaI 05/01/01).

As a researcher in their environment, I too became enmeshed in a feeling of responsibility to the Centre and felt a desire to help out where I could. Early in my fieldwork I bought a small tin of paint, accepted the offer of help from Del, and together we cleaned up the glass door and redid the address numbers.

For some students the work they do for the Centre is integrated and harmonious with their own academic work and their presence at the Centre. For example, Laura offered to make a sign for our Group Talk and used that as her computer assignment. There is an envelope on the wall with an ongoing list of current “Jobs To Do” around the Centre and some students are aware of this and readily integrate their own work and the jobs for the Centre. Audrey chooses to do her academic computer work at the Welcome Desk, answering the telephone and greeting people as they enter.

Not all students feel the same way about the work they do for the Centre and for one another. Some students, such as Del, struggle with valuing their own work and being able to set boundaries.

Well since I've been here, I've learned some things, some responsibilities? That also cuts into what I'm supposed to be doing, my writing, and my math and stuff like that? I don't mind helping out others, but if they can do it in return.

I feel like I'm behind on a lot of things, because people stop and they ask you to do something and you have some kind of a plan that you want to do something, then that just, puts a damper on (DeI 03/13/01).

Del struggles to balance his own work with his work for the Centre. Other students expressed a sense of well being about their participation in the work of the Centre. During the interview with Audrey, when I commented on all the roles she takes on, she said, “It gives me strength”. Judy talked about her participation in a student-initiated and student-run bake sale.

Gives you confidence in yourself [pause] like, makes you more open to anything else, more aware (GT2 05/30/01).

The peer relations that develop through vernacular practices work to diffuse the authority-dependent relations (Shor and Freire 1987) that more commonly exist within groups of students and teachers. The students' increased self-respect and confidence demonstrates how the experiences of students become capacity-building and sustainable through the ongoing connections and relationships at the Centre. This in turn contributes to the undercurrent of abundance and diffusion that permeates the Centre. The community relationship of the Centre includes both students and teachers, thus the experiences of respect of Judy (who experienced the respect of the group when she served as Chair and Writer) and other students of the Centre are

diffused amongst students and teachers. It is not only the teachers who are taking Judy seriously and thinking she can do something, but students as well. This diffusion can be viewed as a desocialization and disruption of the traditional student and teacher roles, where the teacher is invested with the authority to give – knowledge, approval, marks – and the student receives. As well, at the Centre, there is diffusion in what students receive respect and approval for, since it is not only academic work and accomplishment, but their vernacular literacy practices and social practices as well.

The jobs and non-academic activities that students engage in are important contributions to the well-being of both the group and the individual. These activities can serve as steppingstones in the students' decision-making and risk-taking process at the Centre. Del's zipper sculpture illustrates this process with the graduated heights of bars – at the Centre, a student can start with what is familiar (the lowest bar) and gradually move onto more difficult and risky activities until they feel ready to make the leap to the highest trapeze bar. There is an abundance of choices and opportunities for vernacular literacy practices. Students can create their own comfort level; they can experience respect, reciprocity and responsibility in a variety of ways. Each person can exercise their expertise through their way of knowing, doing and being, such as finding out information online, speaking about racism to potential tutors, planning and preparing lunch, bringing bannock to share with others, or cutting boards for signage. Some students assume leadership roles and initiate activities, others work in support roles and others make suggestions. Students can act with autonomy and agency; they do not have to wait to be told what to do by a teacher. For some students this maybe be a disruption and an unlearning of the roles they usually assume within an educational environment.

Students' self-respect and confidence work to increase student agency and thus function as disruptions to the pervasive deficit perspective associated with adult literacy learners. Students from the Centre have become involved in speak-outs, where they talk publicly about their work as adult literacy students. Audrey has attended provincial learner conferences and Rene no longer needs to hide the fact of being a literacy student. I asked other students about representing the Reading and Writing Centre publicly. Their responses indicated that, for them, there is no stigma attached to being identified as students from the Centre, but rather it is a source of dignity and honour.

The teachers' consciousness of group and their social practices approach to literacy figure prominently at the Centre to help create sense of community. The issue of safety and creating a safe environment is another key area where the group consciousness is apparent.

Group Responsibility for Safety

Safety was a theme that emerged from interviews and observations. The Centre is unique in how the teachers approach the issue of safety. They differ from other educational environments in how they work with students and promote a collective responsibility to create and maintain a level of safety. I will explain and illustrate what safety means at the Reading and Writing Centre and tell a story about how one safety issue was handled.

Awareness of the need for a safe environment in adult literacy education is usually an awareness of the socio-political realities of students' lives – the conditions of poverty, racism, and trauma and the effects on learning.(Horsman 1999; Battell 2001; Norton 2001b; Alderson and Twiss 2003). A safe environment is required in order to do freedom at the Reading and Writing Centre. This means students and teachers feel safe on a physical, emotional and intellectual level. They feel free to move, express feelings and take risks in learning. The freedom and safety at the Centre are related to their non-hierarchical power system and the lack of authoritarian power dynamics. Kate and Christina are educators with a keen awareness of the socio-political rationale for a safe environment and the means to create such an environment. They display a mindfulness of the importance of the daily encounters with students to build and maintain the respect and support needed to resocialize and disrupt the expectations and patterns associated with hierarchical, authoritarian power dynamics. The teachers work with the student group to do this. Their consciousness of group is perhaps a way that Kate & Christina work with the limits of their power and influence, acknowledging that the student group is needed to help create a safe environment. The sense of community at the Centre means that everyone needs to take responsibility; that the teacher is not seen as omnipotent, but rather, can exercise effective power in some situations, not in others.

Explosions of laughter were often heard from Christina's classes in the Inhale Room. She told me that she sees the presence of laughter as a sign of safety in the classroom because she believed that "people need to feel safe enough to laugh together" (Chi 06/12/01). The indicators of safety from the teachers' perspective are laughter, student autonomy and ownership. Kate relates the development of a safe environment to the autonomy of the storefront location and students' sense of ownership:

Well, the move from the college has to do with giving the students way more control, over this situation, and others. And so if students have ownership I think that then learning will be easier and developing their own safety will be easier, that it has in fact, been working, although slowly, it has been working (KaI 02/00).

Kate and I talked about a discussion she had with students during the first month in their new storefront location:

Kate: One day I asked if we could just have a round and if the old students would tell, would say something to the new students, that they wished they had known on their first days there. So Audrey said “I’ll start”, and she said “You need to know it’s safe here”. Just plo! [exclamation] like that, that was really a nice confirmation for me, [laughs], because that is probably my number one concern as well. So it was great to see her name it right off the top. When I think about the world not being a safe place, I know it’s not safe for First Nations people, and I know it’s not safe for other people of colour, and I know it’s not safe for various people but the group my heart goes out to most is women, you know. When I think about making the world safe, I think about making it safe for women. So that really is a big thing and so I pay attention to those big issues of racism and sexism particularly.

Bonnie: Yes, and so this learning environment that you’re creating, I mean safety is one really important thing. What else is important?

Kate: Well I guess I would say safety in so many areas, but safety in terms of [pause] being safe from other students making remarks about, about your abilities or anything about you. A place where it’s safe to take risks in learning (KaI 3/00).

Students’ indicators of safety were the sense of trust, well-being and comfort they felt at the Centre. They spoke with me in interviews about feeling safe at the Centre, where “nobody runs you down, feels secure here” and that you need “never, ever be afraid to ask a question, even if you think it’s stupid”. Safety shapes and is shaped by the students’ trust of one another and of the teachers. Based on their experiences with Christina and Kate, students such as Judy exhibited high levels of trust and belief in what the teachers say and suggest to them:

Yeah, you can choose. Like see I didn’t want to go to that computer thing at Malaspina [College campus], because I don’t know nothing about computers. What am I going to do sitting in front of computers? And then Chris goes like: “Oh but just try it once, they only do that, you’d be surprised at what they do”. So if she’s saying that, [okay] she’s honest with me. But if she thought, you know, it wouldn’t be good she’d go: “Like you know, you probably wouldn’t like it, you know”. So if she says “I bet you would like it” then I’m going to go and see because Chris says she thinks I would like it and so I did like it (GT2 05/30/01).

Judy’s willingness to take risks and try something new stems from the safe place created through her trust and belief in the teachers.

Students described the feeling at the Centre as “homey” and “not intimidating”. Their sense of safety was expressed through explanations of their comfort level. Laura said:

That's another good thing, at the meetings, I can get up and talk to all the students without feeling uncomfortable. You can feel comfortable there. And, just feel comfortable, and you're okay and you can talk in front of all the students without worrying, without no shyness, without fear. And I think that feeling, I can just talk, without no nervousness. That was always my fear in the past, and I can just get over it (LaI 05/01/01).

My observation of Judy one afternoon epitomizes the high level of safety and feelings of trust and belonging at the Centre. Judy was stretched out on the black vinyl lounge chair in the reading area of the Exhale Room. Her feet were up on the tattered matching footrest and she had a book on her lap. Several students and a teacher were working at the tables and computers throughout the room. Judy called out loudly, as if to make sure the whole world could hear: "What's a-i-r-y?" Only a couple students looked up briefly, then returned to their work. Kate, who was the teacher in the Exhale Room at the time, walked over to Judy to answer her question. They spoke briefly together about Judy's book, then Kate wandered back to her work with other students. I was initially surprised, and then rather delighted that Judy could feel both safe enough to publicly ask for word identification and to assume that someone at the Centre would answer her question. When I questioned her later about the possibilities of her behaviour viewed as an interruption to others or possibly resented, she confidently reassured me that no, not here at the Centre, there would be no objections - it was okay. Judy's sense of safety at the Centre allowed her to act without fear and apprehension about publicly displaying her reading ability. She was able to ask for and expect help from a teacher. Kate and Christina's work with students to create a safe environment stems from their awareness of students' lives and their emphasis on the group, illustrated in the following story.

During my fieldwork, the teachers were concerned for one female student's physical safety and they acted on this concern in two ways. Christina acted as an advocate and helped the student relocate to a woman's shelter and then both teachers channeled their concern for this student's safety to a teaching opportunity to prepare the Centre for a possible visit from an unwelcome visitor.

One of the regular students, whom I'll name Mary, arrived late one morning. Mary's presence was usually quiet and unobtrusive. On this morning, she whirled in with a frowning face like thunder, strode across the Inhale Room to her cubby in the Exhale Room. On her way back to the door, Christina asked Mary if she was going to stay or was just picking up stuff. Mary's face remained firm and she said she was just picking up her stuff. She went out the door and down the sidewalk. A few seconds later, Christina walked outside, looked down the street,

then disappeared from view. Christina came back a few minutes later and asked to talk with Kate outside. I found out later that Mary had been involved in an incident with her boyfriend and she had been charged with assault with a weapon. When Christina had gone out to talk with her, Mary said there were people in the Centre who knew about her, who knew what had happened. Christina told her that this was her school, and that she could come no matter what had happened, no matter what she had done. Mary did return and attended the afternoon Exhale Class, which happened to be on Anger Management. Later that week, Christina and Mary worked together to relocate her to a women's shelter because they wanted to guard against the possibility of retaliation from the boyfriend and his family.

Kate and Christina were concerned about Mary's safety at the Centre as well, because there was a possibility that people might come looking for her at school. They planned and executed a group activity with all the students to bring awareness to that possibility and to explore together ways of dealing with such a potential visitor. The group activity took place in the Exhale Room, near the entrance door, and involved role-playing. In her explanation of the activity, Kate made no reference to the specific assault incident. She first reiterated the College policy of students' right to privacy - at the Centre students can choose to not be contacted by telephone at the Centre. Their names are on a list by the telephone so the person answering calls will know. Kate explained that this right to privacy also includes people trying to contact them in person at the Centre. She said she wanted to work out with the students what they all could do if someone came to the Centre and forcibly tried to contact a student against their wishes. Kate and Christina took turns taking the role of an angry visitor looking for a student, and after initial responses of laughter and mock fear, students gradually took part first through suggestions, then getting up and role playing ways of dealing with the person. They acted and discussed what to say, where to position themselves, and how to support the person who initially was in contact with the visitor.

While this was happening, I kept glancing around the group of fifteen students. Most of them appeared keenly engaged and involved either through role-playing, talking or leaning forward. Mary sat through the whole activity. She attended very sporadically for the next couple weeks and I did not take an opportunity to talk with her.

I was struck by the way the teachers perceived and handled this situation. They acted without blame or judgment about the incident, and their actions were focussed on concern for Mary and the safety of the group. The use of the role-play enabled the teachers to introduce the issue and to work together with students to find ways to deal with the issue. The teachers'

concerns and acknowledgment of students' lives and their use of the group helps to build a sense of community. The assumption of joint responsibility for a safe environment works to build and strengthen their facilitative power system and community relationship.

Kate and Christina acted on the notion of assuring students of their rights and responsibilities, rather than focusing on the notion of helping as a way of addressing individuals' needs and deficiencies (Kreisberg 1992). The helping perspective is indicative of much of adult literacy education and works to perpetuate individualism, dependence and the caregiving approach in adult literacy education.

The Reading and Writing Centre's mode of ensuring student safety is similar to the teachers' approach to all the other practices – students are included, consulted and considered partners in creating the educational environment. The efficacy of this approach, as has been discussed and illustrated throughout this thesis, lies in the ways teacher/student power relations are disrupted and shifted to make room for student growth and initiative through their community relationship. The group itself becomes an empowering agent. The group process that builds community relationship at the Centre – through facilitative power, dialogic instruction and mutuality – disrupts the individualism that tends to dominate education and diffuses teacher power and authority. There is an abundance of room at the Centre for growth of student autonomy through the collective power of the group.

Chapter 6: Summary

This study explored power and authority amongst teachers and students asked what contributed to the efficacy of the Reading and Writing Centre. The “something different” about the Centre and its uniqueness within adult literacy education is its capacity for teachers and students to do freedom. This final chapter briefly summarizes what doing freedom means and reinterprets it through the concepts of normalization and democracy. I share some personal reflections, then discuss some implications for adult literacy education and suggest some directions for further research in this area.

At the Reading and Writing Centre people experience freedom from stereotyping and individual blaming; authoritarian practices; and the narrow roles of Teacher and Student. They experience freedom to respect themselves and others; make choices and be respected for those choices; and exercise individual and collective power. Doing freedom occurs within their learning centred environment where power dynamics amongst teachers and students shift from power *over* to power *with*. The teachers’ participatory democratic vision is manifest within the development of their facilitative power system. My research has shown that what then happens in a democratic, learning centred adult literacy educative environment is a rich process of learning and community building.

This thesis has stressed the uniqueness of the Centre, that something different is happening there - they are doing freedom. Now I would like to shift that perspective and look at doing freedom as a process of normalization and an exercise in democracy; the people at the Centre are living and exercising their rights as human beings. Normalization is a term used in Montessori education to name the changes that children undergo when they are offered work and freedom within a prepared environment (Standing 1984). The changes observed in children include shifts from being in conflict with themselves and their social environment and exhibiting disordered behaviour to being more in harmony with themselves and their environment. A Montessori classroom is rich in motives for activities that are adapted to the child’s interests and that engage the child’s whole personality. The child chooses their individual activity; their choices are respected and free from adult control. Aided by this kind of environment, “normalized” children show in their subsequent development “spontaneous discipline, continuous and happy work, social sentiments of help and sympathy for others” (Montessori 1979:207).

When I compare my experiences working in Montessori schools and my research at the Reading and Writing Centre, I see strong parallels between the philosophies of Montessori and the teachers at the Centre. The Reading and Writing Centre is a prepared environment that is richly geared to the needs, interests, and motives of the students. The students are encouraged to do freedom - to make their own choices - and their choices and decisions are respected. Within this environment, the adult students show interest in engaging in academic and vernacular literacy activities, there is an atmosphere of joy and abundance, and people exhibit respect, reciprocity and responsibility towards one another. Since many adult literacy students have internalized the derogatory stereotypes and deficit perspective of dominant literacy and education discourse, or since their previous schooling experiences often make them reticent to return to education, they often do not see themselves as capable learners with agency and leadership potential. Thus the experiences of respect, reciprocity and responsibility can be seen as signifiers of adult students becoming normalized within this environment. They experience the basic rights and responsibilities of a human being. Their normalization means they experience being an individual-in-relation and not solely an isolated individual; they experience a sense of immanence rather than seeing themselves through only a deficit perspective; and they experience education as self-development and not solely development of literacy skills.

This study has shown how the education processes at the Reading and Writing Centre involve learning one's rights and responsibilities. The work that students and teachers choose to do at the Centre illustrates their initiative and commitment to common activities. Students at the Centre experience that every person has that right, responsibility, and capability of some level of involvement in these activities. Competence is assumed, thus people are not excluded because of low literacy skills, and people are not assumed incapable because of low literacy skills. This thesis shares Gould's argument that common activity is one of the conditions for self-development; it provides a social context for reciprocity and makes possible the achievement of ends that could not be achieved by an individual alone.

Thus as well as an experience of normalization, the students of the Reading and Writing Centre experience an exercise in democracy. The study has illustrated and explored the democratization of adult literacy education within this setting. By democracy, I mean the principle of democracy introduced in the literature chapter - more participatory than representative, based on human agency, and including the economic and social domains as well as the political domain. Students participate in the creation of the environment and they participate in the decisions that affect their lives within that environment. Student participation

is neither imposed or coerced, but rather, there exists a quality of relationships and respect that makes participation a matter of choice. Students and teachers work together as allies. The Centre's establishment of a facilitative power system and community relationships illustrates a shift from traditional teacher/student relationships towards an equalization of power dynamics. The power system and relationships are indicators of active citizenship engagement within a direct and participatory democracy (Rebick 2000). The Reading and Writing Centre can serve as a model of education that characterizes democratic participation.

The elements of that model that are most prominent are the Centre's values that have emerged through the teachers' politics and philosophy, and their vision. Before this research, my passion and belief in social change were fired by the inequities and injustice related to adult literacy adult education and I saw the Reading and Writing Centre as an oasis in the field and a potential vehicle for change. Having done this study has modified how I envision change. Now I am not convinced that such models within education will necessarily substantiate social change within the larger society. The importance of this research lies in showing how a visionary goal can be lived out through more equitable relationships within adult literacy education. We may not be able to remake the world through schooling, but "we can instantiate a vision through pedagogy that creates in microcosm a transformed set of relationships and possibilities for social futures, a vision that is lived in schools" (New-London-Group 1996:72).

The Reading and Writing Centre shows us that a transformed set of relationships is a joint effort on behalf of the teachers and the students, who work together to create a generative and sustainable environment with a range of choices to accommodate diverse learning needs. Such teacher and student collaborative efforts work well. More educational institutions need to support such collaborations by acknowledging the existing debilitating hierarchical approaches and work to remove the barriers that limit teacher autonomy. In order for students to do freedom, teachers must have a taste of it themselves. Through living their vision of learner-run, the Centre kindles the imagination of possibility for social futures that encompass equitable community relationships. I heartily agree with Steven, a student research participant who told me "the way I look at it, they got to have more schools like this" (StI 04/17/01). Yet can the Reading and Writing Centre be duplicated as an educational environment? The efficacy of the Centre is their politics, which are based on principles and ethics that are manifest in the educational methods and strategies. The principles and values of the Centre - immanence, non-deficit thinking, abundance and disruption - are not reflected in the larger culture; as Audrey said "it's a

jungle out there". This implies that struggles, challenges, and contradictions are inevitable when educational environments adopt and live such principles and values.

This thesis affirms the importance of acknowledging the social practices of literacy and the value of the vernacular in adult literacy education. The efficacy of the Reading and Writing Centre as a learning environment illustrates the value of the interaction between informal and formal literacy practices. This study ties in with a current long-term literacy research project in the United Kingdom that is looking at the interaction between informal and formal literacy practices with the intent of improving adult learning in formal education (Ivanic 2004). As ethnography, this study contributes the depth of detail of students' experiences and perspectives of what works for them in their education.

Where are the voices of students in educational research? Why are educators not listening more closely to students? There are unacknowledged power issues related to dominant discourse that must be recognized and acknowledged. In formal education, we do not recognize or value informal literacy practices, the students' vernacular practices. We need to see this as social inequity. We will never begin to address social injustices unless we start to recognize and own the myriad of ways we contribute to social inequities on a daily basis within our own activities and relationships. This study may prompt teachers, tutors and administrators to look again at what they are doing through the lens of equalizing power and authority dynamics. They can ask themselves: What am I actively doing to open wider spaces where students can more effectively exercise power? How well do I listen and engage in reciprocal talk? By doing this, students can feel they are truly agents within their own education and may then be encouraged to reconsider their rights and responsibilities within educative settings. It would be interesting to examine further how community and the sense of group are operating in other adult literacy education settings, both group programs and one-on-one tutoring programs. The findings of this study may cause a reexamination of the prevalent model of one-on-one teaching within adult literacy education and explore creative ways to provide more opportunity for community relationship building within the educative process.

This study has generalized and lumped together the categories of students and of teachers, and did not focus on the scholarship that speaks to students and teachers that are of First Nations heritage, of specific gender or ability. It would be interesting to look at how the Reading and Writing Centre's community relationship and the power system have been affected by gender and culture.

Ethnographic study serves as an important resource in adult education, giving a much-needed look into the students' perceptions and experiences. The employment of artifacts as a research tool uses an art-based inquiry approach that contributes to ethnographic methodology. Further exploration and documentation of art-based inquiry is needed to explore how the approach can be more fully integrated into the research process from proposal to dissemination.

I can now welcome the changes and ongoing questions that this research has prompted within my own life. My ongoing connection with the people of the Reading and Writing Centre affirms my trust that this research can continue to support and help benefit their program. I look forward to sharing this study with the broader field through interactive presentations with students, instructors and administrators and to work on developing creative projects that will share the essence of the Reading and Writing Centre.

EPILOGUE: Not Doing Freedom

This is a story of my intensely arduous journey of learning about academic writing, specifically writing the literature chapter. What follows is a description of some emotional experiences, then a reflective analysis that is framed within the process of acculturation and identity. I outline some of my learning about academic writing and the related personal changes, as well as a few things that helped and hindered my process of academic literacy learning. I want to make transparent my own literacy learning in graduate school and to explain my identification with adult literacy students. I write this in hopes that others will benefit and perhaps gain strength to hear one person's struggles with academic writing.

My attempts to write a literature review started during my research proposal-writing and continued throughout the research process, evoking some of the most intense and painful struggles I have ever experienced. They were struggles that tested and challenged every cell, every element within my emotional, intellectual and spiritual being. My attempts to assume an academic voice made my throat clog up and my whole body to feel choked. I ranted and raved in frustration and anger; I became immobilized and debilitated in long periods of depression. My family and friends ceased asking how things were going. In response to my expressed frustrations at home, my teen-aged son learned to ask "Mom, are you angry with me or did you have another bad day writing?" I treated myself to three separate week-long solitary writing retreats that resulted in drafts that were all "not quite there yet". I did not know where "there" was and the doubts that I would ever reach that place increased as my confidence continued to erode. To help maintain some balance and to work through my difficulties, I wrote pages and pages of personal journaling; I telephoned and emailed friends and colleagues; I pounded on the piano and I cried a lot. I created zipper sculptures and collages; I wrote poems and songs that were loudly chanted during long walks in the forest. Mostly I was determined not to quit. My commitment to and belief in the Reading and Writing Centre and the people there sustained my desire to see this thesis through to the end.

When I entered graduate school, I was new to the academic culture and to the field of adult literacy as well. Within the process of acculturation into academia I assumed the roles of student, researcher and artist. I was a student, and eventually a researcher, both in my own thesis research and in my work with adult literacy practitioners doing research in practice. When I fully recognized my need to use my artwork for expression and to maintain balance within academia, I

came out and identified as an artist. These identities acted as enablers and as barriers to my process of learning academic writing.

As a student I was there to learn, thus I knew to expect struggles and to anticipate steep learning curves. Through my explorations of the literature related to this study, I was finding out and making connections about power, dominant discourses and teacher/student relationships. Because of my strong need for ongoing self-reflexivity, I was also exploring these concepts and issues within my personal experiences as a student in graduate school. My assumptions about power, about teachers and teacher authority were revealed, reshaped and renewed through intense reflection and examination of my struggles as a student of academic literacy. Although my location was different, I deeply empathized with the powerlessness of adult literacy students and the often traumatic process of coming to know through literacy learning. The learning involves not only new technical skills, but a socialization into new ways of thinking, being and doing through the process of reading and writing. My acculturation into academia involved feelings of alienation and powerlessness. A colleague in literacy research helped me understand and come to articulate what I was going through. She wrote in an email message:

It's all about identity and not wanting to give yourself over to an alien discourse, isn't it? Different genres of writing come from different powerbases and signal different kinds of social relations, so the new literacy theorists say. So doing academic writing feels like being forced into a uniform you don't feel comfortable in, don't like the look of, and doesn't fit (probably the zippers are all in the wrong place).

Giving name to academic literacy as an alien discourse and bringing attention to its power as a dominant discourse helped me to honour my struggles and fears of being swallowed up by academia. The zipper reference in the email reminded me of my own need for humour and playfulness. I became further aware of the different power bases through my contact with others involved in arts-based inquiry. My identity as an artist worked to sustain me, but also served to increase the powerlessness and alienation within academia and affected my receptivity to academic writing. In my circles of academic contacts, there was a lack of interest and engagement in arts-based inquiry. It wasn't until my third year of graduate school that I even heard the terms arts-based inquiry, arts-based educational research. I was so excited to find names for my use of artifacts as a research tool and to connect with other people who were doing and thinking things that resonated so strongly with me. But they were also struggling with validating and finding a place within academia and within qualitative research. I became more fully aware of the lack of acceptance and the marginalization of arts-based work.

My growing identity as a researcher enabled me to constantly reflect on ways my student and artist identities affected this research. In my work as a research friend with practitioners involved in research in practice, I had the opportunity to examine and critique the use of literature in research. I was contracted to find ways to make connections between practitioners and research literature. That process required an examination of the meaning and use of literature in research. I became more convinced of the importance of making my literature review meaningful to me and my study, rather than another compulsory hoop. In order to do that within the rigors of academia there was much I needed to learn.

I needed to learn about critique and argument. To integrate critique and argument into my writing, I had to make changes to my ways of thinking, I had to create new brain pathways, forge new trails. This trail-blazing to new ways of thinking required new skills. I had to acknowledge and unlearn my tendency towards duality. I had to consciously shift from looking and thinking about things as all or nothing, good or bad, this or that. I had to embrace and work with contradictions instead of trying to resolve them. I had to be able to discuss these contradictions and difficulties without moving to solutions, or trying to fix things. This was not easy. I needed to learn two crucial life skills – how to offer respectful critique and the art of being non-judgmental. I had to recognize and acknowledge my disrespect and judgment. When I needed the skills of critique in order to critique the idea of critique I took that as a nudge to stop taking myself so seriously and to more fully accept critique as an academic tool.

I did not fully accept the value and potency of argument until my work was criticized as being an advertisement for the Reading and Writing Centre. I was initially devastated and worked hard to not allow my feelings of threat to undermine my perception of the worthiness of this study. Instead of wallowing in my tendency towards self-condemnation, I rallied my anger towards creating arguments. Yet ethnographic critique and argument involve many shades of gray. In order to see and recognize various grays, I had to shift from my black/white mode of thinking about power relationships amongst teachers and students. I needed to work through some personal teacher/student relationship issues myself. I had yet to understand the ways students exercise power and influence to maintain inequitable relationships. I had to recognize the passive student within myself; to accept my need and expectation of a map to unravel the mystique of academic writing and to show me the path to “there”. Through personal reflection, I was able to acknowledge and understand the finer nuances and complexities and the importance of articulating them. It was only then that I could begin to articulate and include the shades of gray within my thesis arguments.

My learning about academic writing was hindered by my lack of confidence as a writer and a scholar; this was coupled with my inexperience in research and academic writing. My tendency towards resistance as a strategy of survival often made me unable to hear and be receptive to guidance and advice. My confidence dwindled and my resistance grew when I felt a lack of mutuality and when I felt that the content of my work was invalidated.

I was helped considerably in the process of academic writing through my association with people involved in research in practice in adult literacy (RiPAL). That work gave me context and audience for this study, giving me the much-needed concrete relations with people whom I could imagine having conversation with when writing. I was fortunate to get to know some of the literacy researchers, writers of the literature I was using for this study. They were people whose passions, politics and convictions were reflected in their work – work that integrated theory and practice, work that was accessible. They lacked the tension and fear that is prevalent in much of academia. In other words, their being, doing and knowing were in synchronization. Through my association with them and their work, I realized that this was what had been missing for me in academia and in much of the literature.

Several books helped me in my process of writing academically. Annie Dillard's *The Writing Life* is full of little gems that continue to inspire and deepen my understanding of the writing process. *Bird by Bird* by Anne Lamott gave me laughter and timely advice. Ursula LeGuin's poem, *The writer on, and at her work*, is an exquisite description of the spiral journey of the writing process. *Academic Writing*, by Janet Giltrow, *The Politics of Writing*, by Clark & Ivanic, analyze scholarly writing traditions and the politics of knowledge. Elizabeth Rankin's *The Work of Writing* gives specific strategies for academic writing. Finally, *The Art of Writing Inquiry*, Neilson et al (see bibliography), has been a welcomed affirmation of the importance and power of arts-informed research.

I was inspired by Kate Nonesuch's *Never Fail Writing Program* that affirms the value of focussing on the positive, on what people can do and are doing. I was fortunate to receive positive encouragement and support from friends and colleagues to aid my own writing process and help see this thesis to completion.

Thank you.

APPENDIX A: Research Participants

THE STUDENTS

(Each student's starting date at the Centre or at Malaspina University-College is indicated in parentheses after their name)

Audrey: (1992) is a white female, 48 years old. She has lived in Alberta, and while a child in school, she was tormented with teasing, being called dumb and stupid. Audrey returned to school at age 16 to negative responses from teachers about her abilities in reading. Audrey volunteers for the Al-Anon organization, is active at the Centre as Head Leader, fund-raiser, writer and a frequent email and web user. Audrey's stories are online at:

www.nald.ca/STORY/archive/2001/30sept/audrey.htm and also on the Reading and Writing Centre's website: <http://literacy.cc.mala.bc.ca/spring02/amazingcaves.htm>

Carolyn: (December 2000) is a 42-year old female, of First Nations heritage, and involved in creating artwork using traditional designs in her drawings, beading, and mirror etching. She attended school to about grade 10, has worked as a waitress, and had difficulties getting funding to return to school. Carolyn is working on her Math and serves as a Head Leader at the Centre, while also taking some English classes at Malaspina University-College.

Del: (February 1993) is a white male, 55 years old. He started at Malaspina University-College in 1993 and then took a 2-yr break before returning again. He grew up on Vancouver Island, was taken out of school at age 12 to work in his father's mill. Del is involved with his church, helping with activities and attending Bible studies. He attends the Centre regularly and takes on many responsibilities and jobs around the place, including Head Leader, watering the plants, cleaning up the kitchen and starting up and shutting down the computers each day. One of Del's stories can be read and heard online at: www.nald.ca/STORY/archive/2001/30sept/hehn.htm and on the Centre's website: <http://literacy.cc.mala.bc.ca/spring02/motherndoorway.htm>

Laura: assigned pseudonym (March 26, 2001) is a 21-year old female, of First Nations heritage, and grew up on Vancouver Island in several different foster homes. After her mother's death in 1998, she felt she couldn't go to school. At the Centre, Laura displays an ever-present smile and cheerful disposition, enjoys making friends and has taken on the roles of Head Leader, Writer and Chairperson at the Centre. She has written and publicly read stories about her personal experiences.

Margaret: self-chosen pseudonym (March 2001): is of First Nations heritage, a 25-year old female and a relatively new resident of Duncan, having moved from northern BC. She found out about the Centre while walking past and reading the banners on the window. Margaret often shares her cigarettes with others in the smoke group during break time just outside the Centre. She has written and publicly read stories about her personal experiences. One of her stories (with a different pseudonym) can be read and heard online at:
www.nald.ca/STORY/archive/2001/30sept/cecile.htm

Richard: assigned pseudonym (February 14, 2001) is a 34-year old male, of First Nations and Ukrainian heritage. He attended high school and has been involved in adult education classes both at the College and at an adult education centre in Duncan. He has skills in rebuilding engines and running machines. Richard has been involved in writing stories about his life while

at the Centre, and has really enjoyed the camaraderie of the afternoon card games with others in the Inhale Room.

Renee: (March 2000) is a white male, 56 years old. He's from a French-speaking family, was bilingual as a child, and said he shut himself down during elementary school. He was failed in Grade 2 and has worked in lumber mills since he was 15 years old. Rene, very soft-spoken and gentle, sees himself as well respected by other students at the Centre. He enjoys writing (he said he was very moved emotionally the first time he saw his words printed on paper), cleaning the computer mice, buying the coffee, helping out new students and serving as Head Leader.

Steven: (Sept 2000) is a white male, 34 years. He said has been assessed by doctors and told he has dyslexia. Steven quit school in Grade 7, went back to different special schools and has worked in many jobs as a cook.. He wants to be able to handle the reading requirements for a Chef position in a fancy restaurant. Steven talks and moves very quickly, changes subjects abruptly, laughs a lot, and uses "we" when speaking about the Centre. He was away for a few months, opting to serve an impaired driving charge in jail. Steven often took on the responsibility of preparing weekly lunches for the whole group at the Centre.

Judy: assigned pseudonym (January 2001) is a white female, 32 years old. She grew up in Newfoundland, worked at her father's logging camp as a cook at age 13 and has worked as a snowmobile mechanic. Her reasons to return to school at the Centre were to be doing something besides getting high on drugs and to keep social services off her back. She surprised herself because she started school for totally different reasons than why she keeps on going. She would like to go on to the college and take nursing. At the Centre, Judy has assumed the roles of Chair during the Monday meetings, of Head Leader and has helped with the fund-raising bake sale. The only thing she does not yet do at the Centre is use the computer.

THE TEACHERS

Kate Nonesuch, the founder and “inventor” of the Reading and Writing Centre, holds the regular full-time position (28 hours per week). She is a white female, in her 50's with a degree in English literature and a year of teacher training. She began teaching adult basic education in 1983, and started at the literacy level in 1987. Prior to 1983, her primary focus was as an activist in the women's movement. Kate speaks slowly, listens closely, and often thinks in silence before responding to a question or comment. She has a very gracious and polite manner with people. During her classes, she often uses humour and theatrics, such as playing with the timbre and volume of her voice during spelling or other group classes. Kate, with her successful teaching experiences, involvement in curriculum writing, literacy research and provincial literacy affairs, is a well-respected faculty member of Cowichan Campus. Kate's idea to move the fundamental classes to a storefront site was strongly supported by Vicki Noonan, the coordinator of Career and Academic Preparation Program and Carrie Nelson the Principal of Cowichan Campus.

Christina Patterson had worked as a teacher in alternative school, taught various classes at the Cowichan Campus, and worked as a substitute for many of Kate's classes before team-teaching with Kate. A white female in her mid 40's, she exuded much determination and a ready sense of humour. She displayed an empathic manner with students, and would often burst out with laughter, or quick retorts and comments. Christina spoke very articulately and usually in full sentences, as I found out during transcription of our interviews. I asked Kate to help describe Christina's physical approach to curriculum, she writes:

One of her greatest gifts to the Centre program was her "physical curriculum." She believed that it was imperative that students have physical access to everything in the place, without having to ask a teacher for it; that students be encouraged to move around, to "own" the place with their physical bodies. She believed in providing physical experiences that could later be analyzed verbally and applied to more abstract ideas. For example, she took students for a three-hour archery lesson, came back and they made a list of all the things they had learned about shooting an arrow--keep your eyes on the target, keep your balance, breathe, focus, rest your eyes, etc.; then she led the students in a discussion about their target in the class--to improve their reading (email correspondence, 13/06/04).

As a College term employee (22 hours per week) at the Centre, Christina had to re-apply and be interviewed for her job at least once a year. Her position was regularized starting September 2001, a change that she and Kate had been hoping for. Sadly, she did not get to experience being a regular because she died of cancer during the summer, a month before school resumed.

APPENDIX B: Consent Form

Malaspina University-College Consent Form

Date of Ethics Approval: February 23, 2001

Bonnie Soroke
 Graduate Student, University of British Columbia
 Faculty of Education, Department of Educational Studies
 Research for Masters Degree Thesis
 Phone: 604 462-7280
 Email: bonnie@soroke.com

Research Supervisor & Faculty Advisor:

Dr. Allison Tom
 Associate Professor, University of British Columbia
 Faculty of Education, Department of Educational Studies
 Phone: 604 822-5361
 Email: allison.tom@ubc.ca

Power and Authority in Adult Literacy Education

Purpose

Bonnie Soroke, the student researcher, wants to listen to students and teachers to talk about school and hear their thoughts and ideas about the Reading and Writing Centre. She is studying power and authority for a thesis report that she will write to get a Masters degree at UBC. Bonnie is interested in learning about ways to improve all adult literacy programs.

Description

Bonnie will be at the Centre two days a week for three months. She will watch and take notes, help out at the Centre, interview 8 students and both teachers, and lead two group discussions of students.

Students who want to take part in the research can do so in three ways: They can agree to Bonnie watching them at the Centre and taking notes about what she sees. They can agree to come to two group sessions, for about an hour each time. They can agree to talk to Bonnie by themselves for 1 to 1 ½ hours (an interview) at the Centre, a coffee shop or the person's house. The teachers will agree to a 1 to 1 ½ hour interview and being watched at the Centre.

Bonnie will tape-record the interviews and discussions, then she will write them out.

If Bonnie writes about a person in her thesis, she will show that writing to the person. The person will be asked if they are uncomfortable with anything written about them. The person can choose to have Bonnie not mention them at all, to change what she wrote or have her write a note in her thesis that they disagree.

Bonnie also wants to talk with students and teachers about their thoughts and feelings about the research and the reports. She is asking people to expect to give between 1-15 hours of their time to take part in the research.

Research Reports

Bonnie will give a copy of her thesis to the Centre. She will also write a shorter summary of the thesis for the Centre. Bonnie might write articles about the research that may get published in educational magazines.

She would like to work on a project with students of the Centre to tell other students and teachers about the research.

Payment

Bonnie will donate \$20 to the Student Program Fund for each person who is interviewed.

People Who Take Part

Students and teachers can ask questions and say what they don't like about the research. Bonnie welcomes questions and comments anytime during the interviews, the group discussions and while she is watching and taking notes.

People can change their minds or leave the research at any time and nothing damaging will happen to them at the Centre because they left.

Any students who are interested can work with Bonnie on a project to tell other students and teachers about the research results. They will decide together what that project will be.

People can talk to Bonnie anytime during or after the research about their questions, concerns or ideas. She can be reached by telephone (604 462-7280), email (soroke@interchange.ubc.ca) or during her visits to the Centre.

Possible Help and Harm

Safety is important.

Sometimes people might not like what happens in the discussions. Talking about things that have happened in school may make some people feel uncomfortable. They can pass or they can talk about what they do not like.

Talking and listening to one another can be useful: find out the ways we are the same, the ways we are different, and get more understanding about ourselves and our education.

Privacy

In research reports, a person's real name or a made-up name can be used. Each student can decide if they want their own name used. The real names of the College and the Centre will be used.

Bonnie will use what she writes up from the observations, interviews and group discussions to write her thesis. If you are mentioned in the write up for her thesis, she will show you that part of the write up first and ask you if she can use it. If you say no, you can ask her to not mention you at all, to change what she wrote, or to make a note that you disagree. Nothing else you say in the interviews will be told to anyone else. Everything people say is private except for information that must be legally reported (such as child abuse).

Only Bonnie and her UBC supervisor will hear the tapes or see the write-up (transcription).

All tapes and writing about people who take part will be labeled in code numbers and kept in a locked filing cabinet.

Contact:

If I have questions or need more information, I may contact Dr. Allison Tom at 604 822-5361.

If I have concerns about my rights as a research subject I may contact the Committee Chair of Research at Malaspina University-College, Lynn Traynor at 753-3245 Local 2135 or the Director of Research Services at the University of British Columbia, Dr. Richard Spratley at 604 822-8598.

Consent:

I have read and understood the information on this form.

I understand that I can ask any questions and say what I do not like at any time during the research.

I understand that I do not have to take part or I can leave the research at any time and nothing damaging will happen to me at the Centre because I leave the research study.

I will be able to see the report when it is done.

I have a copy of this form to keep for myself.

I agree to take part in the group discussions.

Participant Signature

Date

Signature of Witness

Date

I agree to be interviewed.

Participant Signature

Date

Signature of Witness

Date

I agree/don't agree to Bonnie watching me at the Centre and taking notes.

Participant Signature

Date

Signature of Witness

Date

I agree/don't agree to let you use my name in any reports of this study.

Participant Signature

Date

Signature of Witness

Date

Version Date: February 28, 2001

APPENDIX C: Interview Questions**QUESTIONS FOR STUDENT INTERVIEW**

Remind each person: Comfort Level, Safety is important

Ask about: Age, years, place of schooling, when return to school, time spent at the Centre

Tell me about your educational experiences.

Tell me about your relationships with teachers and other students.

What has been your experience as an adult student?

Tell me about your experiences at the Reading and Writing Centre.

What do those experiences mean to you?

As a new student, how did you find out about how things work here?

Who does what? What do you need to do?

What do you do at the Centre? What are you involved in?

What do you like/dislike about the Centre? What's comfortable or uncomfortable?

What would you like to see happen at the Centre? (that is not happening)

How are decisions made here?

What are the Head Leaders all about? How did they come to be?

What does power mean to you? Authority? Is power important?

How do you see power and authority dealt with/shared at the Centre?

What questions should I have asked you which I didn't? or What questions should I be asking other people?

QUESTIONS FOR TEACHER INTERVIEW

Tell me about your teaching experiences.

Tell me about your relationships with adult students.

What do you like/dislike about the Centre?

What is comfortable/uncomfortable?

What would you like to see happen at the Centre? (that is NOT happening)

What are the Head Leaders all about? How did they come to be?

What does power mean to you? Authority? Is power important?

How do you see power and authority dealt with/shared at the Centre?

What are your feelings, thoughts about the three “resident” students that have little intention of moving on from the Centre?

How do you let students know about restrictions in using the Internet?

Teachers are the bosses at the Centre – how do you see that perception?

How does your teacher role fit/not fit with the idea of learner agency, of a learner-run centre?

The view of the Centre as Utopia – ask about sexist, racist behaviour at the Centre, any incidents, how they were responded to.

Kate’s Rules: how has that evolved?

Ask Kate about “checking feelings”

When is this used? For what purpose?

Do students ever use this with one another? With the teachers?

What questions should I have asked you which I didn’t?

APPENDIX D: Story of the Storefront Move

The move to the storefront location in September 1999 was the result of Kate Nonesuch's three years of persistent effort, her willingness to take risks, and her successful history of contribution to the literacy program at the College.

When Kate started teaching the fundamental level at the Cowichan Campus of Malaspina University-College in 1985, the literacy program offered one class per week. She suggested they use the budget (of X number of classes for literacy) to offer classes every day for a shorter time. The change was successful, the literacy program grew and Kate eventually took on the position of Literacy Coordinator as well as literacy instructor. The principal of Cowichan Campus at that time, conferred with Kate about how to do the literacy program. Kate said she asked for lots and she got it.

In a push for permanent funding for the literacy program, Kate took her students to the College board meeting, and they succeeded in getting literacy into the base budget. Kate began to see that they needed their own location in order to develop a literacy program more in line with students' needs and lives. Kate then agitated for three years through presentations, proposal-writing, and meetings in efforts to move the fundamental program off-campus. She received negative responses to the proposals that she wrote to the College and for the provincial cost-shared grants. Along with College faculty and administration, she met with the local school board about running an adult literacy program together, but abandoned that potential partnership when she realized the school board people were not interested in supporting student power. Kate also made an unsuccessful attempt to secure a grant through provincial adult literacy research funding. Her proposal was to work with students in researching and questioning the requirements necessary for students to set up a society and form a partnership with the College to run a literacy program on an equal basis.

At that time, the Cowichan campus was overcrowded and was renting space off campus for some programs. When the research grant application was turned down, Carrie Nelson, campus principal, suggested to Kate that, since they were paying rent for an off-campus site anyway, she could move the literacy program off campus, and some of the off-campus programs could be housed on campus. Kate said yes; they went looking for a place in downtown Duncan; they found the Jubilee Street location and made the move. Kate's vision and persistence were the preparation and groundwork that allowed them to take the opportunity for their own storefront setting when circumstances arose.

APPENDIX E: Story of Audrey

Audrey attributes much of her increased self-esteem and her abilities to make changes in her life to her association with the teachers and her experiences at the Centre. She felt a strong sense of loyalty to Christina and Kate and to what they work to accomplish at the Centre. There were feelings of mutual respect with both the teachers. During my interview with Christina, she commented on the changes she had observed in Audrey:

Audrey has learned a ton about how to stand up for herself and what she deserves as a human being and then she goes to the Alano Club and you bet she stands up for herself. I've seen Audrey through an awful lot of growing. Really good growing, confidence building and better relationships with men, better relationships with social services and support agencies, taking better care of herself, her relationships with her children, her relationship with her ex, her good women-friends that I know. She's grown (ChI 05/14/01).

Audrey spoke with me about decisions she has made in her personal life that have made her a much happier person during the past few years. She left an unsatisfactory relationship and moved out on her own. On her sundeck she has planted flowers, tomato plants and strawberries. She said she is learning to be a better shopper after asking help from a friend, who accompanies Audrey to help with comparing prices and making sure Audrey is given the correct change in return for purchases.

Audrey has talked with me about being able to stick up for herself and to say no to people. She said she feels in much better physical health since she decided to quit smoking. She has lost fifteen pounds and got herself a new haircut.

She has branched out in her community involvement through volunteer work with the Cowichan Community Police. She really enjoys this new job that includes answering telephones and working as a Citizen on Patrol, where she goes out on the Duncan streets every Thursday to help keep an eye on things, such as checking if cars are locked or the windows are rolled up.

Within many adult literacy programs, there is often the expectation of students moving on. Audrey has moved on within the Reading and Writing Centre, continuing to maintain her literacy learning through use of the computer for email and writing up her stories. She acts as a valuable resource for incoming students and participates in many of the Centre's events, often choosing to speak in public. She performs many tasks at the Centre, including working at the Welcome Desk. I heard that some students thought she was a paid worker and were upset because she did not forward some telephone messages for them.

At the Centre, students and teachers see Audrey as an influential person who exercises power and authority - she makes decisions, creates initiatives, and she acts on the values and principles of the Centre. I created a Queen Bee zipper sculpture in response to a student description of Audrey as “owning the place; thinking she was smart” and being the “Queen Bee around there”. After observing and reflecting upon Audrey, I wrote a little poem to accompany the sculpture:

Queen Bee thinks she's smart
Queen Bee IS smart
Queen Bee knows what she knows
and uses her knowing to
ACT!

When I apprehensively approached Audrey and spoke with her about the sculpture, she responded with “that sounds just like me!”



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