Literacy acquisition and family systems: A case study of adult literacy learners

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LITERACY ACQUISITION AND FAMILY SYSTEMS:
A CASE STUDY OF ADULT LITERACY LEARNERS

by

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education
in
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ABSTRACT

To provide insight into adult literacy learning, a case study of the interactions between adult students and their families was conducted. The primary sources of data were transcripts of tutoring sessions; interviews with the students and family members; notes from informal conversations with the students; and writing of the students and family. Grounded in theories of social constructivism, literacy acquisition, and family systems, this study attempted to add to the body of research on adult literacy learning.

The two adult students who participated for the full six months presented a contrast. One was a 46-year-old black man, a complete non-reader, whose family was highly involved with his learning. The other was a 28-year-old black woman who read at about the fifth grade level but whose family knew nothing about her reading and writing problems. During the six months that the students stayed with the literacy program, the man attended 37.5 hours of tutoring sessions; the woman attended 27.5 hours of tutoring sessions. While an informal reading inventory showed that neither student progressed from their original entry levels, tutor observations and student comments showed that the man had, indeed, progressed from his non-reader status while the woman had made more
changes in her perception of herself than in her reading and writing.

The data revealed that changes occurred during the students' learning period in three areas: concepts of literacy and literacy learning, perceptions of the students by themselves and their family members, and supportive and non-supportive interactions. As these changes occurred, conflict arose, stemming the student's literacy progress. While not all conflict originated in the literacy learning, it still affected the students' progress.

The results of this study suggest 1) a need for further research of larger populations to determine if there are varying degrees of conflict during learning depending on the literacy level of the adult students; 2) the need for literacy programs to plan for family involvement so that concepts held by the family, the student, and the tutor are aligned; and 3) the need for a means of help in resolving family conflicts that will probably occur during an adult student's learning.
CHAPTER 1

THE PROBLEM

Introduction to the Problem

In 1894, following the release of educational statistics produced by the 1890 census, Blodgett opined that "those above [the age of] twenty-one...we cannot reach and must consider as confirmed illiterates" (p. 235). Over a hundred years later, in 1995, we are still trying to refute Blodgett's claim...with only limited success (Bishop, 1991; Bowren, 1988; Diekhoff, 1988; Kirsch, Jungeblut, Jenkins, & Kolstad, 1993; Wikelund, Reder, & Hart-Landsberg, 1992).

Adult literacy initiatives in the United States began as early as 1911 with Cora Stewart's "moonlight schools" in Kentucky and continued sporadically, usually dependent on volunteers and charitable contributions, until the mid-1960's when federally funded adult basic education (ABE) programs were established (Newman & Beverstock, 1990). Although the federal funding for such programs was subsequently reduced, interest in adult literacy grew,
and the 1980's became "the Literacy Decade" (Newman & Beverstock, 1990, p. 27).

In 1983, the U.S. Department of Education announced its Adult Literacy Initiative to expand basic skills programs (Business Council for Effective Literacy [BCEL], 1984). In the same year, the Coalition for Literacy (a group of 11 national literacy and adult education organizations) joined with the Advertising Council to launch an adult literacy promotional campaign (BCEL, 1984). In 1984, the Business Council for Effective Literacy was formed to enlist corporations in responding to the problem of adult literacy (BCEL, 1984), and a new Title VI was added to the Library Services and Construction Act to help fund adult literacy programs in libraries (Library Services and Construction Act Amendment, 1984). In 1985, Project Literacy U.S. (PLUS), a joint project between ABC and PBS, was begun to foster more awareness of the problem by the general public (BCEL, 1986).

As a result of these promotional efforts, literacy programs began to mushroom, establishing themselves in universities, community colleges, public school districts, libraries, private workplaces, churches, and non-profit organizations. By 1990, the U.S. Department of Education had made literacy for all adult Americans a
high priority on its National Education Agenda (U.S. Department of Education, 1990), and in 1991, the U.S. Congress declared that every American adult should have the opportunity to learn to read (National Literacy Act, 1991).

Despite the best efforts of these activities, little progress, if any, in reducing the number of adult illiterates has been made. When these efforts began, the number of illiterate adults was reported to be 20% of all adults in the U.S. or 27 million adults (Hunter & Harman, 1985); in 1993, the number was reported as 23% or 44 million (Kirsch et al., 1993). With awareness increased, the number of both adult literacy students and tutors also increased (Mikulecky, 1987), but the Department of Education estimates that only 3 million Americans enroll in programs each year, and of these, 50% to 75% drop out soon after enrollment (Bishop, 1991). Thirty-nine percent of students drop out before 20 hours of instruction, 60% before 40 hours, and 90% before 100 hours (Bowren, 1988). Since programs report that a reading grade level gain of one year requires between 100 and 150 hours of instruction (Diekhoff, 1988; Wikelund, Reder, & Hart-Landsberg, 1992), the high drop-out rates mean few adults are leaving programs with an improved ability to read.

In my role as a basic adult literacy tutor, trainer,
curriculum designer, and consultant over the last 13 years, I have witnessed the growing interest in adult literacy by state and federal legislators, schools, libraries, churches, prisons, charitable organizations, and businesses. At the same time, I have also witnessed the high dropout rates. I have gradually become aware that learning to read, especially as an adult, is more than either an amassing of skills or an individual cognitive activity. I was forced to stand by as George, a 56-year-old man who was finally making progress, dropped out of a literacy program because his wife was intimidated by the independence his reading ability was creating for him. I saw Lynn, a 35-year-old woman, get a divorce because her newly gained reading ability uncovered her husband's illegal financial transactions. I watched John, a 45-year-old man, sabotage his own learning for fear that his children might discover he was trying to learn and therefore realize he had never been able to read. These extreme cases, along with others, as well as my professional reading, made me begin to realize that the social and emotional aspects of reading may impact the learner as much or more than skills and cognition.

Smith (1988) has called reading "a social event" (p. 194) for children just learning to read. Perhaps his
phrase is just as appropriate for adults. To understand better the importance of this social aspect of literacy and whether or not it affects adults learning to read, I explored how adults enrolled in a basic literacy program interacted socially with their families over the course of their enrollment. Determining whether students' learning affected their familial interactions or whether familial interactions affected students' learning—and how—may suggest a need for different approach with adult literacy learners. This may, in turn, suggest a need to reconceptualize adult literacy programs by recognizing familial impact and planning for it in the curriculum.

Background and Significance of the Problem

"The teaching of adult illiterates has long floundered as an educational stepchild" (Bowren, 1988, p. 208). Current research on adult literacy is thus relatively limited (Newman & Beverstock, 1990), usually focusing on definitions of literacy, issues in curriculum and methodology, and characteristics of the adult literacy learner. (These limitations will be discussed further in Chapter 2.) Even the recent trend toward family literacy programs is, according to Auerbach (1989), based on false assumptions and not "informed by ethnographic research or substantiated by what we learned from the students themselves" (p. 167). Research does,
indeed, show the importance of parental involvement for a child learning to read (Chall & Snow, 1982; Goldenberg, 1987; Paratore, 1993; Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines, 1988; Wells, 1985), but formal studies do not yet show the importance of family involvement for an adult's literacy learning.

Such research focusing on the adult learner and familial support is just emerging. In structured interviews and surveys, Fitzsimmons (1991) and Holmes (1991) respectively found that family support was not a significant factor in whether or not adult students persisted in mid-level literacy and GED programs; yet Fingeret (1982), in open-ended interviews with low-literate adults, found that some dropped out of literacy programs because learning to read affected their relationships with others. In a case study of three learning disabled adults, Johnston (1985) reported detrimental effects of family members' lack of enthusiasm for one low-level adult reader's accomplishments. And in their study on the effectiveness of a New York program, Fingeret and Danin (1991) discovered that learning to read could impact the adult and family and vice versa: one student found that his reading deteriorated when his relationship with his girlfriend did; another found that as his reading improved, his family relationships were
"slowly shifting" (p. 124).

Research on adult literacy has reported not only that the majority of low-level students drop out before they have had a chance to improve their reading ability (Bishop, 1991; Bowren, 1988; Diekhoff, 1988) but also that they drop out for reasons that are "less often a failure of the program itself than a result of outside forces" (Balmuth, 1988, p. 623). Meyer (1974) found family situations to be one of those outside forces. Coles (1984), too, suggested that family relations, as part of an individual's broad learning environment, affect an adult student's learning; his student, Earl, sabotaged his own learning because of family relationships, leading Coles to conclude that "psychological processes develop through interaction with others and cannot be understood separately from a person's life and activities" (p. 466). Morse's (1992) findings supported this; as one student's relationships changed, the student saw herself become more than "just a mother" (p. 62), with her family supporting her efforts to learn not only by taking over some of the household chores but also by turning to her for help with literacy-related tasks.

The findings of such researchers as Coles (1984), Fingeret (1982), Fingeret and Danin, (1991), Johnston
(1985), and Morse (1992) indicate that the family has a powerful influence on an adult learning to read. They further point to a new dimension of study on adult literacy learners: one that focuses specifically on the social involvement of the family and adult student to see how one impacts the other.

Theoretical Foundations

A view of learning to read as a social activity rather than a purely cognitive one requires a framework that views the individual within a communal setting. Theories of social constructivism, literacy acquisition, and family systems take this view and provide a foundation for understanding why the family may be an important factor in an adult's efforts to learn to read.

Social Constructivism

In social constructivism "knowledge is constructed by the interaction of the individual with the social/cultural environment" (McCarthey & Raphael, 1989, p. 21). To the social constructivist, knowledge and language are not only inseparable but community-generated (Bruffee, 1986). Literacy, as an aspect of language, is thus similarly constructed and becomes a term relative to the user's needs and expectations (Stubbs, 1980). According to different communities' needs and
expectations, literacy becomes endowed not only with more meaning than just the ability to read or write but also with different meanings (Cook-Gumperz, 1986; Levine, 1986; Scribner & Cole, 1981; Stubbs, 1980). To different communities, literacy can be "a social virtue...a root of democracy" or a means of job placement (Cook-Gumperz, 1986, p. 2).

The family, as a community in itself, may or may not reflect the larger community in which it lives. Furthermore, the family's concept of literacy may not be the same as that of an educational institution. Research has shown that it is important that the student's view and that of the literacy program coincide to a certain extent (Levine, 1986; Mikulecky, 1987), but it may also be important for the student's and family's view of literacy to coincide since the family, as defined by Ackerman (1984), is the community in which the student interacts most. How learners' families interact with students during their learning period seems to be built on their own construction of literacy; these interactions may be a key to students' acquisition of literacy or their rejection of it.

**Literacy Acquisition Theory**

The family is also viewed as the key in literacy acquisition theory. Vygotsky (1978) said that all "human
learning presupposes a specific social nature and a process by which children grow into the intellectual life of those around them" (p. 88). As one domain of learning, "literacy and literacy learning," according to Teale (1986) "are fundamentally social processes" (p. 174). Furthermore, "children learn written language through active engagement with their world. They interact socially with adults in writing and reading situations; they explore print on their own, and they profit from modeling of literacy by significant adults, particularly their parents" (Teale & Sulzby, 1986, p. xviii).

Cambourne (1988) more clearly delineates the steps to the acquisition of literacy: 1) immersion of the learner in literacy events, 2) demonstration of literacy by those who surround the learner, 3) expectations by others that the learner can acquire literacy, 4) responsibility by the learner for learning, 5) use of literacy by the learner, 6) freedom to approximate use of literacy and make mistakes, and 7) favorable response by others to the learner's use of literacy. For a child, these attitudes and events usually take place both in the home and at school, the two places where children spend most of their time.

For the adult learning to read, however, Cambourne's requisites may not be readily available. Adult literacy
students, like most adults, spend a third of their day at work, but work is usually a place where they dare not show their lack of literacy skills for fear of repercussions (BCEL, 1987). Moreover, adult literacy students typically spend less than 6 hours per week in classes or tutoring sessions, and their attendance is rarely consistent from one week to the next (Mikulecky, 1987). Such brief contact also does not meet Cambourne's requisites. Home, then, is the most likely place where Cambourne's requisites can be met. Even there, however, it may be difficult. Bill, in Johnston's (1985) study, found that when he read aloud to his children, "my eight-year-old started pointing out my mistakes, so that was that--never did that again" (p. 173). Fingeret and Danin (1991) also found that some adult learners shunned literacy-related events or activities in front of other people, even their own families. Still, the home environment seems to offer the most opportunities for the requisites of literacy acquisition. As Smith (1988) noted, "whether or not learning takes place depends more on people around learners than on the learners themselves" (p. 194).

**Family Systems Theory**

The people most closely involved with adult learners are usually their family members. Within the social
organization of the family, each member plays a number of defined roles in relation to the others; these roles develop from the others' expectations (Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 1991; Lappin, 1988; Minuchin, 1974; Stanton & Todd, 1979; Stryker, 1972). Continuity of interactions according to these roles provides balance (Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 1991; Huberty & Huberty, 1983), but if one member begins playing a role, such as new reader, which is incongruous with others' expectations, then disharmony results (Stryker, 1972). The others' roles also change, sometimes to adapt to the new one introduced, sometimes to effect a change back to the expected role (Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 1991; Stanton & Todd, 1979). The role of new reader, for instance, could result either in others' adaptation of new expectations and behavior to support the learner or in their maladaptation of expectations and behavior to reject the learner.

Resistance to new roles is derived from two sources: the purpose of the family as a system and the structure of the family. In systems theory, the family is a social organism with one main goal: survival (Lappin, 1988; Martin & O'Connor, 1989). To survive, the system must get by the constraints of its environment in any way possible (Lappin, 1988). The family must either incorporate or reject outside influences to remain a system or destroy
itself. Accordingly, George, the 56-year-old learner, dropped out of the literacy program to keep his family system intact while Lynn, the 35-year-old who got a divorce, dismantled her family system.

The structure of the family, derived from explicit and implicit rules, also lends itself to resistance to new roles (Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 1991; Lappin, 1988). Explicit or overt rules include such items as "bedtimes, curfews, no stray socks in the living room" (Lappin, 1988, p. 227). Implicit or covert rules are rules that never have been articulated but that are clearly understood by family members (Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 1991; Lappin, 1988). In the case of a non-reading adult, the individual's inability to read may never have been stated, but everyone understands the covert rule that children do not ask that individual to read a bedtime story or for help with homework, and no one ever talks about reading. A significant change, such as the introduction of literacy activity for that family member, breaks the family's covert rule and can cause disruption. A sudden discontinuity "call[s] for transformations in the organization of the system, which the family may have trouble negotiating" (Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 1991, p. 14). The 45-year-old John, who sabotaged his own learning, may have done so because he understood the
difficulties his admission of illiteracy would create in
the family.

Whether or not the family can handle required
negotiations may be an indication of whether or not the
adult student will continue to attend school, much less
learn. It may also influence whether or not the home
environment becomes an active part of the adult's
learning. Fingeret and Danin (1991) found that some adult
literacy students were able to negotiate better than
others, but negotiation required change. Although some
students kept their illiteracy and their learning secret
from their family, other students were greatly aware of
how much their literacy learning influenced and was
influenced by their family relationships. As Teale and
Sulzby (1986) stated: "Changes in the home literacy
environment imply changes in the ways the family
organizes its everyday activities" (p. 200).

Summary

Adult non-readers enter literacy programs
specifically to create a change in their lives (Fingeret
& Danin, 1983; Wikelund, Reder & Hart-Landsberg, 1992),
"fashion[ing] literacy into a vehicle for the substantial
reconstruction of their identities" (Levine, 1986, p.
120). The reconstruction of the individual, however, also
may result in a reconstruction of the family; thus
participating in a literacy program may have a greater impact on both adult learners and their families than originally intended.

**Need for the Study**

Kazemek and Kazemek (1992) suggest that the planning of adult literacy programs should be based on family systems theory. To date, however, there does not seem to be a single study on which to base their suggestion other than my own pilot project (Moulton, 1994; Moulton & Holmes, 1995). In fact, the two studies that specifically look at family support and adult literacy learning (Fitzsimmons, 1991; Holmes, 1991) found that the students believed their families were not a factor in their success or failure. Fitzsimmons (1991) asked 10 black adult female students about familial support; most replied that their own determination and inner strength, often phrased in religious terms, were the most important factors. Holmes (1991) sent a questionnaire to ABE program persisters and non-persisters, trying to determine if there was a difference between the two groups in terms of financial, motivational, and psychological support by families. She concluded that there was no significant difference between persisters and non-persisters but that there were indications that a difference existed between the kinds of psychological
support that had been provided to the two groups.

Anecdotal newspaper accounts suggest that learning to read as an adult has improved former students' lives (e.g., Dworkis, 1992; Jolidon, 1989), but these accounts are usually general and aimed at recruitment of tutors and students. They hint at improved family relationships for successful students, but they never mention students who did not learn to read and rarely feature students who experienced difficulties in their relationships due to literacy learning. Only a single recent article in a literacy newsletter (Ivers, 1995) describes a student whose learning resulted in severe problems in his marital relationship.

Reports from family literacy programs that combine literacy and parenting skills (e.g., Brizius & Foster, 1993) seem to support the belief that family relationships change as literacy skills improve, but again, there is little, if any, reporting of failures or difficulties. Furthermore, such programs and reports are aimed at improving children's performance in school rather than at improving parents' reading or making changes in the family environment to enhance learning.

Fingeret and Danin's (1991) report of a New York literacy program is the closest approximation of a study on adult literacy learning and family systems. The report
clearly demonstrates that adult literacy learning and family systems affect each other, both positively and negatively, but there is little specificity beyond this generalization.

Many case studies of adult students (e.g., Meyer, Estes, Harris, and Daniels, 1991; Purcell-Gates, 1993; Scully & Johnston, 1991), which might provide some insight to family involvement on an individual basis, all indicate that successful adult literacy students spent hundreds of hours of "study" outside of tutoring or classroom sessions. How these students actually spent such study time or what their families were doing during their study time was never mentioned.

These different accounts, reports, and studies all indicate that family systems impact--and are impacted by--adults learning to read, but none actually answers the question of how. Individuals drop out of adult literacy programs at a high rate (Bishop, 1991; Bowren, 1988; Diekhoff, 1988), but, according to Whitaker (in Lappin, 1988, p. 226), "There is no such thing as an individual, there are only fragments of families." The question of how the family and adult learner impact each other thus becomes an important one.
Scope of the Study

Szwed (1981) stated that "we need to look at reading and writing as activities having consequences in (and being affected by) family life, work patterns, economic conditions, patterns of leisure, and a complex of other factors" (p. 21). He also stated that "ethnographic methods are the only means" for doing so (p. 20). Guthrie and Hall (1984) similarly stated that "only by looking at the interactional process of education...will we really gain any significant insight into the problems facing poor readers" (p. 100). They echoed Szwed's advocation of ethnographic methods:

The basic rationale for microethnographic approaches is that in the interactional give-and-take of everyday conversation, people negotiate their understanding of one another and the world. Unless educational research can get at how these interactions are conducted, it is argued, important features of the processes of teaching and learning will be overlooked (Guthrie & Hall, 1984, p. 95).

Through ethnographic methods, then, this study looked at the consequences in the families of adults learning to read and write, trying to determine how students negotiated learning and family interactions.
Purpose and Questions

This research project had three goals: to examine how literacy instruction affected adult learners' interactions with their families and, conversely, how family interactions affected adult students' learning; to examine the perceptions of the adult learners by their family members and the learners themselves; and to examine the impact of the learning on families' concepts of literacy.

In Fingeret and Danin's (1991) study many adult literacy students cited difficulties in trying to study and use their literacy skills at home. Their children and spouses were often distractions and, like any adult, these mature students had family responsibilities which did not include their literacy learning. Other students seemed to integrate their literacy learning with their families. Such interaction or lack of interaction may have an effect on literacy acquisition. In relation to the first goal of examining how literacy instruction affects the adult learner's interactions with the family, this study asked:

According to the perspectives of both the adult literacy learner and the individual members of the family, how do the interactions of the family change, if at all, during the learning period?
Adult learners are already perceived by both themselves and their family members to have certain characteristics when playing specific roles (e.g. spouse, parent, earner, authority figure, game player) within the family. The new role of learner adds new characteristics that may change those perceptions. Thus, in terms of the second goal of the project, examining perceptions of the learner, the project asked,

According to the learners and to the individual members of their families, how do perceptions of the adult learner change, if at all, during the learning period?

The family has previously constructed notions of literacy and how to achieve it, but the adult learner, impacted by the literacy program being attended, may be bringing in new dimensions to this viewpoint. Since other people interpret a person's actions as well as his words (Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 1991; Lappin, 1988; Minuchin, 1974), the changes in the new reader's literacy actions may impact other family members' literacy actions as well. Specifically then, in relation to the third goal of the project, examining the impact of the learner on the family's concept(s) of literacy, this study asked,

How do the concepts of literacy and literacy learning held by the learners and the individual members of the
family change, if at all, during the learning period?

Assumptions of the Study

The goals of the study were based on several assumptions. First, I assumed that learning to read creates changes in the learner. Second, I assumed that personal change manifests itself in words, actions, and relationships with others. Third, I assumed that such visible changes are evidence of learning. Last, I assumed that the ability of the individual and family to integrate changes in their relationship encourages continued learning.

Limitations of the Study

Several limitations existed in this study. One was the restricted access of an outsider to the families. I was neither living with the families nor an integral part of their normal activities. Furthermore, the policy of the literacy program in which I tutored the students required that lessons be held only at library sites and not in students' homes, thereby limiting my personal observations of home life to the times when I interviewed family members. Observations of most family activities were made by the adult learners and their family members and reported to me. Observations were, thus, based on the participants' memories and descriptions of past events rather than on my own observations of events as they
occurred. I had access to their observations only through interviews, both formal and conversational, with the different individuals.

A second limitation was the nature of the population of adult literacy students available to me. In trying to schedule two weekly sessions for each of four students, I needed a single library location. Only one location had enough students available to match the requirements of family (within a broad definition of family) as well as the logistics of the students' schedules and mine. This library branch was in a predominantly black neighborhood with a low socio-economic status. All of the students at this library were black, and many of them received some form of government assistance. My differing circumstances as a highly educated white woman from a higher socio-economic neighborhood may have limited my ability to interpret their actions and words appropriately.

A third limitation was the combination of my roles as researcher and tutor. As a participating tutor, I was probably not a totally objective observer, and as a researcher, I may also have limited my effectiveness as a tutor.

Contributions of the Study

Taylor (1981) noted that "a wealth of prescriptive information is available to teachers and many parents;
however, very little information is based on descriptive studies of families with young children who are learning to read" (p. 94, italics in original). Over a decade later, the same may be said for adults who are learning to read. This study will contribute to the field of adult literacy by describing the familial context in which adult students are trying to learn. It may thus help to determine how the family interacts with the student to either encourage or discourage learning. It may also help to determine how families perceive adult students as learners and thereby encourage or discourage them from learning. Furthermore, it may help to determine how families' and students' concepts of literacy impact their interactions and perceptions to encourage or discourage literacy learning. By doing so, this study may provide impetus for a new avenue of approach in researching effective literacy learning in adults. It may also have implications for program design if, as Denton (1989) has stated, "Sound educational policy and practice...require seeing the family system as the focal point for educational interventions" (p. 9).
CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Studies specifically investigating the impact of interactions between the family and an adult learning to read seem to be limited to my own single case study (Moulton, in press; Moulton & Holmes, in press). There have, however, been numerous studies in adult literacy, adult learning, children's literacy acquisition, family literacy, and family therapy that have guided me to this particular investigation. As these overlapping areas converge, they focus not only on the concept of literacy but also on the academic and social environments of learning and the learners themselves.

Concepts of Being Literate

Whether the number of people considered illiterate is 27 million (Hunter & Harman, 1985) or 44 million (Kirsch et al., 1993), Kozol (1985) points out that "one troublesome objection rears its head whenever we address this issue" (p. 11). That objection deals with the concept of literacy. Depending on the author, concepts of
literacy include both definitions and inherent values stemming from the terms used in them. More traditionally based definitions tend to quantify literacy according to a single standard whereas more current trends construct definitions from the social roles literacy assumes for individuals. The difference between these external and internal definitions (Hunter & Harman, 1985) may have a significant impact on what is being taught in literacy programs and whether or not students learn, for literacy definitions seem to assume values which may not be shared by learners and teachers.

**Traditional Definitions of Adult Literacy**

The earliest definition of literacy, used by the U.S. Census Bureau in 1870, was based on the ability to write one's name, resulting in a high level of literacy—90%—for the U.S. (Newman & Beverstock, 1991). Although the definition of literacy changed, it remained simplistic enough to create a 99.5% rate of literacy according to the 1890 census (Newman & Beverstock, 1991). Researchers, however, had already begun to question the validity of the Census Bureau's claims, and, in an attempt to measure literacy in the U.S., based their definitions on school grade levels of reading proficiency (Hunter & Harman, 1985; Mikulecky, 1987; Newman & Beverstock, 1990). While labels sometimes differed,
essentially adults reading below the fifth grade level were considered low literate, those reading between the fifth and eighth grade marginally literate, and those reading between the ninth and twelfth grade functionally literate. Those reading at the twelfth grade level were considered literate. No reading tests were actually given to adults, however; instead, levels were extrapolated from census information of grades completed without regard to levels of proficiency in those grades (Kozol, 1985; Newman & Beverstock, 1990). Furthermore, the labels assigned were based on the assumption that school reading programs prepared people for the literacy-related tasks encountered in everyday life as an adult, an assumption that has turned out to be invalid (Kirsch, 1990; Sticht, 1990).

The most recent effort to define literacy in the U.S., the National Adult Literacy Survey (Kirsch et al., 1993), was based on the proficiency of over 26,000 adults (including speakers of languages other than English) on tasks using prose, documents, and quantitative materials. From their data, the researchers developed five levels of literacy. Extrapolating from the results, Kirsch et al. (1993) found that approximately 21-23% of the U.S. adult population (40 to 44 million adults) were at Level 1, the lowest level of literacy; 25-28% (48 to 54 million
adults) were at Level 2, the second lowest level of literacy; approximately 31% (61 million adults) were at Level 3; 15-17% (29 to 33 million adults) were at Level 4; and 3-4% (6 to 8 million adults) were at Level 5, the highest level of literacy. These different levels of literacy clearly measured adult literacy in terms of tasks and materials that adults encounter in their daily lives, but as Sticht (1990) stated about earlier competency-based measures, the NALS appeared to provide guidelines for schools to prevent future adult literacy problems rather than curricular direction for adult literacy programs.

Grade-level-based and competency-based definitions of literacy may have meaning for those who create them, but they do not necessarily have meaning for those to whom they apply. In interviews, Kirsch et al. (1993) found that many of the adults they placed in the lowest levels of literacy felt themselves to be literate. Thus the participants' views or definitions of literacy were not the same as those of the researchers, an important distinction if literacy programs are to serve their clientele effectively.

Social Constructivist Definitions of Literacy

Literacy, as an aspect of both language and knowledge, is viewed by social constructivists as
generated by the individual's interaction with the community or social and cultural environment (Bruffee, 1986; McCarthey & Raphael, 1989). According to different communities' needs and expectations, the meaning of literacy is relative and may have different meanings depending on the community from which it is derived (Cook-Gumperz, 1986; Levine, 1986; Scribner & Cole, 1981; Stubbs, 1980). Vygotskyan theory, for instance, views literacy as a means of higher thought processes (Scribner & Cole, 1981). UNESCO views literacy as a means of greater productivity (Levine, 1986). The National Governors' Association views literacy as a means of exercising "the rights and responsibilities of citizenship" (U.S. Department of Education, 1991, p. 4). To different communities, literacy can be a valuable goal in itself or merely a tool to be used in reaching a more valuable goal (Cook-Gumperz, 1986). Defining and measuring adult literacy from a single viewpoint may thus have no relationship to the adult seeking remediation from a different perspective.

Other research has, in fact, shown that adults at varying levels of literacy often view literacy quite differently from psychometricians, psychologists, politicians, and educators. Just as Smith (1988) identified learning to read as "a social event" (p. 194),
so do adults identify literacy. In a study of 20 adults who had left school early and had low literacy skills, Barton (1990) found that literacy activities were more associated with appropriate social roles than with abilities. Letters and cards were seen as a woman's role in the household; dealing with forms and bills were the man's, regardless of literacy skills. Any form of literacy activity, however, was viewed as less valuable than the "real work" (p. 8) of physical activity among these participants. Furthermore, some literacy activities could be accomplished by socially accepted alternatives; finding out the time of a bus departure could be accomplished not just by reading the schedule but also by calling the bus station. Literacy for these participants was a social practice rather than a set of skills. Levine (1986) similarly found that, for one community, reading the Bible was essentially "a religious observance" (p. 16) rather than a literate activity.

What constitutes a community may have little to do with geographic boundaries but, instead, may depend on such social practice. In her study of a single small school district, Heath (1980, 1983) found several communities, each with different concepts of literacy. In Roadville, for instance, reading was a social activity that involved others. When a letter or even an
advertising brochure arrived, it was a source of community discussion, interpretation, and evaluation. People who went off alone to read were seen as socially unsuccessful; for instance, "women who read 'romance' magazines or men who read 'girlie' magazines were charged with having to read to meet social needs they could not handle in real life" (1980, p. 128). The townspeople in Heath's (1980, 1983) study, on the other hand, found solitary reading a virtue and a means of achieving social and economic success. Concepts of literacy may thus be integrated with concepts of community as well as with values.

Moll (1994) found that both families and social networks develop "funds of knowledge" (p. 184) which they draw from and share with others. A person who has knowledge of repairing an appliance, for instance, may share that knowledge with others by either repairing their appliance or teaching them how to do it themselves. Literacy is just one of these funds. Fingeret (1983) also found literacy activities related to social networks as well as values. While literacy was seen as a valued skill in the Appalachian community she studied, it was just one skill among many and became a commodity that could be bartered and exchanged for others within the network. Because of these same social networks, literacy has also
been found to be a commodity of negative value. Wikelund (1989) reviewed studies of street youth (e.g., Conklin & Hurtig, 1986; McDermott, 1974; Shuman, 1983, 1986) and found that literacy was almost detrimental to their well-being within their social group; school and literacy failure was considered achievement. Holzman (1986) also found negative values attached to literacy for minority female single parents. Their enrollment in a literacy program was often seen as an effort to separate themselves from their community, an effort unacceptable to their social peers, who demanded to know, "WHO DO YOU THINK YOU ARE, GIRL?" (p. 29, capitals in original).

Acquiring literacy thus may not necessarily be the means of adults achieving "the greatest possible opportunity in their work and in their lives" that the National Literacy Act (1991, p. 333) intends it to be. Any definition of literacy, according to social constructivism, is relative to individuals and their social networks. To serve low-literate adults through literacy programs, knowing how literacy is defined and what literacy means to their lives and their social networks, especially their families, becomes an important element in determining curriculum and methodology. **Associative Definitions of Literacy**

The recent emphasis on adult literacy has created
such a negative connotation for the word literacy itself that researchers (Ziegahn, 1992) and literacy programs (Laubach Literacy Action, 1993) are avoiding its use. Kozol (1985) cited an advertisement, intended to recruit adult students, in the form of a "wanted" poster as an indication of values associated with literacy by the literate. Ziegahn (1992) found informants not forthcoming when she used the term literacy and thus rephrased her questions in terms of reading and writing instead. One person who was referred to her as a possible low-literate participant turned out to be highly educated; the "informant later explained that she thought this woman was 'flaky,' a condition she associated with illiteracy" (p. 36).

The word literacy, which is often confused with the word illiteracy, has come to have a stigma and be so associated with schooling that low-literate adults are loath to admit to their lack of literacy or enroll in programs (Ziegahn, 1992; Quigley, 1992). They have recognized what Cook-Gumperz (1986) pointed out: everyday adult literacy is different from school literacy, and school literacy holds little value in their lives (Ziegahn, 1992). While they value learning and easily point to its results, they avoid learning when it is associated with school (Moll, 1994; Ziegahn, 1992).
Furthermore, physical work is valued over mental activity so that doing has more value than reading (Barton, 1990; Beder, 1991; Moulton & Holmes, 1995). As one of Quigley's (1992) interviewees stated, to become a participant in literacy learning, it must have "something to do with my life" (p. 113). While the people interviewed in these studies did not necessarily define literacy per se, their associations with the term literacy seem to indicate a need for teachers and tutors not only to think about literacy in terms of people's everyday lives but also to teach literacy activities in situations that are more clearly related to students' lives.

Academic and Social Environments of Learning

Research on adults learning to read rarely has what Quigley's (1992) participant wanted: "something to do with [a learner's] life" (p. 133). Instead, research has usually been situated in the students' academic environments, not in their social milieu. It has tended to focus on curriculum and methodology within the classroom setting by looking at specific teaching techniques or by reviewing how a successful student was taught. Research on children learning to read, however, has begun to take into account the social setting of the family. By doing so, such research may have applicability
to adults as well.

**Teaching Techniques**

Much of the literature that exists on adult literacy teaching techniques is prescriptive rather than descriptive. That is, it prescribes particular philosophies, techniques, activities, and materials, but it rarely describes studies of their efficacy. Furthermore, because these philosophies, techniques, activities, and materials are limited to classroom or tutoring situations, they do not go beyond the class or particular intervention. For instance, recommendations have included the use of whole language (Keefe & Meyer, 1991; Padak, Stuart, & Schierloh, 1991), the language experience approach (Davidson & Wheat, 1989; Townsend, 1982), word banks (Austin-Angela, 1994; Davidson & Wheat, 1989), picture books (Danielson, 1994), storytelling (Ford, 1994), poetry (Conniff, Bortle, & Joseph, 1994; Kazemek & Rigg, 1994), classic novels (Schierloh, 1994), autobiographical writing (Stasz, Schwartz, & Weeden, 1994), and journal writing (Sole, 1994). While some of these recommendations were based on classroom use, no studies were actually made of whether or not these philosophies, techniques, activities, and materials enhanced adult literacy learning.

The recommendation of only a few techniques have been
based on studies. For instance, Malicky and Norman (1982) reported on the use of miscue analysis with adult literacy learners. No gains in reading level resulted, but the researchers suggested that miscue analysis did lead to low-level readers beginning to recognize use of appropriate and inappropriate strategies and recommended its use. In a later study, Malicky and Norman (1989) found that during an assessment interview, beginning adult readers made less errors when reading their own familiar stories than when reading commercial unfamiliar material, suggesting that a language experience approach be used in class or tutoring sessions with virtual non-readers. Using a read-along strategy called Prime-O-Tec with midlevel readers, Meyer (1982) reported gains in vocabulary but not comprehension. After seven hours of reading along with taped material until able to read two articles aloud to the instructor with 90% accuracy, subjects had a post-test gain of seven months as opposed to a one-month gain in the control group.

More recently, Keefe and Meyer (1991) recommended a number of teaching activities for adult literacy students. The study on which their recommendations were based was not on the techniques but, rather, on the initial assessment of over 100 adults enrolled in volunteer and ABE literacy programs. From these
assessments, the researchers developed four basic profiles of learners in order to assign activities consistent with each profile (Meyer & Keefe, 1990). Their research was thus on the characteristics of the subjects, not on the suggested teaching activities, and their recommendations were limited to activities during class sessions.

Recent practitioner-oriented books (Frager, 1991; Meyer & Keefe, 1990; Soifer et al., 1990) have this same classroom emphasis. Meyer and Keefe (1990) referred only to activities inside the classroom. Soifer et al. (1990) described computer usage, collaborative group work, and writing activities, though in the final section on assessment they mentioned literacy outside the classroom, in "daily work, home and social situations" (p. 170). Frager's (1991) work, on the other hand, began with an explanation of the importance of literacy activities outside the classroom and even in the home, but it did not refer to this aspect when dealing with instructional strategies, curriculum, or assessment. Practitioner-oriented books and studies thus seem to overlook an important aspect of learning: extension of learning and practice from the classroom to real life.

Successful Adult Literacy Students

Most reported case studies have similarly focused on
classroom or tutoring activities, but they have also given a hint that learning activities occurred outside the lesson. Eldredge's (1988) report on Ron focused on the two elements of the tutoring: phonics lessons based on a four-part decoding process and read-along tapes of student-selected adult level material. The tutoring lasted only six months and consisted of 12 twenty-minute phonics lessons and an unspecified number of other lessons. At the end of the six months, Ron was reported to be reading independently. No entry-level reading ability was reported, so the amount of change is unknown. Furthermore, since Ron was out of town frequently on business trips during this six-month period and the amount of teaching time appeared to be relatively short—a total of 4 hours of phonics and an unknown number of other hours as opposed to the 100-150 hours per grade level Diekhoff (1988) reported—it seems that most of Ron's learning must have occurred on his own time with the tapes.

Scully and Johnston's (1991) study of Chad attributed Chad's success at decoding to the use of a therapeutic model that combined skill activities with discussions of attitude and strategies, though other techniques were also used. Activities outside of the tutoring sessions were not reported, but it seems that much of the success
must have come from them as well, for the tutoring consisted of only 15 sessions of 1 1/2 to 2 hours length over a 4-month period, while Chad averaged between 7 and 10 hours a week studying on his own.

Using a whole language approach, Norman (Meyer, Estes, Harris, & Daniels, 1991) progressed from knowing only the alphabet to reading between the sixth and seventh grade levels in a year's time. He began with environmental print and word banks, moved to a language experience approach, then to journal writing and sustained silent reading, all mixed with many activities which the teachers felt would emphasize the meaning-based nature of reading and writing. Norman attended class usually three times a week, but he also spent 7 to 12 hours per week reading on his own. Like Ron and Chad, Norman's literacy activities outside of class, though unreported, surely must have impacted his learning.

With Jenny, Purcell-Gates (1993) used a form of dialogue journal: Jenny wrote, the teacher typed Jenny's writing (and corrected spelling and punctuation as she did so), and then the teacher wrote back to Jenny. There was little direct instruction in reading reported, but Jenny's reading improved along with her writing. There was also little time spent with the student. Jenny's learning essentially took place on her own time though
there was no documentation of how much time she spent or exactly how she spent it.

Rigg's (1985) study of Petra stands apart from the other studies. Not only is it the earliest study and the learner the least successful, but it is also the only study to refer to the importance of the student's social milieu. Rigg had to abandon her psycholinguistic approach to reading and writing in favor of Petra's skill-based view to make any progress. Petra still did not become literate in the traditional sense of literacy, but she did achieve her goal of being able to write her own name and identify specific words. Not only did Petra limit her own progress through her view of literacy, but so did her family through theirs. Seeing no need for her to become literate, they placed obstacles in her way, leaving her little chance to learn. Long after the tutoring ended, Rigg came to understand Petra's acceptance of her family's behavior. Because Rigg now recognized "how one's literacy development is affected by the people with whom one most closely associates, and by the assumptions and expectations held by those people" (p. 138), Rigg castigated herself for "never ask[ing] Petra what changes she anticipated as a result of learning to read" (p. 137).

It is only with the case of Petra (Rigg, 1985), an
unsuccessful learner, that social factors outside the academic setting finally merge with literacy acquisition theory. The other case studies, purporting to show what worked with adult literacy students, seem to gloss over part of what made the students successful: time spent on literacy activities outside class or tutoring sessions. No two of the approaches used were the same; what does appear to be the same is the apparent undocumented non-class time. In terms of literacy acquisition theory, which views learning to read as a social process that goes beyond the classroom, it is this undocumented non-class time that could be a crucial element to an adult learning to read.

**Children's Literacy and Social Environment**

Smith's (1988) observation that learning to read is "a social event" (p. 194) for children is an apt one. Studies on children who are successfully learning to read show that the social setting of the home is vital to their success in school. Taylor's (1983) study of six middle-class white families with successfully reading first-graders showed how literacy was an integral part of the lives of the children from birth. Parents did not consciously teach children to read but expected them to take part in literacy-related activities as simple as looking for the "Two Guys" sign that would mark the
upcoming highway exit to their favorite pizza place. Stories were read and discussed as a matter of course. Paper and writing, coloring, or scribbling materials were always handy, and the abundance of writing activity was evidenced not only in prominent displays but also in trash baskets. Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines' (1988) study of four poverty-stricken black families with successfully reading first-graders showed the same results. Literacy activities were both expected and highly valued, and literacy-related activities were an integral part of the families' lives. In both studies, many of the activities were not even seen as literacy activities by the participants; they were just part of everyday socialization.

Two reports from a single Harvard study (Chall & Snow, 1982; Snow, Barnes, Chandler, Goodman, & Hemphill, 1991) also found that children's early success in school appeared to be due to rich literacy experiences in the home, maternal expectations, and emotional support. Parents did not set out to teach their children literacy skills but, instead, used them in their social settings. As the children progressed in school, moving into middle and high schools, the home influence seemed to have less impact while school influences had more (Snow et al., 1991). Some fell behind, and when the researchers
followed up on the children five years later (Snow et al., 1991), a few had dropped out of school.

Several researchers (e.g. Kirby, 1992; Teale, 1986; Teale & Sulzby, 1986; Wells, 1985) have looked specifically at the reading of stories to preschool children to determine what factors prepared children for literacy learning. Storybook reading itself was not the determining factor of later school success; rather, it was the discussions and activities that accompanied the reading. Through the discussions, children were able to relate the world of print to their own world. While reading stories aloud was obviously a literacy-related activity, it appeared to be the more social process of talk about the stories and how they related to the children's lives that enhanced the children's literacy acquisition.

Heath's (1983) study of several communities within a single school district also found that early home-based activities influenced children's success in school. In one rural community, story-telling was more valued than story-reading though personal letters and advertising fliers were often read aloud and discussed between adults. Children were not seen as appropriate partners in communication. Parents felt that what children needed to learn for school should be taught in school. Thus any
pre-school literacy learning was usually initiated by the children themselves or by their older siblings. In the town, however, children were surrounded by literacy activities and expected to take part in family communication. When the children from these two communities began school, teachers perceived those from the former community as slow learners because they did not seem to understand the language of school, which is far different from the language of home (Cook-Gumperz & Gumperz, 1981). Heath concluded that it behooves the schools to understand the different communities' views of literacy and communication rather than to expect different communities to understand the schools' views and expectations. Fingeret (1983) echoed this view with adults:

Educators have to recognize that existing social groups will continue to be of primary importance in the lives of illiterate adults; if we do not learn to work with them, many illiterate adults will continue to refuse to work with us (p. 144).

**Family Literacy Programs**

The gap between family literacy and school literacy seems to be almost universal. Only in a completely homogeneous community, such as the Amish community Fishman (1988) described, where the teachers had been
brought up in the community, is there little separation between school and home. The school is an extension of the home. Family literacy programs have attempted to bridge this gap, but, as opposed to Fishman's (1988) community, they often try to make the home an extension of the school through a "transmission of school practices model" (Auerbach, 1989, p. 173). While some children have benefited from these types of programs, most studies (Chall & Snow, 1982; Snow et al., 1991; Taylor, 1983; Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines, 1988; Urzua, 1986) show that:

indirect factors including frequency of children's outings with adults, number of maternal outings, emotional climate of the home, amount of time spent interacting with adults, level of financial stress, enrichment activities, and parental involvement with the schools had a stronger effect on many aspects of reading and writing than did direct literacy activities, such as help with homework (Auerbach, 1989, p. 172).

Furthermore, children arrive at school eager to learn, and it is the school which changes their attitudes and influences their abilities (Auerbach, 1989; Urzua, 1986).

Both Auerbach (1989) and Nickse (1991) concluded that family literacy or intergenerational programs are based on false assumptions and provide little evidence that
they work. Aside from assuming that family life needs to include school practices, they assume that all direction must come from the parents (Auerbach, 1989), yet Taylor (1983) found that children initiated many literacy-related activities which the families smoothly integrated into their social life. Similarly, most intergenerational programs "emphasize how parents can learn from schools but give little attention to how schools might learn from parents" (Morrow & Paratore, 1993, p. 197).

The findings on family literacy programs have direct applicability to adult literacy programs. Like schools, adult literacy programs focus on the learner separate from the family. If children's literacy acquisition depends on home influences and smooth integration of literacy-related activities, then it seems likely that an adult's should, too. Literacy is not "an add-on instructional activity" (Auerbach, 1989, p. 173) but must be part of the social organization of the student's and family's life.

Adults as Learners: Differing Views

Adult learning theory recognizes that adult learners seek knowledge to integrate and apply immediately to their lives outside of class (Claxton, Darnell, Reid, & Shugart, 1987; Freire, 1970; Graham, 1988; Knowles, 1980; Knox, 1977). Freire's (1970) work among illiterate
Brazilians especially emphasized the need for literacy learning to be part of adults' social, economic, and political activities. Life outside the classroom certainly includes the family, yet Cross's (1981) study found that family support, along with other situational barriers such as time and home responsibilities, were the greatest obstacles to adults' participation in learning. While Smith-Burke, Parker, and Deegan (1987) found that attendance at a New York literacy program was hindered by the students' "outside lives and personal commitments" (p. 39), she also found that students cited family support as the primary factor in their continued attendance. Although referring to instructors' attitudes and class activities, Knowles (1980) also stated that adults learned better when they felt "supported rather than judged or threatened" (p. 279).

Most tenets of adult learning theory are based on post-secondary students. Knowles (1980) posited that adult students are not only active learners who wish to succeed in learning but also know how they learn best. However, in looking at ABE students, Kidd (1973) found that the fear of failure was so great that it became almost impossible for some adults to learn. Johnston (1985) found that adult literacy learners were essentially passive rather than active learners, as did
Belz (1984), who also found that students needed to revise their concepts of how they learned best. Eberle and Robinson (1980) found that "an adult who undertakes to become literate...is beginning a process that is more complicated and more difficult than earlier learning was" (p. 27) because there is much to "unlearn" in both the cognitive and affective domains. This modified view of adult learning theory for adult literacy learners is especially relevant to the inclusion of family in literacy learning.

**Adult Learning Theory and Literacy Learners**

Studies of adult literacy learners that include more than teaching techniques tend to support this modified view of adult learning theory. In a tutoring situation with Earl, Coles (1984), found that other aspects of the student's life were hindering his literacy learning. When Earl seemed to have "a memory problem" (p. 466), Coles began to understand how Earl's relationship with his parents and his past experiences had created a low self-concept which led to Earl's sabotaging his efforts to learn. It was not enough for Coles to raise Earl's self-concept within the classes; Earl also needed to "act in the world as a changing person" (p. 466). It was not enough to change the way Earl thought; for effective learning to take place, Earl also needed to change his
"course of activity in the world" (p. 466). Coles came to believe that it was "necessary to study cognition not by itself but as part of an individual's social relationships...and social conditions" (p. 452).

Observing another adult student's tutoring session, Coles (1984a) similarly noted that the student's responses revealed more than his cognitive abilities; they showed that he was "a complex human being bringing to the task his personal history, emotions, self-worth, [and] present interrelationships" (p. 322). Coles also pointed to the need for "mutually active involvement of the learner and the learning environment" (p. 326), an environment that he defined as being within a "broad social context" which included "family relations, social class relations, [and] cultural ideology" (p. 326).

Like Coles, Johnston (1985), too, felt that "a useful understanding [would] only emerge from an integrated examination of the cognitive, affective, social, and personal history of the learner" (p. 155). The three men Johnston studied all had extreme anxiety about reading. Afraid of appearing stupid, they rarely took risks in their reading and were passive or helpless learners. Their anxiety reactions caused their minds "almost literally to shut down" (p. 169). As a result, they avoided print and held poor concepts of themselves. Fear
of success was almost as an inhibiting factor to learning as fear of failure. One student, Jack, was hindered because he felt learning to read at this point in his life would make him question what he might have been able to do had he learned to read as a child. Even literacy-related interactions with their own families were a source of anxiety. One student, Bill, did not want to use his newly learned skills at home because his eight-year-old child had once criticized his oral reading and his wife had expressed little enthusiasm when he announced that he had finished reading his first book. Although Bill's family was a negative influence on his reading progress, it was also an indication of the importance of social relationships and family involvement on reading.

Like Johnston (1985) and Coles (1984, 1984a), Belz (1984) believed that a student's non-school problems "are inextricably tied to the client's literacy needs" (p. 97). She based literacy instruction on an "educational therapy" model emphasizing the students' recognition of ineffective learning strategies they had been using and conflict-resolution of past educational experiences and perceptions of self. Belz's student, Joe, had feelings of anger toward his parents' and teachers' perception of him as inadequate because of his reading failure. To be "free to learn" (p. 103), Joe needed to loosen "the bonds of
insecurity, inadequacy and fear of failure and success" (p. 103). He needed to raise his self-esteem by redefining himself and becoming a more active participant in his learning. To achieve this, however, Joe experienced these changes as a "struggle—a conflict" (p. 103) within himself. While Belz's (1984) model recognized affective problems for an adult learning to read and made a point of dealing with them, there was no account of how the student's learning and redefinition of himself was integrated with his current life at home with his wife and two children.

In interviews with eight adult literacy students, Rosow (1988) found that all had low self-esteem and, like the adults in Belz's (1984) and Johnston's (1985) studies, experienced such anxiety and fear of failure that they created "a mental block which prevent[ed] conscious access to learning" (Rosow, 1988, p. 121). References to family support, however, all related to the learners as children, not adults. That is, they all recalled unhappy and abused childhoods, and none of them could recall ever having been read to at home or at school. These issues of self-esteem and family support were contradictory to findings in studies by Gold and Johnson (1982) and Beebe (1992). Gold and Johnson (1982) found that self-esteem was neither below average for
their 132 adult literacy participants nor related to reading. Beebe (1992), in interviews with 57 low-literate adults, inquired about family conditions when participants were children. Unlike Rosow (1988) and researchers on children's literacy (e.g. Chall & Snow, 1982; Snow et al., 1991; Taylor, 1983; Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines, 1988; Urzua, 1986), Beebe (1992) concluded that family factors, such as social and economic status, stability, and reading in the home, had no significant effect on adults' reading skills. Such a finding, however, does not indicate that there is no need for emotional support during literacy learning as an adult; rather, it shows just as strong a need, and the most meaningful support comes from those closest to the learner, the family.

Persisters and Non-persisters in Literacy Programs

Because of the high dropout rates—up to 90%—in adult literacy programs (Bishop, 1991; Bowren, 1988; Diekhoff, 1988), there have been a number of studies to determine why some students remain and others leave without learning. Balmuth (1988) found that reasons for dropping out were "less often a failure of the program itself than a result of outside forces" (p. 623).

One of the first efforts to determine reasons for non-persistence in adult literacy, Meyer's (1974) survey
of over 1000 drop-outs found that few dropped out because of dissatisfaction with the literacy program but, instead, cited outside interference related to transportation, family and living situations, health, and employment. Looking at the same problem from a different angle, Jones, Schulman, and Stubblefield (1978) tried to determine predictors of persistence for adults in ABE classes. While their findings were inconclusive, they theorized that social support factors were an important element because students who lacked self-confidence were more susceptible to social pressure. Diekhoff and Diekhoff (1984) also attempted to determine predictors of persistence, but in a volunteer-based adult literacy program. They found five variables to be significantly correlated with persistence: age, program goals, amount of illiteracy in the family, employment status, and race. Citing Jones (1978), the researchers stated that the family literacy factor was seen as important because of the amount of support or hindrance the family would provide.

Fitzsimmons (1991) followed up on these studies by looking at 10 black women in literacy programs. She found the factors that the women felt to be most important to their persistence were their personal strengths, elements within the reading program, their goals, social support,
prior experiences in school, and family influence from when they were children. Though the women interviewed felt their own inner strength, often phrased in religious terms, to be the most important factor, all had told other people about their efforts to learn and had received positive feedback and encouragement. Some had received negative feedback as well but said that it had just made them want to learn even more.

Holmes (1991) specifically looked at financial, motivational, and psychological aspects of family support for both persisters and non-persisters in ABE programs. Through a questionnaire, she found there was no significant difference in support between persisters and non-persisters. However, almost 50% of drop-outs left for financial reasons, and there appeared to be indications that a difference existed between the kind of psychological support provided to the two groups. Morse's (1992) study more clearly showed the importance of psychological support. Looking at how the acquisition of literacy was tied to self-efficacy, he found that some adult learners felt other family members began to respect them more, which raised their self-esteem and encouraged them to stay with the program.

The amount of research on family support for adult learners is limited, but what there is seems to indicate
that learning to read as an adult arouses social and emotional problems that cannot be ignored. Few literacy programs are equipped to handle both aspects of learning to read and social-psychological counseling (Ponzetti & Bodine, 1993); families must be involved to help deal with such social and emotional problems.

Family Therapy and Adult Learners

The family is a major part of an adult student's existence outside the classroom. In creating its own social organization, each member plays a number of defined roles in relation to the other members (Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 1991; Lappin, 1988; Minuchin, 1974; Stanton & Todd, 1979; Stryker, 1972). Changes in roles create changes in the family. To maintain the family, members must either negotiate their adaptations to the change or reject the change (Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 1991). Literacy learning is not normally a cause for therapy, but the principles are similar. Stanton and Todd (1979) found that the parents of a drug addict were unable to negotiate the changes in their own relationship that occurred when the son overcame his addiction. The conflict in the family was such that the son became addicted again and the parents' roles returned to "normal."

In Johnston's (1985) study of three adults learning
to read, Bill attempted to change his behavior—and thus his family's social organization—by reading aloud to his daughter. Expecting her father to be competent, the daughter scorned his immature reading efforts. Rebuffed, Bill said he "never did that again" (p. 173). The daughter's rejection of the change in her father maintained the former family roles and organization but may have prevented Bill from learning. In my study of Len (Moulton, 1994; Moulton & Holmes, 1995), the family accepted Len's oral reading efforts. No one criticized his reading, and while his son Jeremy objected to Len's demand that the television be off and oral reading as a family take its place, Jeremy acquiesced. The family negotiated the changes Len's new ability to read created.

The women Horsman (1990) described were very much aware of the changes their learning engendered and spoke freely about their families' fear of those changes. Some women left their husbands because the women's need to learn and change was so great; others remained, but, like Petra in Rigg's (1985) study, they encountered obstacles placed by family members to keep them from attending their educational program. These cases all point out the need for an awareness that change will occur in the family and an understanding that negotiating such change is important to learning (Rigg, 1985).
Part of the resistance to new roles and change is derived from covert rules that have been established in the family, rules that have never been articulated but that are clearly understood by family members (Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 1991; Lappin, 1991). When Len (Moulton, 1994; Moulton & Holmes, 1995) announced to his family that he was now learning to read, he eliminated the covert rule that had existed. Len's wife Susan acknowledged that Len's inability to read was treated as a covert rule. She stated that the children "knew but it was never said." Susan's daughter corroborated this: by sixth grade, "I kind of figured out that he couldn't read that well...he just never came out and said it." Once the rule was dismissed and the family actively took part in Len's learning, family relationships changed. Jeremy noticed that Len had become "a lot calmer...a lot nicer" and was involving himself in more of Jeremy's activities.

In his study of self-efficacy and literacy, Morse (1992) found changes in family relationships to be a by-product for one learner; by being a student, Cathy saw herself become more than "just a mother" (p. 62) as her family supported her learning to read not only by taking over some of the household chores but also by turning to her for help with literacy-related tasks. Smithe-Burke, Parker, and Deegan (1987) also found changes: One woman
stated that "for the first time, she felt independent and proud of myself. My kids are proud of me and that makes me feel good" (p. 31).

Fingeret and Danin (1991) found in their study of adult literacy students enrolled in a New York program that:

the issue of reading and writing at home is more complex than simply whether or not a student has the quiet time and the energy after a long work day. It also has to do with the students' lives at home--their social networks, the relationships they have established with their family and friends. Increasing the amount of reading and writing they do at home means that students have to renegotiate many of the relationships that are central to their lives (p. 120).

The researchers found that some students were better able to negotiate than others. Some still tried to keep their illiteracy and their learning secret from their family. Other students were greatly aware of how much their literacy learning influenced and was influenced by their relationships. One student, Mr. Paynter, found "his relationships with his family slowly shifting" as he began to make use of his literacy skills in activities new to him (p. 124). Another student, Mr. Walsh, found
that his reading suffered when his relationship with his girlfriend was not going well. Fingeret and Danin's (1991) study appears to be the first that actually looked in any depth at how literacy students' learning is closely aligned to their familial relationships. As such, it may be a cornerstone upon which further studies can be built.

Whether or not the family can handle negotiations of change may be an indication of whether or not the adult student will continue to learn at school. It may also influence whether or not the home environment becomes an active part of the adult's learning. As Taylor (1983) demonstrated in her study and Teale and Sulzby (1986) stated: "Changes in the home literacy environment imply changes in the ways the family organizes its everyday activities" (p. 200).

Conclusion

While the literature reviewed comes from different areas, most of it converges in a single view of adults not only as learners but also as family members. It points out that learning cannot be compartmentalized and relegated to a cognitive activity taking place in the classroom alone. Classroom learning, to be effective and continue to hold the learner's interest, must be integrated into the learner's social and family life. How
that is to be accomplished, however, is not described. Nor is there much description of how it has been accomplished by successful adult literacy learners or how it has been impeded for less successful learners. Such a description was the purpose of this study.

Benseman (1989), Fingeret (1982), Rockhill (1982), and Wikelund, Reder, and Hart-Landsberg (1992) have all called for more qualitative research on adult education "that makes it possible to look at educational participation as it is embedded in learning and begin to understand how learning is embedded in everyday life" (p. 30). By studying the role of the family in adults learning to read, I have responded to their call and attempted to study the very foundation of everyday life in which education is embedded. Witnessing the negotiations of change in learners and families, discovering their views of literacy, and documenting the integration or rejection of new literacy knowledge and behavior within the established organization of the family may lead to a better understanding of adult literacy students, their learning, and their program needs.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

In advocating an ethnographic approach to reading research, Szwed (1981) encouraged researchers "to stay as close as possible to real cases, individual examples, in order to gain the strength of evidence that comes with being able to examine specific cases in great depth and complexity" (p. 21). Lipson and Wixson (1986) similarly advocated "ethnographic research [that] can enrich our understanding of reading (dis)ability by examining it within the multiple layers of social and cultural contexts provided by classroom, schools, homes, and communities" (p. 127). Heeding their advice, my qualitative investigation used ethnographic methodology in a multiple-case study to explore the impact of the family on adults learning to read.

Specifically, I investigated 1) how the interactions of families changed, if at all, as adult members of the families learned to read; 2) how the perceptions of the adult learners by individual members of the families and
by the learners themselves changed, if at all, during the
learning period; and 3) how the concepts of literacy and
learning held by the student and the individual members
of the families changed, if at all, during the learning
period. As a multi-layered context in which most adults
live and learn, the family and its individual members
create perceptions of the adult learner and construct
ideas of learning and literacy. These views may affect
adult students' interactions with family members and, in
turn, their literacy learning. Exploring these three
aspects through ethnographic methodology allowed me to
"stay as close as possible to real cases" (Szwed, 1981,
p. 100) and better understand how adults negotiated
progress in their learning with the accompanying changes
that were required in their families.

Because my investigation involved real cases, made up
of real people in their own homes with real lives and
real problems that accompany any real family—but people
I did not know before the study began—there was no way
to foresee what would happen, as is true of any
naturalistic inquiry (Janesick, 1994; Schumacher &
McMillan, 1993). Events unforeseen by the participants
themselves controlled and shaped the study; in fact, the
study evolved, shaping itself, as ethnographic and case
study research does, according to LeCompte and Preissle,
around a "reality that is ever changing" (1993, p. 46). Because of this constant reshaping, I have included some particulars from the study to help explain the changing methodology and design that accompanied it.

**Research Design**

Stake (1994) identifies two basic types of case study: intrinsic and instrumental. The intrinsic case is studied because of interest in the case itself. The instrumental case is studied because it promises to "provide insight into an issue or refinement of theory" (p. 237). Collective case study extends the instrumental study to several cases and is also known as a multiple case study (Yin, 1984).

This project used a collective or multiple case study design. As Yin (1984) explained, multiple cases can allow for replication, either literal, in which the same results are produced, or theoretical, in which contrary results are produced. A minimum of two cases is needed to suggest whether results may be literal or theoretical (Yin, 1984). In this instance, multiple cases were intended to help me explore whether or not an adult learning to read in a particular literacy program was impacted by the family's interactions in similar ways as other adults learning in similar circumstances of family and literacy program. However, as the study progressed, I
became aware that the circumstances of one participant were not what she had purported them to be at the outset; her inability to read was still a secret from the family (contrary to one of the expressed criteria for participants) and therefore prevented interactions based on literacy learning. Rather than drop her from the study, which would also have meant ending her tutoring sessions, a decision which I felt would have been unethical in terms of her need for tutoring, I looked at her inclusion as an instance of Yin's (1984) theoretical replication rather than as a literal replication.

The use of at least two cases helps to establish reliability (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993; Yin, 1984), sometimes called dependability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), as well as to "minimize the errors and biases in the study" (Yin, 1984, p. 45). The number of cases, Yin (1984) further noted, also depends on the resources and time available to the investigator(s). In this investigation of adult literacy learners, time was a limiting factor because I was to be not only interviewing students and their family members at approximately monthly intervals but also tutoring each student twice a week. Furthermore, adult literacy students typically have a high drop-out rate (Bishop, 1991; Bowren, 1988; Diekhoff, 1988); thus, to assure that I was able to continue with at least two
students and their families throughout the project, I began with four students.

Cross-case analysis (Yin, 1984) of the students who remained in the study as well as "thick" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) or "rich" (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993) description allowed for transferability of results. That is, comparisons between each case as well as detailed descriptions of participants, settings, and events provided a means of making generalizations that may apply to similar cases in similar settings. Such generalizations, although they may be tentative, are the purpose of the multiple or collective case study. The cases "may be similar or dissimilar, redundancy and variety each having voice. They are chosen because it is believed that understanding them will lead to better understanding, perhaps better theorizing, about a still larger collection of cases" (Stake, 1994, p. 237).

Research Context

The Library Literacy Program

The study was conducted in a one-on-one literacy program sponsored by the combined city-county library district of a large southwestern city. The program offered tutoring for students reading below the sixth grade level as determined by volunteer evaluators who
administered a combination of word lists, skill checks, and reading passages: One list of words and the skill check are derived from the phonics-based Laubach Way to Reading Series (Laubach, Kirk, & Laubach, 1984); the other word list is the San Diego Quick Test (LaPray, 1972); the reading passages are from The Emergency Reading Teacher's Manual (Fry, 1969). Despite the skills approach to evaluation, the library's 12-hour tutor training is based on a whole language philosophy (see Cambourne, 1988; Smith, 1988), and there is no set curriculum; tutors independently select methods and materials that work best with their students. The library branch I chose to work in was selected because of its location in a low socioeconomic area of the city where, according to my past experience with the program as tutor trainer, there are usually more students than tutors available. I selected a single branch to try to coordinate my time and travel and to try to ensure having students and families with similar socioeconomic backgrounds and living environments.

My Role as Participant-Observer

In qualitative studies, the researcher is often a participant in as well as an observer of the group being studied (Jorgensen, 1989; LeCompte & Preissle, 1993; Yin, 1989). Jorgensen (1989) and Gold (cited in LeCompte &
Preissle, 1993) established continuums of the researcher's involvement from an insider or complete participant to an outsider or complete observer. While insiders act as members of the groups being studied and outsiders have no interaction with participants, both make their observations covertly, concealing their roles as researchers. Both the participant-observer and the observer-participant, lying toward the middle of the continuum, make their researcher roles known. While the latter usually interacts minimally with participants through interviews, the former sometimes assumes an insider role "but often playing the part of a snoop, shadow, or historian--roles not normally found in the group but familiar enough to participants to allow comfortable interactions" (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993, pp. 92-93). As a participant-observer, the researcher "can request access to the whole group, to negotiate data collecting and recording and to seek feedback on what is seen and how it is interpreted" (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993, p. 93).

In this study, I was a participant-observer. I was not a participant in the traditional sense since I could be neither a member of a student's family nor a non-reader myself, but I was the adult students' tutor, which made me a participant in the learning experience of each
student. Furthermore, I not only collected data openly from the students and family members, but I was sometimes an instigator of family interactions through the activities generated from my philosophy of teaching reading. Basing my teaching methodology on a whole language philosophy (see Cambourne, 1988; Smith, 1988), I often encouraged students to extend what they learned in tutoring sessions to their everyday lives and activities, which often involved their family members. In addition, I was often included in their activities as a friend, attending a child's birthday party or going out to lunch, and I was sometimes asked to act as a friendly advisor on marital and child-rearing problems. At the same time, however, I was still very much an outsider since I was more highly educated reader and usually the only white person in an all-black gathering or neighborhood.

**Selection of Participants**

Strauss and Corbin (1990) suggested that participants be selected on the basis of "theoretical sampling" (p. 176) while Lincoln and Guba (1985) recommended "purposeful sampling" (p. 102) and LeCompte and Preissle (1993) suggested "purposive sampling" (p. 69). Despite the difference in terms, such selection is usually based on the participants' exhibiting theoretical relevance to the concept(s) under investigation (Strauss & Corbin,
1990). After filing a protocol and receiving approval from the university's Human Subjects in Research committee (see Appendix A), I selected students based on two basic criteria.

First, the students had to intend to complete at least six months of tutoring. During my first meeting with prospective students, I explained my study and its duration. If they expressed interest in participating, I explained the second criterion.

The second criterion was that the students had to be living with other family members and be willing to involve their families in the study. Because of the students available at the library location, the term family was loosely interpreted to include any relatives or "significant others" who lived in the same household. These family members also had to be willing to be involved. In setting up interviews for me, the library branch literacy coordinator had already established that each prospective student met my criterion for family living arrangements. During my first meeting with prospective students, I explained to them that they would be expected to be open with their family members about their involvement with the literacy program. I also expected them to be open with me about what literacy-related interactions took place at home between them and
other family members. I further explained that their family members would be expected to participate in monthly interviews with me and, twice during the study, keep a week-long journal of home-based activities (see Data Sources below).

If students indicated willingness, I read them the consent forms (see Appendix B for the different versions for students, adult family members, and minor family members) so that they realized that their agreement was a formal consent. I also explained that their consent was not a requirement for entering the literacy program, but it was a requirement for me to be their tutor. The students did not have to make up their minds at that time but could discuss it with their families and then let me know.

I went through this procedure with four students in January, 1995: Carl, Marie, Joan, and Howard (for whom these are pseudonyms). Carl and Joan immediately accepted the arrangement and signed the consent form. Marie questioned why I needed to talk to her husband and two young sons. While she stated that they knew about her reading problem, "but they don't know how bad it is," she also argued that "they aren't going to help me learn to read." After talking about change and how it affects the people around us, she agreed to the terms of the consent
form and signed it. Howard did not sign the consent form at that time but took it home to discuss with his live-in girlfriend and his brother.

The three students who signed the consent forms began their tutoring sessions that day. The fourth student began the following week. I did not interview family members before beginning tutoring but accepted the students' words and signatures that their families would be cooperative. Despite students' signatures attesting to their determination to continue for six months, I wanted to have enough tutoring sessions completed to assure me as much as possible that the students would remain with me for the duration of the study. Howard dropped out of the program within two weeks. Joan, who lived with her niece and the niece's grandfather, had an erratic attendance pattern from the outset. While she continued to show up or at least call to cancel sessions for almost three months, she only attended 7 hours of tutoring before stating that she wanted to drop out temporarily. Carl and Marie both remained in the study for six months, from January through June of 1995, although they did not actually attend all of the twice weekly scheduled sessions, and their attendance became more sporadic as time passed.

Description of Participants
Carl was a 45-year-old black man who had never learned to read. He and Brenda were the parents of four teen-aged children still living at home, although Brenda also had three older children by her late husband. Brenda's oldest daughter lived in town, as did sisters of both Brenda and Carl. Carl's aunt by marriage lived with Carl and his family part of the year as she moved among several relatives in different states. When I met Carl to become his tutor, he was working as a handyman for a welfare organization, but he also was working with the union to be reinstated at the sanitation district and receive a year's back pay for having been illegally fired the year before.

Marie was a 28-year-old black woman who could read at about the fifth grade level but could not always write coherently or spell much more than short one-syllable words...and even many of those were often misspelled. She lived with her husband and two young sons, ages 3 and 8. Marie was the eighth child in a family of thirteen children, all of whom still lived in town. Marie was the only sibling to have been diagnosed in school as learning disabled. When I met Marie, she had just started working part-time on the graveyard shift as a monitor for the county's welfare home for abused and neglected children.
Data Collection

Data Sources

To provide credibility through "triangulation" (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993; Lincoln & Guba, 1985), multiple sources of data were used. Data sources dealing with students included transcripts of interviews and tutoring sessions, notes from my observations during tutoring and from telephone calls with the students, and results of reading inventories. Data sources dealing with family members included transcripts of interviews, notes from my observations during home visits, and the words of their journals.

Interviews and tutoring sessions. I used the interview guide approach (Schumacher & McMillan, 1993) with each adult student at the beginning of tutoring. With this approach, I was able to decide on the topics in advance, but the actual wording, sequence, and sometimes inclusion of questions was determined during the interview itself. This initial interview (see Appendix C for topics but not wording or sequence of actual interviews) not only elicited information about the adult learner’s concepts of literacy, perception of self, and family structure and interactions but also served as a diagnostic tool for reading lessons. At the end of the study, circumstances curtailed the planned guided
interviews with the two remaining students. Carl was not feeling well, which is why he was dropping out of the program, and Brenda was waiting outside to take him to the doctor. Marie, in her final interview, did not want to answer the questions at that time but preferred to think about them and then write out her answers. Her writing did not respond exactly to the questions but was still informative.

Informal interviews (Schumacher & McMillan, 1993) were conducted throughout the course of tutoring as a part of the conversation that normally accompanies tutoring sessions. Carl attended 27 sessions for a total of 37.5 hours; almost all of these sessions began with an informal interview of what had been happening at home. Marie attended 22 sessions, totaling 27.25 hours, and most of these sessions also began with talking about what had been happening at home. In addition, Marie telephoned frequently—42 times in all—to talk about her learning, her job, and her personal life. These telephone calls usually lasted from 30 minutes to an hour. Both the informal interviews and the final interview focused on the student's progress in learning as well as changes in the adult learner's concepts of literacy, perception of self, and family structure and interaction. The final interview also was a time to check with each student
about previous statements and my observations and interpretations, although this often occurred during tutoring sessions as well.

All face-to-face interviews were tape recorded and transcribed. Marie's telephone calls were not taped, but I took notes and then reconstructed the conversations from those notes. Tutoring sessions also were tape recorded (and later transcribed) to avoid my being so involved in my tutoring role that I omitted taking notes in my research role.

Interviews with students' family members, at approximately monthly intervals, provided other sources of data. These interviews took place in the families' homes so that I could observe the surroundings for traces of literacy-related activity. They focused on each family member's concept and use of literacy, perceptions of the adult learner, and family interactions. The initial interview was a guided one (see Appendix C), but subsequent interviews were follow-up on what was stated in the initial interview and what the adult student had suggested was happening at home. The final interviews were a combination of focusing on changes in the adult learner and family interactions and of checking with each member about the accuracy of my previous notes and observations. These interviews were also tape recorded.
and transcribed.

While the interviews were intended to be one-on-one, the students' families were not structured to make this possible. In the homes of both Carl and Marie, other family members gathered wherever I tried to interview a single member. Television sets were constantly blaring, and friends and other relatives streamed in and out of their homes, sometimes sitting down with us, sometimes carrying on fragmented conversations as they passed through the room. On one occasion at Carl's house, I tried to avoid this group interview by moving outside with Carl's oldest son, Tony. Despite the fact that it was an uncomfortably cold and windy day, Tony's mother, Brenda, joined us, while his two younger sisters continually drifted in and out of the house and group.

At Marie's house, there also were visitors who participated in the interviews with her two sons. Three of Marie's sisters were present as well as some of their children and friends of the sons. Marie herself was the most frequent participant in the interviews, always hovering nearby and giving me signals to make sure that I did not reveal her reading problems. Despite her earlier assurance that her family knew of her reading problem, this was not the case. Only a close friend, Sondra, whom Marie called her godmother, knew of it. Consequently, I
interviewed Sondra (see Appendix C), rather than Marie's husband, as a key informant who had "access to observations unavailable to the ethnographer" (Schumacher & McMillan, 1993, p. 427). As with student and family interviews, this key informant interview was tape recorded and transcribed.

**Observations.** I could not actually observe what took place in the home without disrupting normal activities. Thus, observations in the home were rather superficial ones, searching for evidence of literacy-related activities. I looked for books, newspapers, pencils and paper, children's homework, and other such artifacts that might have indicated that literacy-related activities had taken place, but the absence of these artifacts sometimes merely indicated tidy housekeeping rather than the absence of literacy. True observation could take place only during the tutoring sessions, at which time I was looking for evidence of change not only in the learner's words but also in the learner's appearance and attitude. I had noticed in my past experience with adult literacy learners that as they made progress in reading, they often gave evidence of an apparent change in self-esteem through their dress, posture, and tone of voice. Observations about students and their families were written as reflections at the end of the transcriptions.
of each tutoring session, interview, and phone call.

Journals. Both students and family members were also asked intermittently to keep journals of activities. The students were asked to do so as part of their literacy learning. Depending on their reading levels, journals were either part of their homework or part of the tutoring sessions. Carl was reading at too low a level to keep a journal independently, so his entries were sometimes written with the help of a family member at home and sometimes with me during tutoring sessions as part of the language experience approach (Davidson & Wheat, 1989; Townsend, 1982). While Marie wrote profusely, she refused to write about her reading/writing activities. "I have to write with feeling," she said, "and I don't have no feeling about that."

Carl's family members were asked to maintain intermittent, short-term journals twice during the project. Taylor (1983) helped the family members in her study of good readers set up week-long journals by working with them in writing their first entries, gleaning much information that she would not have been able to access otherwise. Despite my urging of specific details, Carl's family was very vague in their writing and did not provide even as much information as what they told me, with constant prompting, in interviews. Because
of Marie's need for secrecy about both her reading ability and her tutoring sessions, her family members were not asked to maintain journals.

**Informal reading assessments.** Because this study asked whether or not changes took place during the adult student's period of learning, it was necessary to establish whether or not learning had taken place. This was determined from three sources: an informal reading inventory (Flynt & Cooter, 1993) taken by students at both the beginning and end of the project, my own observations throughout the project, and the students' comments during tutoring sessions and telephone calls about their progress.

I elected to use Form C of the *Flynt-Cooter Informal Reading Inventory* (Flynt & Cooter, 1993) because it is the only form that uses non-fiction at the lowest levels. My past experience with adult literacy learners had indicated that they usually were more interested in non-fiction than fiction, and research has indicated that interest is an important factor in both reading comprehension and word recognition (see Cambourne, 1988; Smith, 1988; Vacca & Vacca, 1993). The inventory was intended as a conventional measure of reading, but I acknowledge and often concur with the controversy surrounding the grade level equivalents which informal
reading inventories provide, especially for adult learners (see Kirsch, 1990; Mikulecky, 1987; Sticht, 1990).

The use of this measure was also intended as a convenient method of ascertaining change within individual students and was not to be construed as either absolute or comparative progress and learning. After all, if one student begins at a pre-kindergarten level and another at a fifth grade level, and each student progresses one grade level, there is little or no research to support that each has learned the same amount, i.e., that the amount of learning to progress from a pre-kindergarten to first grade reading level is the same amount needed to progress from the fifth to sixth grade reading level (see Kirsch, 1990; Mikulecky, 1987; Sticht, 1990). The issue of grade level became moot, however, as the students participated in so few hours of tutoring (see Diekhoff, 1988; Wikelund, Reder, & Hart-Landsberg, 1992) that progress was not measurable in terms of the whole grade levels on which this inventory is based. Thus, I relied more heavily on my own frequent observations--every tutoring session--and on the students' comments than on the standardized tests.

My observations, which were recorded at the end of each tutoring session transcript, noted not only the
skills that the students appeared to have learned but also the fluctuations in their progress and the emotional overtones they conveyed during that session. Skills included recognition of words and sounds, use of context clues, comprehension of text, fluency in oral reading, discussion of text read, coherency and organization in writing—whether self-written or dictated, development of ideas in writing, and spelling. Fluctuations were often noted by the students themselves during the tutoring sessions by their making comments about how well or poorly they read a particular text, whether or not they recognized a word that had been introduced previously, and how they managed to figure out a word when reading or writing. Emotions were also often expressed by the students themselves either at the beginning of the session in response to an opening conversational inquiry such as "How are you today?" or as an unprompted explanation of why they believed they were doing better or worse than the last session. Thus, observations of learning were a combination of the students' perceptions and my own judgment as a teacher.

Data Analysis

As data were collected, I used the constant comparative method of data analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) to search for trends and patterns emerging
throughout the study. The data were first open coded (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) into numerous categories. As I gathered more data and reviewed the earlier transcripts and codes, four general categories emerged: concepts of literacy, perceptions of the adult learner, and supportive or non-supportive family literacy interactions. This secondary coding, however, showed a need for refinement of the coding. Supportive and non-supportive actions became blurred depending on who deemed them to be supportive. Data were thus recoded as supportive or non-supportive based on the intent rather than on the result. For instance, when Carl's daughter forced him to sound out the word for which he had requested help, she intended to help him; Carl, however, found her action to be irritating and not helpful. While I at first agreed with Carl's interpretation and coded such an instance as non-supportive, I later recoded it as supportive because of its intent.

The data also showed that the students' literacy interactions often took place in spheres other than the family (see Figure 1) and that my concept of family needed expanding as both of these families included more than the nuclear family of mother, father, and children. Parents, adult sisters and brothers and their children, and other relatives by birth or marriage were a constant
Figure 1. Spheres in which the adult learners interacted.

part of the students' lives, not merely calling occasionally but often living with them for extended periods of time. Friends and co-workers also interacted with the students in literacy-related activities.

Including these other people emphasized a contrast between these two students and led to axial coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) across cases, which led to the inclusion of subcategories and the recognition of a close relationship between the categories (see Figure 2). The supportive and non-supportive interaction categories were split into two other related categories: interactions
initiated by the family and affecting the adult learners and interactions initiated by the learner affecting the families. Within each of these two categories were two subcategories: literacy-related interactions and non-literacy-related interactions. A literacy-related interaction specifically concerned the student's reading or writing activity. A non-literacy-related interaction did not, but it still affected the student's or family's ability to deal with literacy learning.

With axial coding, the other two categories also underwent some change. The concept of literacy was expanded to include the students' concepts as well as their family members' and to include the students' and
family members' concepts of learning and teaching. This expansion seemed necessary for two reasons. First, the students' concepts seemed to begin to vary from those of their family members as the project continued. Second, there seemed to be distinctions between literacy and how to learn to be literate. The perceptions of the learners were also expanded to include the students' self-concepts as well as the perceptions of them by family members. This expansion was deemed necessary not only because it appeared that the self-perception of one of the students was changing during the project but also because I did not have access to all of the family members of one of the students. The expansion of both of these categories also seemed necessary because the new elements appeared, at times, to be related to the nature of interactions.

Criteria for Goodness of the Study

In the past, qualitative studies in education and the criteria for establishing their trustworthiness have generated much controversy (see Eisner & Peshkin, 1990; LeCompte, & Preissle, 1993; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Wolcott, 1990). While qualitative studies have become more popular and accepted (Flinders & Mills, 1993), controversy still remains about assessing their quality. LeCompte and Preissle (1993) provided an overview of the
various schools of thought as well as of the terms and methods being debated, but no matter what terms are used or what philosophy generates them, it appears that the quality of a study depends on the quality of the data and the researcher.

Quality of the Data

Quality of the data stems from its sources, its amount, and its accuracy. Triangulation, the use of multiple and different sources of information, provides both credibility and accuracy of the data (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In this study, I used not only multiple sources such as interviews, journals, and reading inventories from individual participants but also the same sources from multiple informants such as adult learners, their family members, and myself as their tutor. The length of time over which the data are collected is another source of quality. Starting in January, 1995, and concluding in June of the same year, my study took place over a six-month period. While six months is not a prolonged period of time in comparison to many qualitative studies, it is prolonged in terms of adult literacy program participants since 39% of them drop out before 20 hours of instruction, 60% before 40 hours, and 90% before 100 hours (Bowren, 1988).

Accuracy of the data comes not only from
triangulating it but also from archiving it and checking it with participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Storing the original data with the thought that other researchers may want to refer to it helps to assure accuracy that can be confirmed. While I reused the tapes recorded, I maintained a file of the transcripts of them along with other print artifacts such as student writing and family journal texts. I also used the practice of "member checking" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) not only to ensure my fair and accurate treatment of participants but also to contribute to the credibility and trustworthiness of the study. Both during the project and at the end of it, I asked the students and their family members to check my understanding of what they had said by reading them statements they had made and my interpretation of those statements.

The Researcher

Data exist all around us on every topic, but collecting meaningful data and interpreting that data depend on the researcher's background knowledge and what Glaser (1978) called "theoretical sensitivity" and Flinders (1993) called "connoisseurship." Both terms refer to the researcher's insight and perceptual acuity, based on professional and personal experience in the field as well as on reflective exploration.
In terms of adult literacy students and programs, I believe I am a connoisseur who possesses theoretical sensitivity. I have spent 13 years in the field as a tutor, trainer, software and curriculum designer, speaker, and consultant. During that time, I have made numerous changes in my philosophy of teaching reading to adults and in the methods which stem from it, always carefully observing and reflecting on what was happening with my students and myself. I have been recognized as an "expert" by being named to state and national boards and commissions and by being honored nationally for my contribution to the field. My recent written work, based on a case study of a middle-aged male student and his family, has been presented at the National Reading Conference (Moulton, 1994) and published in the *Journal of Reading* (Moulton & Holmes, 1995).

Because I have never experienced reading difficulties myself, perhaps the most revealing incident of my theoretical sensitivity occurred during a recent seminar I conducted for tutors in Little Rock, Arkansas. I had just finished describing what I believe takes place and causes interference in an adult low-level reader's mind when a woman raised her hand to be recognized. She said she was a student and wanted everyone to know that what I had described was exactly what happened to her while
reading. Several other students approached me later to say much the same thing in private.

No matter how sensitive researchers may be, however, they should probably not become over-reliant on their interpretations alone. Lincoln & Guba (1985) recommended debriefing with a disinterested peer as a means of obtaining either confirmation or a different point of view. Since this project was my doctoral dissertation, I discussed my data and reflections with my advisor on a biweekly basis. I also discussed it frequently with coworkers at the university and library. Their points of view and insightful questions led, I believe, to more dependable and accurate data analysis.

Reporting of Findings

Perhaps the most revealing source of trustworthiness of both data and researcher is the reporting of findings. In qualitative research, however, the reporting of findings is inherently interpretive (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Janesick, 1994; Stake, 1994; Van Maanen, 1988). While a case study should "tell its own story" (Stake, 1994, p. 239), the researcher is not transparent (Atkinson & Hammersley, 1994; Van Maanen, 1988). The details, the narrative structure, the metaphors that translate the case observed into the case written are all selected by the researcher as author. As Malinowski, who
is credited as one of the first to bring field observations into anthropology, said of the people he had studied, "It is I who will describe them or create them" (cited in Stocking, 1983, p. 101). It is, therefore, incumbent on ethnographic writers to provide a rich description of the participants, the specific contexts in which they have been studied, the detailed activities in which they have engaged, and the particular words which they have used in order to provide readers with data that lead them to the same conclusions as the researcher. It is also incumbent on the ethnographic writer often to be redundant in presentation of details "to reduce the likelihood of misinterpretation" (Stake, 1994, p. 241).

Such rich or thick description can be presented in several styles as identified by Van Maanen (1988): realistic, impressionistic, confessional, critical, formal, literary, and jointly told. No matter what style is selected (and I am unable to classify my own as perfectly matching any of Van Maanen's categories), all must be judged on their ability to "create a sense of verisimilitude for the reader" (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p. 204; Van Maanen, 1988). The data I present the reader is merely a representation of the cases I studied. While I saw and heard these students and their families on more disparate occasions than seem to appear in my
presentation, the reader can see and hear these same people only through the structure I have built and the words I have selected. As the experts (e.g., Janesick, 1994; Stake, 1994; Van Maanen, 1988) suggested, I have tried to tell my students' stories as stories, and in doing so, I have tried to mix science and art (Van Maanen, 1988) to provide "a vicarious experience" (Stake, 1994, p. 245) that will allow others to extend their knowledge along with my own.

The reporting of findings of an ethnographic study is somewhat of a paradox for both the writer and reader not only because of its mixture of science and art but also because of its mixture of interpretation and fact:

The observations of the ethnographer are always guided by world images that determine which data are salient and which are not: An act of attention to one rather than another object reveals one dimension of the observer's value commitment, as well as his or her value-laden interests. (Vidich & Lyman, 1995, p. 25)

This study is even more paradoxical because I was not only the researcher and writer, but I was also an active "character" in the story, the students' tutor, who acted and reacted to the students and whose presence forced them to act and react as well. For this reason, I have
chosen not to attempt to hide my presence or my interpretation by reporting the findings of this study as a narrative in a sequentially structured "tale of two students;" rather, I have arranged the data according to the themes that emerged from them, including my interpretation by both the selection of data and the rhetorical frameworks that surround them. This choice is, perhaps, not the typical structure of a dissertation, but because the story's "plot," the students' course of learning, twisted and turned as I interpreted the data during their learning and changed my tutoring in accordance with that interpretation, it more clearly represents the story that I saw. My interpretations thus became part of the story and, therefore, cannot easily be separated from it.
CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

Participants and Patterns: Waves of Learning and Life

In what was to be almost the last tutoring session with Marie, she asked me how I thought she was progressing. I made an up and down gesture and said, "I see progress like this."

"Of course," she quietly responded. "That's how my life is: a wave. My life is like that at home. If my life was straight, then I'd learn straight. But because it's up and down..." She paused. "I wish you'd understand it," she said plaintively. "It's hard to learn between waves."

I thought about Marie's words as I looked through the data, seeking answers to my questions. I had asked three of them: 1) how the interactions of the family changed, if at all, as an adult member learned to read; 2) how the perceptions of the adult learner by individual family members and by the students themselves changed, if at all, during the learning period; and 3) how the concepts
of literacy held by the students and the individual members of the family changed, if at all, during the learning period. Marie's imagery provided a perspective from which to view my two students' stories.

The two students I worked with, Carl and Marie, were surrounded by seas of people: their immediate families, their other relatives, their friends and co-workers, and myself as tutor (see Figure 3). These people and their own histories created both undercurrents, which ran beneath the ebb and flow of the students' efforts to learn, and tidepools—the concepts through which they perceived the world of literacy, learning, and the students themselves—which often nourished and, at the same time, constrained them. As the students interacted with these people, they sometimes swam with the current or against it, trying to escape the tidepools that held them but finding comfort in those same pools. The events in the students' lives created waves that left tidemarks reflecting not only the students' learning but also the interactions with the people who surrounded them in their sea of life.
Figure 3. The students' families. Names inside the houses represent those people living there. Boxed names with arrows outside the houses represent people who sometimes lived in the homes with the students' families.
Undercurrents and Surrounding Seas:
The People in the Students' Lives

As water accumulates drop by drop, it is easy to see its volume increase but impossible to separate the individual drops that created the larger pool. Similarly, it is difficult to separate people's lives from their beliefs, their beliefs from their actions, their actions from others' actions. Yet, by defining categories to answer my questions, despite these questions being inextricably related to each other, I have tried to do so. At the same time, I have been unable to do so completely. I have, therefore, included an overview of my students' lives to help bring their perspectives into the answers to my questions, but it is an overview that cannot help but include some of the concepts, perceptions, and interactions that will be described in more detail later.

Carl's History, Family and Co-workers

Carl was a 46-year-old black man who had never learned to read. About 5'9", he was a thin man with graying, receding hair and gold-capped teeth. Though a few teeth were missing altogether, Carl smiled and laughed frequently during conversations. Carl had been living with Brenda for 21 years, but they were not married because Carl had never divorced his first wife.
Right before Carl began his tutoring sessions, Brenda had begun a campaign to convince him to get divorced and marry her. Carl, however, wanted to maintain the status quo: "Womens change when they gets married," he said. The two of them lived in subsidized housing with their four teen-aged children: Tony, 18; Tanya, 16; Carl Jr., 14; and Josie, 13. All four were still in school, but they had very different schedules because of double sessions at Josie's school and Carl Jr.'s enrollment at an alternative school since his last suspension. Although all but Carl Jr. professed to liking school and being faithful about doing their homework, their grades reflected their being average or below average students.

Brenda also had three older children by her late husband. Brenda's daughter Janine, who had never married, had four children by three different men and was now living with another man in the same city as her mother and Carl. Janine visited her mother so frequently that Brenda told her, "You might as well be livin' here, you over so often." Brenda's two older sons were doing well in the military far from home. Sisters--and husbands and children, some of whom were married and had their own families--of both Brenda and Carl also lived in town, and Carl's aunt by marriage lived with Carl and Brenda part of the year as she moved among several relatives in
different states. Carl's brother and mother had died less than a year earlier.

Carl remembered trying to learn how to read in a southern elementary school and even reading a book called *Flip*, but he began missing school in the fourth grade because of a case of childhood arthritis and remembered no other grades or school activity other than teachers being "very hard on me because I missed so much school and couldn't read good. I was slow, you know." He had dropped out but could not remember exactly when. Carl spoke quickly but in a thick accent, a combination of a Mississippi dialect and a Chicago rhythm, remnants from his earlier life, and he rarely completed a sentence without restarting it several times and repeating words.

When he met Brenda in Chicago, he had a good-paying job and was a steady worker. She had no idea he couldn't read until Carl moved ahead of Brenda and the children to this southwestern city nine years ago. When he had difficulty finding employment to earn enough money to bring his family west, Carl finally told Brenda and the children of his inability to read. "I believe he just came right out and told us," Brenda said. After two years of odd jobs, Carl got a good-paying job with the sanitation distriiction—the garbage company, in Carl's words—and moved Brenda and the children. The family
moved into a small house in a project on the northwest side of town where they remained until few months after our tutoring sessions ended. In 1994, Carl lost his job during a company lockout. He found another lower-paying job as a handyman, but even with Brenda's job as a hotel maid, "money kind of scarce," according to Carl. When I met Carl to become his tutor, the union was negotiating to have him reinstated with the garbage company and receive a year's back pay for having been illegally fired. Over Brenda's protests, he was hoping to use this money to buy a house in a different neighborhood so that he could get his family away from what he called "a bad environment."

Carl was very friendly with his co-workers at both jobs. He often saw the men from his handyman job on weekends, and when he was reinstated with the garbage company, he always went to work early to have lunch with co-workers before they all started their afternoon shift. He was open with them about his inability to read. Brenda said that "a couple of years ago...he started telling a lot of people, like, 'I can't read. Can you help me?'" With the help of his co-workers, he had managed to pass the tests to be promoted from pitcher to driver at the garbage company, but in his handyman job following the lockout, he had been passed over for a promotion because
of his inability to read. This was what gave him the impetus to get a tutor.

**Marie's History and Family**

Marie was a 28-year-old black woman who could read at about the fifth grade level. About 5'2", she was a slender woman who often altered her looks by wearing a variety of wigs and hairpieces. She rarely smiled, but when she did, her even teeth gleamed brightly against her cocoa-colored skin. Marie lived with her husband Tory and two young sons: Cody, 8, and Danny, 3. Cody was not Tory's son but, rather, the result of an unplanned pregnancy by another man. Marie's marriage to Tory, three years after Cody's birth, followed a very brief courtship of less than a month. Realizing after the ceremony that she really didn't know this man, Marie slept with a knife under her pillow until Tory confronted her about it. When I met Marie, they had been married five years. During that time they had saved almost $10,000, so Marie said, to buy a house, something she wanted but Tory didn't. However, Tory spent all their savings on gambling and marijuana. Despite his vices, Tory had a steady job as the manager of a tire store while Marie had been in and out of jobs throughout her adult life. At times, she longed for a career of some sort, crying one night, that:

I'm almost 30 years old and I don't know what I want
to do. I want to have a career, not so much for myself or the money, but 'cause I want my kids to see there's something better for them out there. I been out of school 11 years and I never had a career goal or any idea of how to get one. It's taken 11 years for me to get promoted to you.

In almost the same breath, however, she said she had again talked to Sondra, the woman she called her godmother, about quitting her tutoring sessions. After all, she asked, "If I learn all this, then what will I do with it?"

Marie was the eighth child in a family of thirteen children, all of whom still lived in town. All but one of her sisters had children, though few of the sisters were married, and none of her brothers was married, although they had all sired children. Only her oldest brother still lived at home, living off his now-divorced mother and some illegal activities. The family grew up in poverty, with not even enough money to provide dishes and eating utensils for everyone in the household. When Marie's father kicked her out of the house at age 14, she had never used a knife or fork, according to Sondra. Furthermore, Sondra explained:

Things that you and I probably take for granted--personal items, sanitary pads--those sort of things
just weren't provided, so the girls, when they were having their menstrual time, they just didn't go to school because they didn't have what was necessary for their bodies. They would tear up bedsheets and rags to keep from being a mess all over themselves. Although Marie often said she felt "cheated" out of a mother's love and attention by being in such a large family, she frequently wrote about her love for her mother. She visited with her mother and sisters often, all of whom saw their mother as a victim of their father's abuse.

As Marie's close friend and mentor, Sondra had known Marie for almost 15 years, but her description of the family used far less favorable terms than Marie's:

The family was quite dysfunctional when I met them, and it was really the survival of the fittest. That included Mom and Dad. Everybody was kind of out for themselves. The younger group, which she's a part of that younger group, they were kind of taken advantage of by the older kids. Not like sex or anything, but if they weren't at the table when the time dinner was placed there, there wouldn't be any food there for them to eat by the time they got there. And if Mom wasn't there to supervise, the older brother would charge them for eating. Now, of course, they had no
money, but he made them have to wash his clothes, make his bed, or whatever the charge was. It was, for me, it was like meeting people who lived on an island or something.

Sondra, who recognized Tory's gambling problem before Marie married him, saw his inclusion in Marie's life as an extension of her dysfunctional family, saying, "Broken people draw other broken people."

Marie had been diagnosed in school as learning disabled and, by junior high school, was assigned to a special education resource room. She hated being different from her friends. "I'd just hide from everybody. I ditched a lot," she said. She was also late for classes most of the time because "you wait until everybody else gone to class. Then you go to class when everybody else is gone 'cause you going to be the last one out of class so nobody see you coming out of the resource room." In high school, she was a knife-wielding gang member until a substitute teacher confronted her the day her father kicked her out of the house. The teacher was Sondra who, when she heard Marie's story, took Marie to get her few belongings and moved Marie to her own home and family, where Marie stayed for the next five years until she got pregnant. Marie referred to Sondra as her godmother, and both Sondra's family and Marie still
considered her a part of their family.

Although Marie did receive a diploma from school, despite the fact that she thought she had dropped out, she was somewhat bitter about the fact that she still couldn't read or write well. "They should have made me learn," she said. When I met Marie through the literacy program, she had just started working part-time as a night monitor for the county's welfare home for abused and neglected children. She said that Tory objected to her hours, but he wanted her to earn money. She also didn't think his objections mattered because she had to write in a log each night, and "One lady, she told me they're real hard on spelling, so I know I won't have this job long," she said.

Marie liked her job, partly because she liked working with children and partly because she had little contact with other adults. Although there were other adult employees, she essentially worked alone and did not make any effort at making friends with the other adults. When she began a new job some months later, one that she didn't really like, I suggested that when she made friends with her co-workers, she might enjoy work more. "I don't wants to make friends with them," she said. "I just does my work and goes home."

At our first meeting, Marie said that her family knew
about her reading and writing problem, "but they don't know just how bad it is." Apparently, however, they knew about it only indirectly. Marie continually made excuses to prevent me from meeting and interviewing Tory. She finally told me that he didn't really know, and if he found out, it would just be one more reason "to put me down." The children also didn't really know, but she often gave hints by yelling at them, "Don't end up like me!" When Cody asked her to read to him and then sometimes corrected a word she had read, she would yell, "If you know the words, why you want me to read to you? Why don't you read it yourself?!" She said she would then throw the book back at him and storm out of the room. Her sisters and brothers also knew about her reading and writing problem only indirectly. When she was in school, she had once asked them for help in reading. Instead of helping, she said, they had teased her: "You can't read this little old word, girl?" She had never asked for help again. "I ain't about to open myself to no hurt," she said.

Sondra further explained Marie's hesitancy to be open about her reading problems with her family. About Tory Sondra said:

I can understand his part of this because in some ways when they argue or fight or whatever, he is
verbally abusive of that "I'm better than you" and "I can tell just by the way you talk that you're not up there," whatever, so I can understand her not wanting him to know.

Sondra also understood about Marie not wanting to tell her siblings:

If they knew, they would not be supportive of this kind of thing. It's not important to them. Education, that sort of thing is just not..."What are you doing that for?!" "Oh, I want to learn how to read." Then she would open herself up for..."You mean you can't read?!" It would be the family spectacle, the family joke. She would always be the butt of whatever jokes they played.

Although she had little faith in her family's understanding, Marie had a great deal of faith in God and was very religious, attending church as often as she could each week, which was usually twice. After our first session Marie wrote, "I am praying that god bourt [brought] us to gather for A Reson and porpes [purpose] Because I Have So much in me that I want to Read and wright So Badly and I want what youv got for me to lern."

**Carl and Marie**

There seemed to be some clear differences and similarities between Carl and Marie. He was a 46-year-old
man while she was a 28-year-old woman. Though technically unmarried, he had maintained a marriage for over 21 years while Marie was a comparative newlywed of 5 years. Both were experiencing problems with their spouses, however. Both had children, but Carl's were older and more independent than Marie's. Both had large families in town and kept in close contact with them, but Carl made friends at work while Marie did not. Carl worked at a full-time job, first during the daytime and later during the afternoon and evening, while Marie worked at a part-time job on graveyard shift. Carl was completely open with his family, friends, and employer about his lack of reading and writing ability, whereas Marie tried to keep her literacy problems a secret. Except for Marie's religious activities, neither had any hobbies or special interests. Although they had not grown up in the same time or place, both now lived in the same poor area, and both brought to their tutoring sessions a history of rather negative school experiences.

**Tidepools: Concepts of Literacy and Learning**

**Literacy**

As the tide ebbs, it leaves pools of water separated from the rest of the ocean. Sea life is trapped within these pools until the tide flows again. If the pool is deep enough to provide resources and the tide follows its
normal cycle, no harm comes to the sea life before it rejoins the sea. If resources are too few or the tide is abnormal, these pools become stagnant traps, causing aberration or death to the life forms trapped within them. Seen as tidepools, the concepts of literacy and learning held by the families could either provide resources for or impose limitations on the students' literacy learning. Often they seemed to do both.

Few of the members of either family enjoyed reading. It was essentially a tool to have on hand in case it might be needed some day. Asked why they wanted to learn to read and write, both Carl and Marie initially responded that they wanted to be able to fill in job applications. Carl later added that he wanted to be able to read street names, and Marie wanted to be able to read the Bible aloud in church. Their families essentially echoed their pragmatic need for reading and writing along with the ability to read the mail. Hardly anyone ever mentioned reading for pleasure or information.

Literacy in Carl's family. Josie, Carl's 13-year-old daughter, could name only one book that she had read, a children's book far below her grade level, and while she had checked out books from the school library, they remained in her locker and were rarely brought home. The only time she actually read was when she had nothing
better to do: "When it's boring, then I read." When Josie accompanied her father to the library for his tutoring session one night, she sat in the children's area and did jigsaw puzzles the entire time; she never looked at a single book. Josie also said she liked to write stories and letters, but the only thing she told me about or showed me was copywork from books Carl was taking home. Josie's sister Tanya could not name any books that she had read other than for her schoolwork. The only books she mentioned were the dictionary, her spelling book, and her English and history books. When asked what she liked best in her English book, she cited the section on George Washington in her history book. Writing was a matter of assigned homework and nothing more.

Like his older sister, Carl Jr. could also not name any books he had read, but he made no claims about liking to read or write. He said he found reading "hard" and was not interested in either reading or writing. He was often in trouble at school and had been suspended a number of times. Tony, the oldest son living at home, seemed to take school more seriously, claiming that he conscientiously did his homework as soon as he got home from school each day. A senior in high school, he was thinking about going to college, but he had made no inquiries or decisions yet. Tony's main interest was his
rap group, the only planned activity in which any of the children participated. When I first met him, Tony said that he helped make up the words to their songs, but the group's manager actually wrote them down. The last time I saw him, however, Tony told me he was now writing down some of the lyrics himself. At the end of the school year, Tony was no closer to a decision about his academic future and was attending summer school to make up for a failing grade in one class. He said he "like[d] to read, but sometimes it's frustrating." He claimed it was not because reading was hard but because "I just don't like sitting down and doing it." Aside from his schoolbooks, he had "just started reading magazines...to keep up my skills." All four of these children seemed to view reading as a difficult skill-based, school-related activity that held little interest. With the exception of Tony's rap songs, writing was of little interest either.

Brenda and her oldest daughter, Janine, both said they loved to read. Brenda said she had "oodles of books" back in her bedroom, but she was reticent about naming any of them or describing their genre(s). Janine similarly was unable to name or describe a book she had read recently, saying that she currently read magazines more than books. She remembered "loving" school and reading more when she was younger. She was proud of
having attended a post-secondary school for two years until she became pregnant. The family did not subscribe to a newspaper, Brenda said she hadn't looked at her cookbooks in years, and there was no evidence of any reading material in the common areas of the house, such as the kitchen or living room. In fact, there were few signs of literacy anywhere: no pencils or pads of paper near the phone; no notes, lists, or schoolwork on the refrigerator; no mail or catalogs stacked or strewn about the common rooms. This was not a case of tidying up before my visits since often clean laundry was piled on the chairs waiting to be folded, and dirty dishes were left in the kitchen waiting for the child whose chore it was to wash them and put them away.

**Literacy in Marie's family.** In Marie's house, the lack of signs of literacy were a combination of her neatness and a lack of literacy. If one of the children left a book out of its shelf, she yelled at the child to put it away properly. She said she sometimes even woke the children or Tory to put away any items left on the floor before they had gone to bed. Marie kept her own few books on a shelf built into the headboard of the bed. All of these books were either religious self-help books or versions of the Bible. While the children said they liked to read, not much reading took place in the house. Tory
usually did not get home until late, so he only read to
the children occasionally. He rarely read himself. Only
once did I see a sports magazine lying on the coffee
table. The children said that Tory hadn't really read it
but, rather, had been glancing through it while he
watched television the night before. When I came to
visit, Danny was eager to have me read to him, as I had
done on my first visit, and Cody brought out his most
recent drawings and homework, usually skills worksheets,
to show me. Marie usually chased the children away,
however, telling them, despite my protestations to the
contrary, "She don't want to see that." At age 3, Danny
was not yet a reader. Cody, at age 8, was a struggling
one. This became evident not only when Marie forced him
to read aloud to me on my first visit, but also when his
teacher called Marie to say Cody was having problems with
reading in school.

Marie's nine sisters, who were constantly in and out
of her house, were not readers either. Like Marie, they
did not subscribe to newspapers or magazines, check out
books from the library, or write letters. While they
never admitted to any difficulty with reading, Sondra,
Marie's self-adopted godmother, claimed, "Most of them
cannot read." The only one of her family who admitted to
being unable to read was Marie's mother. With Sondra
being a former teacher, the members of her family were readers. Marie's memories of living with Sondra's family included Sondra's constant reading and studying for her university classes. While Sondra no longer took classes, her daughter was now a freshman at an out-of-state college, and her son was on the honor roll in high school. In trying to encourage Marie to improve her reading, Sondra often reminded Marie of her own mother who, despite her lack of a formal high school education, had managed to educate herself and then graduate from college after raising her children. Marie hated the comparison, claiming, "It's different for me." Sondra had never tried to teach Marie to read, claiming that "she [Marie] was too ashamed to let me tutor her."

Carl's and Marie's concepts of literacy. With both Carl's and Marie's families essentially viewing reading as a school-related, skill-based activity, so did Carl and Marie at first. Both seemed to begin their tutoring with the same concepts of reading and writing: reading was an act of decoding, and writing was based on spelling. In preparation for learning, both had purchased materials to help them. Carl had bought a paperback phonics book with an accompanying audio tape that went through beginning consonant sounds and vowel sounds. He had looked at the book but was unable to understand it,
and he did not have a tape player to help him. Marie had bought a set of videotapes with accompanying print materials. With her sons, she had watched the first tape, on which, as Marie described it, "A lady explain how to break down words. She call them insight words. I don't know what that mean. I don't think I ever heard about that." When asked for further explanation, she said, "Well, she just saying insight words and then she saying how alpha...a vowel is closed off in the middle of the word or something like that. I didn't really comprehend it a whole lot." None of them watched that particular tape again or any of the other tapes. Marie said, "It bored me," while Danny was disinterested and Cody claimed it was too easy and that he "already know all that."

Though neither of these adults could articulate what reading was when asked directly in their first meeting with me, both seemed to have conceptualized it as decoding. Aside from both having purchased phonics-based materials, both also described a kind of decoding activity when asked what they did with an unfamiliar word. Carl spelled out unfamiliar words, hoping that would provide a clue, while Marie usually took a random guess based on the first few letters. Both admitted frustration with these activities because they usually brought them no closer to recognizing the words.
By conceptualizing writing as spelling, neither one was at first willing to risk writing words they couldn't spell, and, as a result, the messages they wanted to convey often were misrepresented. For instance, Marie could not spell "laid off" on an employment application, so she wrote "quit" instead. Carl, who was at a much lower level of reading and writing, either just didn't write or copied something. While we had practiced what he might write in a journal to log what he had read or studied, his first efforts were merely copying a portion of the book rather than saying what he had done. Carl had a tendency to mix upper and lower case letters and to forget spaces between words when printing, so we briefly tried cursive writing since that was how he signed his name and wrote his address. While this seemed to solve the problem of cases and spaces, Carl discontinued it because "it just didn't look right." For both Carl and Marie, writing had to be "right" or it wasn't really writing.

Learning

The skill-based concept of literacy of both students and families seemed to be related to their concepts of learning, and literacy learning seemed to be related to stereotypical school-type activities. These activities included worksheets and lectures, with an emphasis on
being "right" rather than on understanding and a focus on the teacher rather than on the student.

**Concepts of learning in Carl's family.** When Carl arrived at our tutoring sessions, he was always on time, neatly dressed in clean t-shirt and jeans or overalls, and carrying a briefcase which became heavier each week as he added books, notebooks, cards, and anything we had generated in our tutoring sessions. The first time he missed a session, which was not until our eleventh meeting, it was because he had been reinstated at the garbage company and had begun working that day. We changed our meeting days and times, and Carl again attended punctually. Only once was he late, and, until June, only once did he miss a session--to fix Brenda's car--without he or some member of the family calling to cancel first. In June, Carl stopped calling to cancel and, despite assuring me when I called that he would "get my act together" and show up, he did not meet with me until I insisted that we needed to talk. He agreed, stating, "I want to tell you in person what's been happening." Until June, he had missed 7 out of 35 scheduled sessions; in June, he missed 5 out of 5 before we met for the final time.

Though I never assigned nor suggested to Carl that he use his phonics book at home, Carl continued to do so for
a while. Since he could not actually read it, however, he would retreat to his bedroom and call in one of the children to help him, usually Josie or Tanya. The girls made him try to sound out words or else acted out the words, making reading either a decoding activity or a game of charades. When he took home books, which we had already practiced together once or twice in the tutoring sessions, he could not always remember all the words. I had shown him how to look at the pictures for clues and encouraged him to skip words he didn't know and then guess from the context rather than the letters alone. Brenda, however, who sometimes helped him read in bed before going to sleep, complained about his skipping over the words. "I think he trying to go too fast," she said. She made him stop and try to sound out the words. Even when I explained to her how I was trying to teach Carl to read words from context and how she could encourage this view, she argued, "But that's what words are: letters. Don't he have to look at them?"

To replace the phonics book, Carl and I began making a dictionary out of a notebook with pictures cut from catalogs and newspapers to teach him initial letters and sounds. He continued this activity at home with Josie and Tanya often cutting out pictures and, when we added the full words beneath each picture, helping him spell the
words. Tony saw this activity but didn't seem to approve. "Why don't you give him worksheets to fill in?" he asked. "You know, the ones where you fill in a word?" I explained that Carl would probably not be able to do them on his own. At this time, he might have been able to write the words that belonged in the blanks, but he would not have been able to read the other words in the sentences. Tony volunteered to help him, so I sent home a few worksheets. Tony helped Carl with only one worksheet. Instead, Janine helped with them, but they were not something Carl did eagerly. "He holler at me to get 'em done," Janine said. "He wait until the last minute and then he holler at me. He don't want to take any time to learn nothin'." When I asked Carl about this, he just said, "I don't think they helpin' me."

Janine also helped Carl by having him read aloud to her, but she insisted on his saying every word correctly, frequently stopping him to lecture on contractions, other mispronunciations, or punctuation. As long as he was reading rather than doing worksheets, Carl seemed to put up with lectures. Brenda said her aunt had tried to help Carl, too:

She be trying to help him understand a word...you know, those small words that come up, like the, those, that, that start with t...he forget 'em and
then you go back over 'em and when you get to 'em again, he forget. She say, "Carl, wait a minute. You messin' with my brain. You know, come on now, Carl, I just told you what that word is."

Carl also seemed to agree with the idea of getting every word right. He wanted to read and reread books or chapters until he knew every word rather than beginning another book or chapter:

Carl: I ain't got real smart in this book now 'cause I been goin over and over it, and some of it I keep forgettin', but it seem like this mornin', I do okay in the book. Because right here it said...I read the whole page, I read the whole page and most of this page. We go on over it, and me and Janine, she helps me out this mornin', 'cause I thought the more I try to read, the more I be learnin', and so most every night now I be tryin' to read this book, two or three pages a night before I go to bed.

Tutor: So, you're going over the same pages you already read?

Carl: Yeah, until I can get, until I feel like I know it, then I go to another page, and she help me 'cause I feel like if I read the whole book, it won't help me. I forgets too much so I keep goin'
over the same page before I go on a page or two, then I can remember this. But if I go through the whole book, I forget a whole lot that in there.

During that same session, however, I introduced a very short book that was on an easier level. While he had problems with some of the words, Carl easily understood it, laughing at its humor and commenting on what was happening in the story. He even stopped at one point to say, "Once you get the words together, this is kind of fun."

While Carl seemed to agree to some extent with his family members' concept of learning as getting things right, he seemed to reject their ideas about drills and decoding. After the worksheet incident, I specifically asked him what he thought helped him learn the most. His answer was simple: reading. Because he was unable to read many things on his own, however, and we only met twice a week, he needed the help of his family and friends to do that reading, and that meant temporarily accepting their concepts and doing his homework their way.

Marie's concept of learning. Like Carl, Marie arrived neatly dressed, on time, and carrying a briefcase for the first month. Unlike Carl, however, her briefcase became lighter as she ripped out whatever she was working on, mostly writing, saying she didn't want it anymore. During
the first month, Marie missed only one session and that was because she insisted she needed to prepare for my visit to her home. Just 10 days later, however, Marie was half an hour late, dressed in workout clothes, and without her briefcase. She was thinking of quitting, she said, and had thought she might not even show up at all. She continued to come for the next month, except for one session, but she was constantly late. Usually this was due to her having lunch with her mother or sisters. We changed our meeting time to accommodate her, but the next month, she cancelled all but two sessions. Sometimes she was too tired, sometimes she was too depressed, and sometimes she had made hair appointments or other engagements at the same time as our sessions. Because she called to talk at least two or three times a week, she did not seem to be aware of how many sessions she had cancelled. By the time Marie quit in the beginning of June, she had been late 8 times before we changed our schedule, she had cancelled 12 out of 35 scheduled sessions, and she had talked about quitting four times.

Because Marie's tutoring sessions were a secret from her family, Marie rarely sought help directly from anyone else. Her concept of learning seemed to be based on her own school experiences, which were more extensive and recent than Carl's, but she did not seem to like that
concept and often contradicted herself about what it was. At the start of our tutoring sessions, she wanted to work mainly on writing and spelling, so I gave her word sorts (see Bear & Barone, 1989; Henderson, 1990) to let her discover spelling patterns for herself. She did not like this activity and said, "It would be whole lot easier if you just told me." I explained that I believed she would learn better and remember longer what she had learned if she discovered it for herself. She grudgingly continued with the activity but, for the next session, brought in one of Cody's old spelling workbooks to use. Apparently she didn't like working with that any better since she never brought it or referred to it again. Because she still resisted the discovery/sorting activities and was demanding that I "Gimme some rules I can learn," I started her on two drill-type computer programs: Spelling Rules (Moulton, 1989) and Word Families (Moulton, 1989). While at first she was glad to be using the computer, she later complained that it was boring, made her sleepy, and hurt her hands. We made print-outs of the computer exercises to avoid the sleepiness and hand problems, but Marie never looked at them outside the tutoring session.

Despite the complaint about her hands hurting, Marie came in one day wanting to use the computer touch-typing program because "I don't want to use my brain today." I
suggested we cancel our session since I felt she needed to use her brain to learn. That seemed to get her attention momentarily, but it did little to change her concept of learning as a passive activity that was dependent on my transmitting knowledge to her. Another day she complained, "Now you're making me talk. I was just going to be a good student and listen."

One time I specifically asked her what learning meant to her. "Listening is learning," she said, but during another session she said, "I can't learn just by listening and watching you write. I need to write the words." On more than one occasion, she would insist that I make the decisions about what we would do and how she should try to learn something, saying, "You the teacher." At the same time, she challenged my decisions because they were not necessarily to her liking. Because Marie wrote several pages of personal thoughts and letters to me between our early sessions, I tried to make use of her written words in spelling lessons. When I asked her one time to go through her writing and mark all the words she thought were misspelled, she asked, "What for? You the one who know how to spell. You do it!" As we looked at the individual words to talk about them and try to get her to figure out where or what the error was, she demanded, "So if you know this word, just tell me!"
During one session Marie told me she wanted to know how to break down words, so I planned the next session around that idea, basing it on a method that calls for the student to stand and use large motor muscles on a chalkboard (see Lockhart, 1986). She hated it. I began with words she knew to show her the system, but when we moved to unknown words, she complained bitterly. "It would be a whole lot easier if you used words I know," she said. "But how would that help you with words you don't know?" I asked. "Isn't that the purpose of this?" She continued to complain, not just about the words but also about standing up and being forced to be the one who wrote on the board. Her complaints were so constant that when we ended the lesson, I vowed never to use that method again with her. A few weeks later, however, she called to say that she wanted another lesson like that because she had discovered it was useful when she helped Cody with his spelling homework. "But you hated that lesson," I said. "Make me learn," she replied, "even though I hate it."

Marie's concepts of learning were often in conflict with each other. She wanted Cody to learn from school so that he wouldn't "end up like me," yet she kept him home from school a number of times because she was too tired to drive him and didn't want him to walk there. She knew
it was important that he do his homework every night, but if she felt like getting out of the house and driving around, she took the children, regardless of Cody's homework. Her concepts of learning were often in conflict with mine, too. We had a heated discussion one day when she asked why I never gave her tests:

Marie: When we do this, why we don't have, like spelling tests on some of these words or nothin'
that you give us?
Tutor: This isn't school.
Marie: It is school! [yelling] You're teaching me to read!
Tutor: You're not getting a grade. You're not getting a report card.
Marie: That's how you learn! If I knew I was getting grades, I would go home and be just like Cody, "Mamma, we getting a spelling test today." OK, I mean...
Tutor: You want me to give you a test? OK.
Marie: I mean, I know we not getting a grade, but you the teacher. You supposed to ...
Tutor: But testing...
Marie: I'm supposed to know these words. I shouldn't have to come in here and read like this. You the teacher.
Sondra summed up Marie's concepts of learning and teaching quite succinctly:

For some reason, she doesn't understand, has never understood that the teacher, the tutor, the professor, whatever, is just there to help. You're the one who's doing it. You're the one who's learning. You're teaching yourself. Really. They're just there to help.

**Carl and Marie: Changing concepts.** There was no evidence that any family members changed their concepts of literacy or learning, but there was evidence that Carl and Marie did. While both seemed to begin with the same concept of learning as drill and drudgery, their ideas shifted as we continued to meet, but not quite in the same way. At the beginning, Carl seemed to spend more time on his phonics book than on my assignments of reading first his dictated language experience stories and then, later, low-level books, creating his own dictionary from pictures and words he recognized, and selecting words from the stories, books, and dictionary to make word bank cards. But the phonics books and his children's help, emphasizing phonics, frustrated him, so he finally abandoned it. His family made it difficult for him to abandon a phonics approach, and their request for worksheets—and my fulfillment of it—apparently made him
able to understand more clearly and articulately how he could best learn to read: by reading in context.

Marie, on the other hand, never really came to terms with what learning and literacy were and how she could best learn to read and write. For homework, she seemed to realize instinctively that her reading and writing would improve if she did more of both, and at first she did, ignoring any of my suggested assignments to study particular words she used or came across. Yet when she stopped writing between sessions, her excuse was, "You didn't assign me to." Unlike Carl, she did not want to reread anything, and rewriting did not mean revision to her; it either meant starting all over or having me correct her spelling and then copying. As we continued to meet, she became less and less willing to do anything outside of our tutoring sessions, claiming she just didn't have the time. At the same time, however, she asked if we could meet daily, but her frequent tardiness and cancellations, aside from my own outside schedule, made me say no. She seemed to be dependent on me to tell her what to do and how to do it, and she wanted me to be there to make sure she did it. As time continued, it seemed as though she didn't really want to learn to spell or read; she wanted to be told the particular words that had her stymied at that moment. She seemed to think that
I would transmit knowledge to her as she sat there passively, yet she also recognized that the less she read and wrote on her own, the less she was learning from me. Her ambivalence about learning and literacy were, perhaps, reflected in her cancellations and her off-and-on decisions to quit.

**Waves: Interactions and Literacy Learning**

The undulations of the sea are manifestations of disturbance in the water and have a great effect on objects they encounter. Waves transfer objects through their energy, but they do not transmit their energy to the objects; objects are often carried along by a wave, but they do not gain energy from it. Furthermore, the shallower the water, the more friction waves create, causing displacement and abrasion. When the water is deep, however, waves do not reach down far enough to cause disruption themselves. The literacy-related interactions that occurred between the students and their families created waves in their lives, and many non-literacy-related interactions created waves in their learning. While the students met with me for just a few hours a week, those few hours seemed to affect the other parts of their lives, and, quite naturally, the other parts of their lives seemed to affect their literacy.
learning. Sometimes these waves carried the students along in their learning, but other times they created friction and disrupted both their lives and their learning.

**Carl's Interactions**

When we first started meeting, Carl was working at his handyman job during the day. He met with me two evenings a week and was home the other evenings and on weekends. Brenda also worked during the day, but her workweek included weekends. According to the children, Carl's usual routine was to come home, shower, have dinner, and then watch television in the living room with Brenda and the girls. Tony and Carl Jr. were usually out or in their own rooms with their televisions. On weekends Carl sometimes worked odd jobs, often taking Tony with him, to earn extra money. Carl consciously tried to integrate his literacy learning into this part of his life.

**Buoyancy: Waves of support.** Once he began meeting with me, Carl went to his and Brenda's room instead of the living room. He would begin trying to read, copy his language experience story, or work with his phonics book or dictionary/notebook. Tanya and Josie were aware of the change immediately because they had enjoyed watching television with him. However, Carl quickly ran into
problems with his homework and called one or both of the girls to come help him. At first they seemed to enjoy the change and felt good about helping him. When we started the dictionary, I asked him if he wanted to work on it with me during our session or to work on it at home. He said he wanted to work on it at home. "The girls, they'll like that, cuttin' out pictures and helpin' me."

Some evenings Carl left his reading until later, and when Brenda joined him in the bedroom, they would read together in bed. One evening when he arrived at our tutoring session somewhat breathless, he explained that he was almost late because he couldn't find a book he had checked out. He had wanted to bring the book and show me how he could read it since Brenda had been helping him. "I be in the bedroom and I calls her to come in and help me. She tell me the word. Then she tell me another word. Pretty soon we be reading it together." He seemed to be enjoying not only the reading, but the sharing of it with Brenda.

Carl was willing to accept help from anyone. One day he came in with a children's book he had rescued from the trash at work. We read it together, and at the next session he told me a co-worker was helping him with it, too:

Carl: I read this a couple times a day, and I been
readin' it about 3 times a day, and I'm on the truck, and when I get stuck on a word, they say, "What you stuck on now?"

Tutor: So they help you then?

Carl: Yeah, Thomas, he be drivin' along and he look over and he tell me.

Carl began telling Thomas about our tutoring sessions and some of the stories we read. Thomas asked him to bring those books to work, too, because they sounded interesting. When Carl was reinstated on his former job, he told his boss and co-workers there about his learning to read. They encouraged him not only to learn but also to bring his books so they could help him.

Carl mentioned numerous people who helped him. A friend came by one weekend, and "He was tryin' to show me how to break up words." One time Janine's boyfriend helped him: "I went over to his house and we was goin' through some of these, like these words here [points to short vowel words in phonics book], and he was explainin' to me what the a, e, i, o, u was." Another time, he said, "My cousin from Chicago, no, not Chicago, Florida, he helped me read with the words that I didn't know. He tell me what they was." Carl mentioned his sister, Brenda's sister, his aunt, Brenda's aunt, and other relatives and friends; almost anyone who visited their house seemed to
end up trying to help Carl learn to read.

When Carl changed jobs, he also changed his hours of work. He was not home in the evenings then and did most of his reading and studying in the morning or late at night. The children were in school in the morning, and Josie and Tanya were in bed when Carl got home from work; he depended less on them and more on Tony, who stayed out late most nights. "When I get home, sometime he be in the kitchen working in his notebook," said Tony. "I ask if he need any help. Sometime he ask if he right or how to spell a word." When Carl couldn't find a paper in his briefcase one day, he said, "I'll have to ask Tony where it be. He was helpin' me with it."

Janine also became important after Carl changed jobs, although not until the latter part of Carl's sessions with me. Her help later created some problems, but there was a noticeable difference in Carl's reading while Janine was helping. She was strict about his pronunciation of words and his interpretation of punctuation. Under her tutelage, he began reading more fluently. Carl knew he was doing better and, after reading a few pages aloud to me, asked, with a grin on his face:

Carl: So how do you think I'm doin'?

Tutor: I think you're doing great. One of the things
that you're doing good today compared to before is you're reading all the way through to the end of the period. It makes more sense then.

Carl: Oh, okay. I read them books, I read them to Janine. Last night I read all three of these.

Carl began to quote Janine often, explaining what she had told him about punctuation, pronunciation, and fluency. He even said that he thought he read better at home with her than he did with me in our sessions.

There were times when the help others offered was, perhaps, not really helpful at all to Carl, but the family was still trying to be supportive. After only a few weeks, everyone was, as Brenda stated, "flustrated." Their emphasis on phonics seemed to be one source of frustration. They all insisted on having him sound out words most of the time, but Carl "tell them to hurry up and tell him the word," Brenda said. They seem to have agreed, however, that this was the best way to do things. Brenda explained, "Tony say that he never learn if they just tell him." I had discovered during the early weeks of tutoring Carl that he did not know sound/symbol relationships and, even once he learned most of the initial consonant sounds, could not segment words. We had finally agreed that phonics, at least until he knew enough words by sight to start seeing patterns in words,
was not particularly helpful. Instead, we concentrated on his reading and making educated guesses at words based on context and initial consonants. While I explained to his family what we were doing and how they could best help him by asking what word would make sense rather than having him try to sound out the word, they continued to emphasize a phonic approach.

Sometimes, of course, they would tell Carl the word, but they expected him to know the word if it appeared again. Brenda explained, "He just sit and look at a word. I tell him we just read that on the other page, but he don't remember." At a later date, she reiterated the point: "He seem to forget the words we just went over." While the two younger girls thought Carl was learning "pretty good," the older members of the family thought he wasn't learning as fast as he should. Brenda, her sister, and her aunt, all of whom helped Carl, seemed to constantly admonish him about remembering words that had appeared earlier.

Undertow: Non-supporting waves. Whether or not the admonishments and the emphasis on phonics were helpful to Carl's learning, they were clearly not helpful in maintaining harmony in the family. Josie complained that Carl "holler at me 'cause I won't tell him the word. I act them out so he can get them." Carl did not admit to
yelling at Josie, but he did agree that she frustrated him at times:

She was sittin' there, like, I read, and then she, she...I'd say, "Josie, what is this?" She always make some kind of a sign. "What is this? What is this?" I say, "Oh, okay, tell me what it is."

Josie also mentioned that Carl "hollered" at her "'cause I had his book." She had taken it "'cause I wanted something to do, so I copied the page." While Josie continued to help Carl read at times, Tanya began visiting friends in the evening more often than she had before.

Janine and Brenda said Carl yelled at them, too. He yelled at Brenda because she grew impatient with his memory for words, and he yelled at Janine because she corrected his grammar in both his reading and his speech. "He so mean," Janine said. "He holler, 'Don't tell me how to talk. I just as good as you are.'" After having talked to the family one time, I specifically asked Carl about the arguments:

Tutor: Your wife tells me that she and the kids are getting kind of mad at you. Is that true? Or is it that you're getting kind of mad at them?

Carl: Mmmm, it goes, it goes...

Tutor: Brenda told me you've got quite a temper.
Carl: It goes both ways.

Tutor: Do you get angry with them? When they won't tell you the word when you want to know it?

Carl: It be like...I get you to help me. Then I sit there and he be talkin' to somebody else. So I'm sittin' there and I want to know this word now. "What is this? I thought you was supposed to be helpin' me." "Oh, yeah, I'm helpin', I'm helpin'." "Well, what you doin' talkin' to somebody else? You ain't helpin' me." [Carl laughs at his own reenactment of the scene.]

Partly because of the yelling and partly because of his change in employment, the amount of help Carl received from the younger children diminished over time.

From the start of the project, there were many times when other parts of Carl's life kept him from receiving help or even reading at all. His employment was one of those parts. Carl's need to earn more money, above his wages as a handyman, sometimes interfered with his reading. One session when he wasn't doing as well as he had before, I teased him, "You must not have been doing your reading this weekend." He replied, "All the weekend I couldn't do that 'cause I be gone on a side job." When he changed employment, the hours and the work interfered. At the beginning of his new employment, he was so
exhausted from the physical labor that he didn't have the energy to study. He no longer had evenings with the family and concentrated on studying only on one of his days off. He did not seem to recognize that this would affect his learning:

Tutor: That's going to change all sorts of things with your family, too. You know, like evenings, you won't be home evenings.

Carl: Yeah, but I did it for about five years. I don't think...

Tutor: I was just thinking that the kids were telling me about how sometimes they come in the bedroom and help you with what you're reading. You won't be able to do that. They won't be home when you're there.

Carl: On Mondays, they could do it on Mondays. I'll be at home all day long.

Of course, at this time, no one else was home with him as they were either in school or at work. The new job also interfered in other ways. There were occasionally union meetings that caused Carl to cancel, and one time drugs were discovered in his truck. All the men who used that truck on both shifts had to report for drug testing. Carl was found to be drug free, but he had to miss a session.
While many of his relatives helped Carl, their demands and problems also interfered at times. One weekend he couldn't read or study because he had to drive a cousin to California. Another weekend Janine's boyfriend beat her up, and she came running to Brenda and Carl, with the boyfriend following her. He was high on drugs and Janine was drunk. Carl and Brenda spent the weekend attempting to deal with Janine, the boyfriend, and Janine's four children. Carl was upset by the incident and brought it up several times during the session. He wanted to have Janine committed to a rehabilitation program to get her off alcohol, but he really didn't want to have four more kids in the house. When the crisis had passed, however, Brenda began pushing for marriage again. Carl didn't want to hear it, so they stopped speaking to each other for a few days, which meant Brenda would not help him during that time.

Though Carl said nothing about Janine for over a month, apparently her relationship with her boyfriend deteriorated and their drug and alcohol use escalated. She lost her job, and while the boyfriend kept his, he "smoked up his pay," according to Carl. They couldn't pay their bills, and their electricity had been turned off. Janine and her four children moved in with Carl, Brenda, and their four children. At first, Janine's presence was
beneficial to Carl's reading. With no job, she was home in the morning to help him read. His improvement was noticeable to both of us, and he sought praise for it: "That was pretty good, wasn't it?" he asked. Then one morning Carl didn't show up for our session. I called his house, and Janine said he hadn't come home the night before. At the next session, I merely asked Carl, "How you been doing?" and he explained what had happened:

Carl: Uhhhh, pretty good. Pretty good. Not...uhhh, some, uh, having a little problem at home I gotta deal with. Yeah, 'cause, like, when Thursday, Wednesday night I went out, stayed out all night because, um...

Tutor: Yes, I found that out because I called Thursday morning. Janine said, "Well, he never came home."

Carl: Yeah, well, me and Brenda got in a argument. I went over to my friend's and we started talking and I had a few drinks and I thought, "Well, I ain't goin back home." Then I stayed all night and I was kind of afraid to go back home. [Carl laughs.]

Tutor: Well, I can understand that.

Carl: I woke up about, I wanted to go home, I woke up about 6 o'clock. Should have gone home anyway, and
I laid up there and I, I...thinkin' I goin' to go home. I need to call home, see if she gone to work.

Tutor: Hmmmm, so what's happening. You guys back on track?

Carl: Hmmmm, yes, well, Brenda and I, I don't...

'cause I...I tell you, I gotta deal with this problem. She thinks it a problem. It isn't really kind of a problem. But I, just between you and me, I don't want this to go no further, she said me and Janine's...I be tryin' to be real nice to her because she there with the kids, and in her house there's no lights because her old man turn the lights off and she stayin' there for a minute and she won't have to do nothin' else, and I still tryin' to be nice to her but Brenda say we's gettin' too close.

Tutor: Oh, dear.

Carl: And all the fact that I did, she sayin' this because she think that I think, she think that me and Janine tryin' to get somethin' goin' on. (inaudible) be there with...and that's what pissed me off that night. That's what happened I stayed all night.
Carl talked at length about the financial and drug problems of Janine and her boyfriend. He then explained: "I ain't doin' too much reading because I can't do too much with all this goin' on in my mind. You know... different things. A lot of times I just get up and go."

This event was a major setback for Carl's reading. While Janine seemed unaware of the argument over her between Brenda and Carl, Carl was very much aware of it. "Janine really wasn't payin' no attention, but it was in my mind," he said. He was uncomfortable around Janine yet needed her help. Sometimes he accepted it, but at other times he avoided her or yelled at her as she helped him. He began staying out at night and sleeping late to avoid seeing her in the morning.

In June, not long after this incident, Carl stopped coming to our sessions without even calling to cancel. I called his house and Brenda said Carl was sick. Physical problems had interfered at times previously, but Carl had always let me know about them. At one point, Carl's eyes began bothering him, but he didn't want to go to a doctor because he didn't yet have his insurance card from the new job. Another time, he had a bad toothache. He tried home remedies until it got so bad that he finally made inquiries about his insurance and was able to go to the dentist. This time, however, was different. Once when I
spoke to Carl during this extended absence, he said he would "get my act together" and be there the next day. He wasn't. I called again and told him that it was all right if he wanted to drop out, but we at least needed to talk. He agreed, saying that he didn't want to tell me over the phone but wanted to talk to me in person. We met the next day.

Tutor: So what's happening?

Carl: I don't know what the hell's happenin'. I'm sick.

Tutor: Sick?

Carl: I'm sick. (inaudible) I'm sick. And I'm kind of scared that, uh... like what's happenin here, I ain't tellin' too many people about it. I think I got the same problem my brother had, and he died.

Tutor: Have you been to a doctor?

Carl: I'm scared to go to a doctor.

Carl explained that he was weak. He wasn't eating, and he had lost weight. Although he was still working, he said it was getting more difficult for him to do his job. He wanted to drop out of our project temporarily until he was better. While he said he thought it would be only for a few weeks, I never heard from Carl again. Several months later, however, I learned from two of Carl's co-workers that he was still on the job and from his
neighbors that he had moved to another part of town.

Marie's Interactions

Unlike Carl, Marie tried to keep her literacy learning a secret and separate part of her life, but that did not happen. As with Carl, her literacy learning and her life became inextricably entangled.

Buoyancy: Waves of support. Because Marie had told no one except her godmother, Sondra, about her literacy problem, there was little support available. Sondra tried to provide verbal encouragement:

I know initially, when she first started, she was real happy about it. She called me because we'd been talking about it for years on end, and even to the point of why don't I hire a tutor because she lived with me for several years. She was never willing to be serious about it, and I don't have the money to waste, and so we just never got involved with that...At first, when she started, she called me and was really excited and told me everything she was going to do. She was going to learn to write and to read the Bible and was just excited about the whole thing. Once she got into it, it was more work than she anticipated, and it was harder work than she anticipated, so I was just encouraging her: "Keep going. Don't give up. You'll get it. Hang in there."
Sondra's encouragement was not enough, however. Marie complained one time, "She don't think I can really do it."

Marie turned to me, her tutor, by calling at least twice a week. While we met for tutoring only 22 times, Marie called me 42 times, and she continued to call long after I was no longer tutoring her. Because her emphasis was on her writing rather than her reading, Marie would call to talk about the content and spelling from her night-time job, which required little work as the children she monitored were usually asleep. Sometimes she would ask how to spell a word that she needed for an entry in the log at work or one that she needed for a note to Cody's teacher. At first, she would also tell me about what she was writing. Since her writing was always about her personal life, however, she would soon stray from her writing to her other problems. Later, she was not writing at all and just wanted to talk about her problems. I encouraged her to write down her feelings as she had said it helped her understand them better and be able to deal with them better. "It get out some of my anger and frustration," she said.

After a few weeks of tutoring, Marie joined a Bible study group. At first she brought the tract they had just studied and asked questions about words in it and the
Bible. When she told me that they always received the tract the previous week, I suggested we go over it before the group met. Her reading and discussion in the study group apparently improved, and when the group commented on it, she told them about her being tutored. They were very supportive. "They asks me each time if I gone to my lesson, and when I says yes, they says 'Good for you!'"

A few times, Cody was indirectly supportive of Marie's learning. One time he asked for help with a word, and Marie showed him how to break it into syllables. "He asked me what 'noticed' was, and I showed him how to break it into three [sic] syllables 'cause I knew about the vowels and how to look for a special ending." While she did not realize her error, she did realize she needed more lessons on breaking words into syllables and specifically asked me for another such lesson. Another time Cody asked for help with a worksheet on capitalization. While they got into an argument about it, she again recognized a need for her continuing to learn.

Only once, however, did Marie actually encourage Cody's and Danny's support. They were talking about Sondra and her daughter Keisha, who was away at school, and Marie suggested they write Keisha a letter. She had the children tell her what they wanted to say, and she wrote a letter, the first letter she had ever written.
She even asked one of her sisters how to spell a few words. She brought the letter to our next session and, after we corrected the spelling—including her sister's—she addressed an envelope and sent it. Keisha was apparently surprised by receiving the letter and called her mother. Sondra, too, was surprised, but she understood the letter's importance. "I said [to Keisha], 'You know how difficult it is for Marie to write.' I was surprised she wrote her. I said, 'Take a couple minutes and write her back.'" Marie fretted for weeks over not receiving an answer, but when Keisha wrote back, Marie was thrilled and called me immediately. She began writing letters to Sondra and Sondra's husband.

At one point Marie was feeling good enough about her improvement to consider telling Tory about her being tutored. "I'm goin' to tell him tonight," she said. But she didn't. She did eventually tell her mother, but her mother could not support her except through encouragement as her mother couldn't read very well either. The instances of support that Marie received were really quite few because of her need to maintain secrecy, but she seemed to want support desperately. During our first meeting, she said, "I don't know why I'm spillin' my story to a stranger," but she continued to do so. She also continued to ask at other times, "Why am I tellin'
you all this?" She asked several times if we could meet on a daily basis. It seemed to be not so much a matter of learning at a faster pace but, rather, a matter of having someone nearby to encourage her while she read or wrote.

Undertow: Non-supporting waves. While Marie seemed to want support, she also seemed afraid to reach out for it to anyone other than Sondra and me. During our first session, Marie had stated that her husband and children "ain't goin' to help me learn to read." Later, when she was having problems with both her learning and her family, I spoke to Marie about the need to involve other people in what she was doing, people who cared about her and were already a major part of her life. That was when she told me about her relationship with her sisters and brothers and how they would make fun of her if they knew. I suggested she be more open with her children and involve them with her learning. After all, she had watched one of the phonics videotapes presumably with this in mind. Without even letting me finish, she rejected the idea immediately: "I can't say, 'Mommy can't read, so she can't help you,' now, can I?" I countered with, "How about 'Mommy sometimes has a hard time figuring out words, too. Let's try it together.'" She was not willing to say this either. I tried making more specific suggestions about how to involve the children.
As a non-reader, Danny wouldn't know whether a word was right or wrong as long as the story made sense; he would enjoy the story and sitting close to her, and she could practice reading. "His daddy read to him," she said, quickly dismissing the idea.

I suggested she become more involved in Cody's homework since it was at a level she could read. She could have him read aloud to her while she followed along, and she could go over his worksheets with him. After Cody's teacher called to say he was having problems in school, that his reading was not good and his homework was not being done, Marie finally tried helping him, only because she was "tired of hittin' and yellin' at him."

She didn't like helping him, though. "He say I'm wrong. I said, 'I thought you asked me to help you. If you don't need my help, why you ask me?'" She made him do his worksheet again, but she said he still had it wrong. In her eyes, though, "He just playin' games." I asked what she meant. "He just want attention," she replied.

Ignoring my response, Marie then told me that she had also made him read to her, telling him to pick a book "but not one of them easy books. Pick a hard one." As he struggled with the text, she reminded him several times to sit up straight. When she told me about this, we talked about the need to read easy books to become a good
reader and the need for individual comfort in posture. She recognized her own needs for the same ease and comfort—Marie liked to read lying down and was easily frustrated by multisyllabic words—but declared she was through helping Cody: "I won't do that again."

I also suggested that she bring the boys to the library while she worked on computer activities. "I can't trust them alone out there," she said. I explained that there were activities for them, and an adult was always in the children's area. She tried this one time. "The kids really enjoyed it," she said, "but I couldn't remember how to use the computer, so we didn't stay very long." I asked her why she didn't get help from the literacy coordinator or aides, whoever was on duty. "I don't know them," she responded, "and I don't want them to know how dumb I am." While Marie tried some of my suggestions with the children, she never tried them more than once, always backing away from whatever help might have been available through them.

When Marie told me about her mother's illiteracy, I suggested that she might want to include her mother in her learning by either having her mother attend sessions with her or by her teaching what she learned to her mother. She did not consult her mother before saying, "No way. She too old, too set in her ways to learn." Marie
did not seem to want anyone to know about her learning, to help her with her learning, or even to think she needed to be learning.

In our first session, I had explained to Marie that writing was not spelling and that I didn't care how she spelled as long as she wrote. Finding freedom in this idea, Marie wrote profusely during the first few weeks of our meetings. When agreeing that writing would be the emphasis of our lessons and her homework, we had also discussed what she would write about.

Tutor: I'd like you to write every day. To yourself, or if it's easier to go "Dear [Tutor]," that's fine. Write me a letter.

Marie: Do I have to talk about me?

Tutor: You don't have to talk about you. You can talk about whatever you want. You can talk about your job...

Marie: I don't want to talk about my old life. That's over. I'm starting a new life now.

Tutor: OK. Let's talk about your new life, talk about your job, talk about your kids...

Marie: I can't write about things that disappoint me. I gave Marie more suggestions for writing, but despite her saying that she didn't want to write about herself or "things that disappoint me," that's often what she did.
She had discovered, as she wrote in one of her letters to me, that one "way to get ridde of the Hurt is to...wRight ABout it."

At the end of the second week of our sessions, she called to say she had written me a four-page letter about her husband, but she was going to tear it up. "I think you should meet him before you read this," she said. I agreed and asked when I could meet him. "You'll have to catch him first," she said. She went on to explain that he worked 14-hour days six days a week and she hardly ever saw him herself. We agreed that I could call Sunday and see if he would meet me. When I called their home, he wasn't there. "It don't matter," she said. "I packed my bags and I'm takin' the kids and movin' out." While I knew there were problems in the marriage, I did not realize they were this serious. I asked what happened.

These problems, they been buildin' for a long time, but I guess I been blockin' them out. All this writin' I been doin' for you made me put words to my feelings that I had kept hidden and forced me to deal with them.

Marie did not move out of the house, but she did move downstairs, emptying out the kitchen pantry and making a small bedroom for herself. She proudly showed it to me and said, "When I have some of my problems out of my head
and my emotions put away, now I can learn a little better." Tory had agreed to go with her to a counseling session at her church, and she was thrilled. After the counseling session, however, Tory refused to go back, and she recognized that "one time ain't goin' to do it," especially since she felt he had not been open with the counselor. He did, however, admit that he was not working all those long hours away from home; he was "playing basketball with friends."

The next week, Marie arrived very late for our session. She was in workout attire and had been to the gym. In a move to patch up their marriage, she and Tory had decided to do more activities together. One of the activities was joining an athletic club. Perhaps this would alleviate his need to play basketball so often. While she had gone alone to the gym this time, she had done so to try to work out her thoughts and feelings through physical exercise. At first she had decided to quit the tutoring and work on her marriage by devoting more time to Tory, but then she changed her mind. "I can't live my life for someone else, and this is what I wants to do." At the same time, however, she stated that "the only time I can give this [learning to read and write] is the time I'm with you." Then she asked, not for the first time, if I could meet with her on a daily basis
to give her more time for learning.

The next week Marie had calmed down somewhat. Tory had gone to church with her, and then they had talked some. He felt the problem was her night-time job, so she was going to start looking for a day job. She put this off for a while. Instead, she began looking for a new place to live. She had one of her brothers go with her to different places, and she contacted a realtor. She was very excited about the prospect of moving. She had not told Tory, however, because "I know we won't go lookin' together as a couple. He'll do it, and then I'll move in and have to be happy with it." When she did tell him, he was not interested, and Marie again became upset with her marriage. As she recounted their argument, she expressed her need for support, but she did not come out and tell him exactly what she meant: "I need you to see that I'm trying to push myself forward, but I need your help pushing." During this time, Marie stopped writing and cut back on her reading.

With the idea of a new house abandoned, Marie began looking first for a new apartment for herself and the children and then for a new job. Apartment hunting seemed to be enjoyable for her, but job hunting created a new crisis. While Sondra encouraged her to try for a clerk's position at her office, I cautioned her about getting her
hopes up. The job required computer experience, filing, filling in forms, and other activities that she was not yet ready to handle. But Marie believed in Sondra and went to her office. She was unable to fill in the application. She came into our session and said, "I'm just so upset. I just want to cry." She told me what had happened and wailed, "Sondra, how could you do this to me?" We began practicing filling out job applications during that session, but Marie was too upset to concentrate on much. She was still upset during the next session and kept wanting to change from whatever we were doing to something else. At one point she asked me to be her secretary and write something down for her. She dictated two sentences and then said, "No, don't write that. I can't think today. Let's do something else."

Marie continued to look for a new job sporadically, showing up for her tutoring sessions just as sporadically. She did not bring her briefcase and rarely brought anything to read or write. Yet there seemed to be no urgency to her job search until she and Tory received an eviction notice. Although she was embarrassed by it because she had told the landlord that Tory had paid the rent, she seemed rather blase about the eviction notice itself. She viewed it as Tory's problem, not hers. A few days later, however, she called me from Sondra's house.
"I've run away," she said. She had learned that not only had Tory gambled away all the money, but he had also been gambling rather than playing basketball with friends every evening.

After talking at length with both Sondra and me, Marie went back home, but she now began her job search in earnest. We looked at the want ads and made up a resume that she could carry with her to use when filling in job applications. Marie was not doing any other reading and writing though. "I sit back and I can read a book, but I can hardly get interested in it. I mean, I'm reading, but I can't hear myself. I guess I just ain't interested in it."

Just a week later, Marie called from work. She had not read the log at work, and as a result, the wrong child had been administered a medical treatment. She was very upset and kept worrying over the next few weeks about the child, her job, and her marriage. She called from home one night. She was upstairs in the dark while the children and Tory were downstairs. She said, "I'm just sittin' here rockin' and cryin' myself to sleep." I suggested she read herself to sleep, but she replied, "I can't read when I'm in a teary mood." The next day when she came to her session, she mostly wanted to talk:

I feel like I'm changing. I am. I'm changing in a lot
of different ways. I've been forced to change. It's not really good for me right now. A lot of things are happening to me right now. It's a lot...I mean...I know, I wanted this [reading and writing] for so much of my natural life, and it scares me, getting back. I'm really scared. I was sitting there. I wanted to call you and say I wasn't coming to you no more...because there's a lot going on here.

There was even more going on than Marie knew. A few days later she was called in for a hearing about the child's medical treatment. We talked at length about what she should say and how she should present herself, but she was very worried about the hearing. In the meantime, she had found a daytime job, but it was something she had sworn she would never do again: work as a hotel maid. She was very unhappy.

I fell apart. I mean, I can't deal with all this in my life. I didn't plan that...I come here because I know I really needed help, right? But, I mean, you know, I wasn't happy with my life because of the ups and downs with the kids...I don't want to sound like I'm complaining about it, but some things just happened and it took a tiresome to me. That's nothing to blame working graveyard, but my nerves took a tiresome to me. Because I wouldn't be gettin to
sleep. I didn't move around. I know I'm not gonna get none now, but I gotta do what I gotta do...I knew when I came in here what I wanted. I still want it. It's just things have come up.

Marie was fired from her job the next day.

While the new job had not yet begun, Marie cancelled her sessions with me. "I feels too sad and bad," she said. Two days later, Tory gambled his paycheck again. Marie gave him $100 and told him to find another place to stay until he had gotten help for his problem. The next day she was called in to begin work at her new job.

I hadn't seen or talked to Marie for almost two weeks when she called to say she had moved. It had been very sudden. She had found a place nearer her mother, and her brother and Tory had moved all their belongings. Tory was living with her and the children again, although he had not yet taken any steps to reform. When I went over to see Marie, the children, and the new house, she was unpacking her books and putting them in the headboard shelf of the bed, and we sat on her bed and talked for a while. She said she was too exhausted to be interviewed and asked if she could have the questions so that she could write out the answers later. Instead of answering each question, she wrote me a letter that included her feelings about her learning to read and write:
I find that By me takieing A Class with with You Has Had A great Affect on my Life, whit So much going on with me, and All the chaneg that are Happing So fast. I find Reading and writing is A very posative thing in my life Right now...I fond A part of me that you help me dige for, and with All the problems going on Around me I fell learning Has Been the most Acting in my Change of life...

Marie continued to call at least twice a week just to talk or to ask for help with things she was writing. For her mother's birthday in July, she wanted to create a book by having each of her brothers and sisters write something special about their love for their mother. I helped her with the spelling and formatting of hers, but only one other sibling wrote anything. She also wanted help writing a letter to her former employer to present her case better than she had at the hearing. We worked on it over the phone somewhat, but she cancelled several appointments to meet and finish it. I rewrote her letter and sent it to her with a note. She called to thank me, telling me at the same time that once she had finished her probationary period at work and was assigned a permanent schedule, she wanted to continue her sessions. That had not yet happened by September, but Marie still called to talk and say it would. During September, Marie
stopped saying she would restart our tutoring sessions. Although she had begun corresponding with an old boyfriend, she said the children's activities and her job were keeping her too busy for her to do any reading and writing at all. She also explained why she had cancelled all our plans to meet at my house; she had been afraid she would get lost because of her inability to read street signs and follow directions.

Summary

While Carl received help from his family that was not always given in accordance with his needs nor accepted in the best manner, his family and friends seemed to support his efforts to learn in the best way they knew how. Marie, however, kept her learning a secret, and her secrecy precluded her family's support of her efforts. Despite one's openness and the other's secretiveness, the literacy learning of both Carl and Marie impacted their families. Brenda was aware of changes taking place in family interactions from the onset and had said at our first meeting, "I think we can handle it." But that was not the case. At first Carl's dependence on others for assistance seemed to create a stronger bond between him and the other members of his family, but Carl's yelling at his family over the type of assistance they gave him created disharmony; and his growing dependence on Janine
and the type of help she gave him created a crisis that threatened the family's existence. Marie's learning created no bonds, but it did create a crisis. Expressing her feelings in writing about her husband threatened this family's existence, too.

At the same time, events at home impacted the students' learning. Carl's change of employment and hours limited who could help him at home and how often they could do so. When Janine moved in, her help at first spurred Carl's learning, but Brenda's accusation of his being sexually interested in Janine stopped his learning altogether. Marie felt a similar impact. Sondra's words best described the relationship between Marie's learning and her family:

Marie's temperament really evolves around what's happening with her family. It's inside out, not outside in. Now the outside helps, but it doesn't really influence it. If things are going wrong in the home, it affects everything outside, and she comes to a screeching halt. She goes into a mild depression of nothing's going to work, why even try, life is coming to an end, I might as well fall off the planet, that kind of thing over and over and over again.

With the crises at home, Marie's learning did, indeed, come "to a screeching halt."
Tidepools: Perceptions of the Students

Like the concepts of literacy and learning that the students and their families had accumulated over the years, the perceptions of the students about themselves and the perceptions of the students by others had also accumulated. Seen as tidepools, these perceptions could either offer resources for growth or deny such nourishment. The students' self-images seemed to affect how they interacted with others as well as how they allowed themselves to learn. How they and others saw their learning, in turn, sometimes seemed to affect their self-concepts.

Perceptions of Carl

Carl's openness about his inability to read seemed to reflect a man who did not depend on others' opinions for his self-image. He did not see his inability to read as something shameful; it was just something he did not know how to do, like playing golf or tennis. It had not kept him from having a good job and providing for his family. In one language experience story, he dictated that he was "a good, hard-working man." He was not ashamed of being a garbageman though he knew Janine's boyfriend was disdainful of his job. Carl had wanted to help the boyfriend get a job there but, he told me, "He don't want that, not no garbage." At other times, Carl mentioned
that he did not drink, other than an occasional beer, or take drugs. He was extremely upset when his wife accused him of even thinking of cheating on her. Other language experience stories recounted the family going out to eat and to the movies together, Tanya baking him a birthday cake, and Josie accompanying him to the library for his tutoring sessions. He was proud of his children and his relationships with them.

Carl's self-esteem was also reflected in his actions. During the second week of our sessions, Carl brought in a children's book to read. He took that book and others to work with him and had his co-workers help him with it. He enjoyed looking through books in the children's section of the library and often laughed delightedly at some of the rhymes and illustrations. He was not embarrassed to check out the children's books or the low-level adult books and often talked to the desk clerk about them. He was not embarrassed by his poor grammar or pronunciation, either. When Janine corrected his speech, he yelled, according to Janine, "Don't tell me how to talk. I just as good as you are."

Carl's family and co-workers also seemed to regard Carl with an esteem that was not dependent on his reading ability. They all accepted his decision to learn to read and were glad to help him at work or at home. Knowing
that he couldn't read or that he needed help did not seem to affect their opinion of him. Carl never recounted a single instance of anyone reacting negatively when he told the person he couldn't read or asked for help. Perhaps his family's easy acceptance of his illiteracy made him believe that others would accept it, too, and that seemed to be the case. His family also easily accepted his decision to learn to read. They seemed to feel it would change Carl's ability to do things, but it would not change Carl. Tony thought that Carl was "doin' the right thing" because "it's what he want" and he'd been "missin' out on stuff" because he couldn't read. Josie commented that she thought "it'll be better for him. If he want to know something, he can read it hisself." Brenda just said, "I think it's nice." When asked if she thought it might change anything, she said, "I believes it will," but when asked how, she said, "I can't explain it offhand."

While Carl's self-esteem was constant, his self-confidence in his learning waivered. One session he would say, "It seem like it gettin' harder and harder," yet another session he would say, "It seem like it gettin' easier." These comments, which were each made on more than one occasion, seemed to be related to what reading-associated activities he had engaged in at home. For
instance, the session after Janine's boyfriend had tried explaining the vowels to Carl, reading became "harder and harder," yet in sessions after Janine had read aloud with him, reading became "easier."

Brenda's confidence in Carl's ability to learn also waivered. During my first interview with her, she said, "I think he got a little difficulty. He lost his mother and his brother the same...just 3 months apart. 'Cause he used to keep things to memory, but not that I could...A little lack of memory. He forgets." Brenda repeated the same concern about Carl's memory in every interview, but she always attributed it, or at least related it, to the death of Carl's mother and brother. When she felt Carl's poor memory was impeding his learning, she spoke to him about it, though not quite in the same terms she had used with me:

Carl: Brenda asked me, says I been changing for quite a while, even before I started reading.

Tutor: In what way?

Carl: She didn't say. She told me once she thought it because of my mother and brother. I told her I didn't think so.

After the first interview, Brenda further expressed some doubts about Carl's ability. "It seem like to me he ain't gettin' nowhere." While she expressed frustration with
her attempts to help Carl, she also seemed to understand that it might not be easy for him. "For some people it kind of hard for them to get it all. My son almost 15 and it hard for him. He very slow." In the same interview, however, she herself pointed to Carl's progress when she seemed to interpret one of my comments as criticism of Carl. "We goes drivin', and he ask me to read the street sign. When we goes by again, he know it. He can't spell it, but he can read it."

At the end of the project, most of the family saw little or no change in Carl's reading or in Carl. Brenda still thought, "He ain't learned much," and "His attitude ain't changed, no...he the same old Carl." When I asked what that meant, she said, "Same mean, grouchy." Janine backed up Brenda's opinion with examples of Carl's yelling at her when she tried to help him with his reading, but Brenda said the yelling had always been going on; just what he was yelling about was different. Tony did see a change in Carl. "He talk different, like more proper." Because I questioned Tony further, doubting the propriety of Carl's spoken language, Tony said, "He just hold hisself different, like he know more." I asked Carl about what Tony had said, and he agreed, saying simply, "Yeah, I do." Later in this final interview, Carl gave a somewhat different picture of his family's
response to his learning:

They was proud of me doing this. And 'cause, see, I was telling you, Carl, you...like all of them kind of look up to me because I been run up for a long time and all. I like, once I tell 'em I gonna do somethin', I always do that. And, uh, they was kind of proud of me 'cause my sister, she said, "Carl, uh, I'm proud of you 'cause you said years ago that you wanted to try to learn how to read and write, and now you all gonna do it and I'm really proud of you." And then she, we tryin' to read a book, and she said, "Carl, you progressed a whole lot."

At the end of the project, despite his illness, both Carl's self-confidence and self-esteem were high. He was proud of what he had accomplished so far, and he believed others were proud of him, too.

Perceptions of Marie

When she enrolled in the literacy program, Marie expected it to change her life. After our first session she wrote, "I thought mabe it con Help me become A Batter wife ar A Batter mother or mabe just A Batter Person." She was not happy with herself and wanted to change, saying in a later conversation, "I looks in the mirror and I asks, do you like what you see, and the answer is no...If you want to change, the answer have to be no."
There were so many things Marie wanted to change, however, that she had set herself an impossible task. Aside from learning to read, write, and spell, she wanted to learn "how to say things without an attitude showing." She wanted to write so that "it don't sound like Dick and Jane." She wanted to change her voice because "it's a little draggy, tired." She wanted "a career, not so much for myself or the money, but because I want my kids to see there's something better out there." She wanted to "learn how to approach people," how to "stand up in church and bear witness," how to "find my voice." She also wanted to effect changes in her husband and her home. Even before she had expressed all these desires, Marie wrote, "You are proble wondering How can I feel so mine [many] wants at one time," and a few weeks later, she began to recognize she was not being realistic, writing, "I guass I came in the Door Looking for more than I was suposed to, Expating you to change me over night, and I was worg [wrong]."

Although Marie clearly stated several times, "I knows what I wants, where I'm going and who I am," she just as clearly did not know these things or how to get them. While she wanted a career, she did not know what career she wanted. At one time she thought she might like to become certified in child development, but she did not
want to take the classes needed. "I don't want to take classes with people," she said, then explaining, "Because I'm not confident enough. I'm not sure about what I know, and anything I don't have confidence in or sure about I fail in." Another time she thought she might like to "do something with computers," but she was not willing to take time outside of our sessions to learn the keyboard and complained that it hurt her hands. She mentioned several other careers, such as counseling and accounting, sometimes without even knowing what they were.

When Marie actually began her search for another job, she really did not know what she wanted or what she was capable of. She seemed to have so many insecurities that her job requirements were difficult to fill. She did not want a job in which she had to handle money; that way no one could accuse her of stealing or making mistakes. She did not want a job that required working closely with other people; that way no one could get close to her and know "the real me." At the same time, she did not want a job that was menial labor; that was why she had quit so many jobs before. When she did apply for jobs that were well above her current abilities, she was devastated when she was rejected. "I should have just stayed a maid. That's all I'm good for," she wailed.

Marie's self-concepts seemed to be related to how she
thought others saw her. While Marie thought she knew who she was, she complained often that her husband did not. She said she had told him, "You see me, but you don't look at me. You see what I'm wearing but not who I am." Yet Marie had spent years hiding herself in appearances the same way she tried to hide her literacy level. She had tried in school to hide the fact that she was in resource room by being late to class. She hid the problems in her marriage from her mother, sisters, and brothers. "You cover up when they comes around," she said. "You wants them to think you made the right choice. I keep it in so they won't look at me and think I made the wrong decision." When she ran into problems at a job she had previously said she both liked and needed, she hid her fears about losing the job by saying, "I don't care about the job." She hid her reading problems from her children by refusing to help them with homework or yelling at them when they corrected her. She even tried to hide her reading ability from me at times, asking me not to listen while she made a tape for miscue analysis one day and, when making a tape at home, retaping until she got it right so I would think it was her first effort.

Marie was aware of some of her pretenses. In one of her early letters to me, she wrote, "Thank you for being
so open with me...I wont Have to Amagen [imagine] an more or pretend. I can just Be mysefl." That was true, however, only in our meeting room in the library or on the phone. When we ventured out to the main library to get the newspaper to look at want ads, she said to me, "Don't be my teacher out there. I may know some people, so just act like my friend." She gave me the same instructions the few times we were together outside the library.

Marie seemed almost paranoid about people knowing that she did not read or write well. She said that at work, "Sometimes I feel like I'm being attacked" because of errors in spelling and arithmetic. Although she wrote both at home and at work, when she arrived at our sessions, she would rip the pages out of her notebook and hand them to me. "I don't want nobody to read it," she said. She wanted worksheets to help her study, but she did not want to do them either at work or at home in case someone saw them. Even with me in our own private room in the library, Marie practically refused to do anything that might make her appear to be less than what she thought she should be. After I had modeled short vowel sounds and asked her to repeat them, she refused, saying, "That's childish." While normally we used whatever books she brought—usually something far too difficult for her,
one day I wanted a book with frequent usage of short vowel sounds in short words. I grabbed a nearby low-level reader:

Marie: That's one of them Dick and Jane books. I don't want to read that.

Tutor: We're not going to read it. I just want you to find some words in here that we can use.

Marie: I don't like them books.

Tutor: I know you don't. That's why we're not going to read it. We're just looking for words.

Marie: Why can't we use my book?

Tutor: We will...after we find what I want you to look for in here. Then we'll compare them.

Marie contradicted herself about doing "childish" things, however, when she argued with me about my not giving her spelling tests.

Tutor: What I'm saying now is that you're a grown-up.

Marie: Yeah, I am, but that don't mean I...If I'm a grown-up, that's a grown-up number, 28. It's just a number and then you ...I come in here and take a test with you and you tell me I read at a third grade level. OK, I'm grown up but you telling me I read at a third grade level, so there's two levels to deal with. You're dealing with two levels now. If you're gonna deal with me like an adult...
Tutor: Did I tell you you read at a third grade level?
Marie: Yes.
Tutor: No, you came in and you told me you read at a third grade level.
Marie: No, he told me. Peter.
Tutor: That's right. Because the Bible is not written at a third grade level. On their tests you read at a third grade level, but you don't read on a third grade level. This is an adult level.
Marie: OK, then tell me...
Tutor: Your reading is a whole lot better than your spelling.
Marie: But if I'm at a third grade level on spelling...
Tutor: Do you want me to treat you like a third grader?
Marie: No, that ain't what I told you. Listen.
Tutor: That's what you're telling me when you're saying, "Be a teacher. Give me a quiz." I'll do that if you want.
Marie: Listen. I don't want you to be disrespectful of me on no third grade level. That don't add up right now.
Tutor: I don't think so.
Marie: I am an adult.

Tutor: That's right.

Marie did not want to be treated like a child, yet she acted liked one at times. She wrote after an incident at work, "I am Filling Like this Littel girl whit No Excouse."

Marie's paranoia over her reading level and her confusion about being an adult were, perhaps, merely indications of the low self-esteem and lack of confidence she also exhibited in other ways. She had begun a new job just a week before we started meeting, but she said that because of her spelling, "I know I won't have this job that long." When we looked at the want ads in the newspaper, we found one that interested her but which she did not want to apply for. "That would be a waste of time and gas," Marie said. I asked, "Why? Are you going to go in and say 'Hi, I'm applying for your job, but you won't want to hire me'?'" She laughed, but then she got serious and said, "I couldn't just go in and do that. Haven't you ever noticed that I don't look people in the eye?" After having gone to apply for one job, Marie came to our next session extremely upset about it. "First of all, I'm already intimidated because I feel that I'm pushing. Then when you hand me a piece of paper and say, 'do this,' that's something else. I didn't like it...I feel
intimidated." A month later, after having tried to fill in an application elsewhere, she expanded on this idea of intimidation. "It's like when I walk in a place, part of me don't belong in there, but part of me trying to come out of what I've been afraid to do."

This attitude caused Marie to take the blame for anything that went wrong, but then she complained about the consequences. When Marie called to say she "ran away" from Tory because of his gambling away the rent money, she also said that she blamed herself for his actions. They had enjoyed the weekend together and now she felt betrayed, but "it's my fault because I thought things was gettin' better." Although I tried convincing Marie that his gambling was not her fault, she said, "It don't matter. He'll end up puttin' the blame on me." When I made a mistake in handling her language experience story by omitting some of her words one time, she wrote me a letter "To Say that I am sorry for my Attude this After NooN...I Had know right to come in and blame you for teaching me." After the incident at work when she felt "like this Littel girl" because she accepted the blame, she then complained, "I am the one thats All ways Loose [loses]."

Marie was apparently aware of her low self-esteem when she pointed out her lack of eye contact, and she was
aware of her lack of confidence. After one of our first sessions, she wrote:

I Enjoy Hanging Around people that are very positive about thier Selfs and All most want evey Say I can't if I can just put that out of my vocaberlay and Say I can think of How much Stroger I would Be.

[I enjoy hanging around people that are very positive about themselves and almost won't ever say, "I can't." If I can just put that out of my vocabulary and say, "I can," think of how much stronger I would be.]

When she dropped out of the program, however, Marie seemed to feel there had been some change in her. In response to my questions, she wrote:

I Belive Reading an writing A Lod [allowed] me to feel the person that I am Realy insiad. when I met you I nere Realy look that deep in my Self from Readin an writing moast I evey done was looked Around me and what ever I saw thats what I tryed to change.

While Marie may have seen her self-concepts changing, they also seem to have impeded her learning during this time.

Summary

Carl's high self-esteem allowed him to be open about his literacy learning, use whatever materials he wanted,
and receive help from others. His confidence seemed to waiver at times as a result of the level and type of materials used or the nature of help he received, but he saw progress and was proud of it. Marie, on the other hand, with her low self-esteem and lack of confidence, kept her literacy learning secret, which limited the materials she could use and denied her help from others. When her self-confidence rose unrealistically high, she applied for jobs beyond her capabilities and then came crashing back to reality and lower levels of self-esteem and self-confidence. The self-concepts of both students seemed to be closely related to their learning patterns and progress.

_Tidemarks: Measurements of Literacy Learning_

As water recedes from land, it leaves marks showing where it has been. The sea often abrades the shore, cutting platforms in the land's structure, but it may also deposit debris upon which land can later build. These formative actions of the sea are measurable marks of the tide's ebb and flow. So, too, were there measurable marks of the students' learning. Though at different levels when entering the literacy program, both Carl and Marie had enrolled to do the same thing: learn to read and write better. Measurements of their learning were seen through standard tests, my observations, and
the students' own statements. As the project progressed and their lives outside of tutoring sessions continued, however, these measurements often showed the waves Marie described.

**Carl's Learning**

Carl entered the program unable to identify all the letters of the alphabet; unable to read more than ten simple words, such as the, and, one, and dad, or even the names of members of his family; and unable to write anything but his own name. When he took Form C of the *Flynt-Cooter Informal Reading Inventory* (Flynt & Cooter, 1993) in June, he was as unable to read the preliminary sentences and Level 1 material as he had been in January. However, Carl's post-test was taken after almost a three-week absence and on the day he came in to explain why he was temporarily dropping out. He had not done any reading during that absence because, as he explained, "I'm sick...and I'm kind of scared that...I think I got the same problem my brother had, and he died." He spoke at length about his fears and his physical weakness, but he was unable to read more than a few words of a standard test at this particular time.

Nevertheless, before this final reading inventory showing he had made no progress, Carl had read a number of very short low-level adult stories and several self-
selected children's books independently though not fluently. He could recognize the main words of many products in advertisements, which we had collected as a means of creating his own dictionary. He was also able to read several hundred decontextualized words, e.g., 85% of the 100 most frequently used words (Fry, 1984; Sakiey & Fry, 1979) as well as the word banks (Austin-Angela, 1994; Davidson & Wheat, 1989) created from the books he read. He could spell very few of these words, however, and was still very hesitant at writing. He could identify most initial consonant sounds both in reading and writing, but he could not identify vowel sounds or initial consonant blends. Based on these measures of learning, despite his poor performance on a standard reading inventory, Carl had made definite progress.

Carl seemed to measure his progress by the ease with which he read. The comments he made seemed to be based on how his homework had gone. Homework consisted essentially of reading, copying his language experience story, and a variety of word study activities such as his dictionary notebook, word cards from the books he had read, or the worksheets Tony requested. Parts of his homework usually depended on someone helping him. During the first few weeks, Carl supplemented my assignments with his own phonics book. If Carl encountered some difficulty doing
his homework, he usually prefaced his oral reading with a comment. For instance, after a friend tried to show him how to break words into syllables, he commented, "It's not goin' as good as I want it to." After I let him go home with a book that was too high a level, he commented, "I thought by now it would get easier." When I sent home the worksheets Tony had suggested, his comment was, "It seem like it gettin' harder and harder." After Brenda had questioned Carl about his memory, he prefaced his reading with a statement about his forgetting words:

A lot of times I can read it. I can read it, and when I see it again, I feel like I should know it, but I don't feel it, like I'm losing the word after I read it.

If the homework had gone well, however, Carl did not make any remarks before reading aloud to me. Instead, his comments came afterward. When I sent home some very short and simple unpublished stories (which I had written, though Carl did not realize that), Carl read the entire story to me and then said, "It seem like it gettin' easier." When Janine began helping him, he read aloud to me and then asked, "I got that all right, didn't I?" After her help another time, he read to me and then commented, "That was pretty good. It was pretty good. A couple of months ago I couldn't even read any of those
words." One time I gave him one of these simple stories and had him read it without my modeling it first. That was when he stopped in the middle of the story and said, "Once you get the words together, this is kind of fun." At the end of the story, he added, "The more I try to read them books, seem like the easier they get." Carl's comments, as measurements of progress, showed learning not only as an up and down motion but also as a result of the materials and type of assistance at home. In the final interview, when he couldn't read the simplest passage on the inventory, Carl stated that he felt he had learned, not as much as he wanted but enough to feel good about himself and his learning.

Marie's Learning

Like Carl, Marie also showed no change in June from the informal reading inventory in January. When she enrolled in the literacy program, the library volunteer placed her at a third grade level. The Flynt-Cooter (1993) inventory that I used placed her between a fifth and sixth grade reading level. Her writing sample was several grades lower than her reading.

My observations showed that Marie could read at much higher levels, however, when she was interested in or familiar with the material. She read many passages in her Bible with very few miscues. She also did well with a
self-selected article on drugs. She did not do particularly well on some of the more philosophical religious books she brought, but they were so difficult that even when I read passages of these books aloud to her, she did not understand them. For the most part, Marie's progress appeared to be more a matter of rising self-confidence and self-esteem. While she could still rarely read decontextualized multi-syllabic words, she was more willing to take a guess at multi-syllabic words when they were in a familiar context, such as the Bible or religious tracts. When her guess was not accurate, however, she still had no means of figuring out the word on her own and would impatiently say, "Gimme the word."

The only change in her final piece of writing from her original piece of writing was the use of some punctuation (see Figure 4). She still misspelled most of the same words she always had, she still omitted words, she still placed her thoughts on paper without trying to organize them in any coherent order, and she still refused to revise or proofread her work.

Marie's confidence in her writing, however, was high enough in June for her to insist that she and her brothers and sisters each write a letter to their mother telling her why she was so special to them, and Marie would have the pages bound as a book for her mother's
I come from a family of thirteen and it was some hard from where I come from because I felt like the Black Ship of the family. So I started making tulle for my mom and dad and got real Rebaes that Dad kid me out because I didn't want to go to school. I just want to hang around gangs.

I find reading and writing is a very positive thing in my life. Right now, I believe reading and writing A Lod me to feel the person that I am Realy insiad. When I met you I nere Realy look that deep in my self from Readin an writing moast I evey done was looked Around me and what ever I saw thats what I tryed to change.

Figure 4. Marie's writing the first day of tutoring (top) and her writing 6 months later after she had discontinued coming to tutoring sessions (bottom).

Birthday present. Marie was only one of two of the thirteen siblings to write anything. Marie's confidence was still high at the end of August, though I had not seen her since June, when she called to read me a letter she was writing to a friend. Yet at the time that Marie asked me how she was doing and I made the wavy motion that she felt signified how she was learning, I was trying to be positive. I did not observe much evidence of improvement in Marie's reading and writing at any time in the project or after when she still called for help.
Marie did not make comments like Carl's. Instead, she argued with me when I presented something she thought she already knew, or she asked why we had to do something when she encountered difficulty understanding it. When the activity was enjoyable for her, she neither argued nor questioned me. It almost seemed that Marie wanted someone to talk to rather than someone to teach her. When Marie brought her Bible and discussion guide, I showed her how to go back and forth between the guide and the Bible, and we discussed the content and meaning of the passages and guide. There were no arguments, except over interpretation of content. As soon as we shifted to looking at specific words that had been difficult for her in the guide or Bible, the questioning began. "Why we doin' this?" she asked.

When I asked her to make a kind of chart of long vowel patterns in one-syllable words, she argued that, "I already knows it take two vowels." She backed down when I asked, "But do you know which two vowels and when?" When we were working on a word family activity on short vowel sounds, she asked, "Why are we doing this? It's boring. These are just little words." I pointed to some short vowel spelling errors in her writing and replied, "Because you said you wanted to learn how to spell, and that includes words like these, doesn't it?" While most
of the time lessons were based on Marie's writing and the reading material she brought, if the lesson was an effort, she wasn't interested. As Marie's family problems increased, her outside reading and writing decreased. And as her attention and attendance lessened, her arguments and protestations grew more frequent and louder. She was understanding less and finding reading and writing more difficult.

In her final interview and letter to me, Marie never once mentioned whether or not she had learned to read or write better. She did mention that previously she "looked at it [her writing] as all bad because I couldn't spell," implying that she now realized that writing and spelling were not the same thing (rather than that she could now spell). She said her purpose behind improving her reading and writing was "trying to improve myself. That's what change is about." Consequently, she focused entirely on what she had learned about herself by having worked with me (see Figure 4). Our sessions had been "positive" because they had (in this edited version) "allowed me to feel the person that I really am inside." Reading and writing were showing her how to "look...deep in myself." In the letter she wrote to her friend in August, she said she had changed: "I've grown into a strong black woman, and I feel good about how I am." For Marie, finding
herself was, perhaps, more important than improving her reading and writing.

**Summary**

Their enrollment in a literacy program presumed that both Carl and Marie were eager to learn and would make every effort to do so. That did not necessarily appear to be the case. While Carl, with the support of his family, made a great deal of effort to learn, Marie did not take much time outside of our sessions to try. When they left the program, both were at a low point in their lives. Carl believed he was seriously ill, perhaps dying, and Marie had accepted a full-time job that she hated and was also experiencing serious marital problems. The standard tests they took, showing no progress, may have reflected this low point rather than a summation of what they had learned. Their own observations and mine showed that Carl probably did begin learning to read and that Marie probably learned more about herself than about reading or writing.

**Summary of Findings**

Carl and Marie, with almost twenty years difference between them, enrolled in the same literacy program with the same purpose: to learn or improve their reading and writing. They were both from large families that maintained close contact as adults, but Carl's family
knew he could not read while Marie's family was unaware of her reading and writing problems. They both entered the program with the same basic concepts of literacy and learning. To them, literacy was a skill-based, school-related activity that was desirable for mostly pragmatic purposes. It was not something that their families engaged in for any other purpose. Learning, too, was mostly a skill-based teacher-oriented concept to them and their families. As they tried to learn, however, their concepts of literacy and learning began to change. To Carl, reading started to become enjoyable when done as an activity itself rather than as a set of skills. To Marie, literacy became endowed with the means to change herself, but she did not seem to understand how to become more literate.

The families, whether they were part of the students' literacy learning or not, both impacted the students' learning and were impacted by it. Carl's family supported him the best they could by frequently helping him read and study. They altered their leisure time habits to do so and accepted the frustration that accompanied his slow progress, but with their help, he was learning to read. However, the closeness between Carl and his stepdaughter that seemed to be evolving as she helped him learn appeared threatening to Carl's wife. A crisis arose, and
Carl was unable to learn in the midst of it. Shortly afterward, he felt ill and dropped out of the program, but recovery from his illness did not bring him back to his literacy learning with me.

Unlike Carl's family, Marie's family did not support her learning. Whether they could have helped her learn is questionable, but they were never offered an opportunity because of her secrecy. They were, however, still impacted by her literacy learning efforts. As she wrote of her feelings, Marie became more dissatisfied with her life. She attempted to leave her husband several times, totally threatening the family's existence. At the same time, her husband's gambling and her own employment problems created more unhappiness and dissatisfaction for Marie and made her incapable of focusing on literacy learning. With a new job and a move to a new house, Marie also dropped out of the program, having made little progress in her literacy learning.

The students' concepts of literacy and learning as well as their interactions with their families seemed closely related to the way they saw themselves and the way others saw them. Carl was satisfied with himself, his family, his job, and his life. Literacy was something he wanted in addition to what he had. He was able to be open about his literacy and open to learning. Marie, however,
was dissatisfied with herself, her family, her job, and her life. Literacy was going to change all these things for her. Her dissatisfaction with all these things, however, along with her shame of not being literate, prevented her from being open about her literacy and prevented her from learning.

**Conclusion**

Poets from Homer to Tennyson to Whitman have used the ebb and flow of the ocean's tide as a metaphor for life across the continents and throughout the ages. The ocean takes us on journeys, its sometimes gentle waves rocking us into contentment, playful waves bringing us happiness and pleasure, surging waves pushing us safely to shore, great crashing waves threatening to inundate and immobilize us in their seeming anger, and strong, hidden waves pulling us deeper into the undertow and endangering our very existence. The two students I worked with were on such journeys, both trying to reach a faraway shore but being pushed and pulled, sometimes gently, sometimes roughly, by their own actions and concepts and by the different people in their lives.
CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Qualitative researchers are sometimes disposed toward causal determination of events, but more often tend to perceive, as did Tolstoy in War and Peace, events not simply and singly caused. Many find the search for cause of little use, dramatizing, rather, the coincidence of events, seeing some events purposive, some situational, many of them interrelated (Stake, 1994, p. 239).

Underlying the questions on which I based this study was the very broad question of why students do or do not learn to read in adult literacy programs. But such an event--learning or not learning--is not, as Stake noted, "simply and singly caused." Intelligence, learning abilities and disabilities, socio-economic status, prior emotional and/or educational experiences, learning styles, time on task, teaching methods and materials, and myriad other factors--none of which were looked at in this study--are probably all part of why students do or
do not learn to read. Furthermore, these factors are often interrelated rather than single causes. The particular factors I looked at--concepts of literacy and learning, perceptions of the student, and family interactions--also appeared not to be separate issues but, rather, interrelated elements that, in their interrelationship, may allow us to understand better what adults experience as they attempt to become literate. My interpretation of the findings is, thus, based on the interrelationship of the questions and the findings, a cross-case analysis of the two students, and the relationship of the findings to the literature and theoretical framework. Seen from this viewpoint, the results of this study may have implications for adult literacy students, tutors or teachers, agencies or programs, and researchers.

Summary and Interpretation of the Findings

I began this study by asking three separate questions: 1) how do the interactions of the family change, if at all, as an adult member learns to read; 2) how do perceptions of the adult learners by individual family members and by the students themselves change, if at all, during the learning period; and 3) how do the concepts of literacy and learning held by the individual members of the family change, if at all, during the
learning period. These questions were embedded in a specific context and time period: the learning period that was presumed to accompany the students' participation in a literacy tutoring program. Both the students and I found, however, that learning was not constant during this time period. The students attributed this inconstancy, at various times, to single and separate causes: my teaching methods and materials or disharmony in their lives at home. The findings of the study indicate, however, that the difficulty in learning to read or write as an adult is somewhat more complex than either the student's (dis)harmonious homelife or the tutor's choices of methods and materials.

Interrelationship of the Questions

While each question focused on different elements of the student and literacy—concepts of literacy and learning, familial interactions, and perceptions of the students—the students and changes in these elements were, of course, central to all three questions. However, there was another element embedded in each question: myself as the tutor. This additional element, perhaps more than the acts of reading and writing themselves, seemed to work as a catalyst of change; and the changes seemed either to encourage more change or discourage it, creating, in either case, disharmony within both the
When the two students, Carl and Marie, enrolled in the literacy program, they held certain concepts about reading and writing. As documented in the findings, their concepts at the beginning of the program were essentially the same as those of their family members but different from mine. They seemed to perceive reading and writing as skills of decoding and encoding while I perceived them as meaning-making thought processes dependent mostly on prior knowledge and the context of what was being read or written. Specific literacy-related interactions were based on these concepts. Carl's family asked him to sound out unknown words; I asked him to read past them and figure them out by thinking about what he knew of the situation being described and what word(s) would fit in the context of the material. As Carl accepted my methods, he also began to change his concepts. His family, not exposed to my methods, made no such changes. The questions they posed to me did, however, indicate an awareness that our concepts differed. As Carl's concepts changed, the nature of the literacy-related interactions also seemed to change. The family's efforts to help engendered "hollerin'" or vocal disagreements. This disharmony or conflict seemed to be based in the emerging difference in concepts of both literacy and learning. And
while the family seemed to negotiate who would assist Carl and when, there was little negotiation of how they would help him.

For Marie, whose secrecy precluded literacy-related assistance from her family, adapting her concept of writing to align more with mine needed no negotiation with others and was almost immediate. Accepting that writing was a meaning-making process rather than one of encoding sounds, she began to write profusely. What she wrote, however, seemed to change her perceptions of herself and her life with her husband, Tory. Her interactions with Tory began to change, and conflict ensued. Coincidentally, Tory's interactions, seemingly unrelated to Marie's literacy learning since he knew nothing about it overtly, were creating disharmony. Marie became so upset that she felt she couldn't write or read. When she couldn't write or read, her literacy learning appeared to stop. It thus appeared that as Marie's concept of writing changed, so did her self-perceptions and, subsequently, her interactions. At the same time, as non-literacy-related interactions changed, so did Marie's self-perceptions, which seemed to interact with her learning.

As individuals learn, no matter what the subject, change should occur; after all, learning is change in
itself in that it adds something to the individuals who are learning. Not surprisingly, perhaps, change in any one of my questions' differing elements--concepts, perceptions, or interactions--created change in another, and that subsequent change engendered other changes. These changes did not create a sequential chain of events, however, but instead, seemed to double back on themselves. With Marie, for instance, the act of writing made her feel better about herself, encouraging her to write more. As her tutor, I also encouraged her to write. But her writing about her feelings for Tory made her dissatisfied with their life together. Acting on these feelings, she tried to talk to Tory, but he made her feel that she was not being either a good wife or a good communicator. She wanted to communicate better and continue her learning, but she also thought about dropping out and devoting more time to her husband. As Marie negotiated her course(s) of action, her literacy learning fluctuated in an uneven wave-like pattern.

The same seemed to be true for Carl. As he left our tutoring sessions, he left with my concept of reading. When he encountered a different concept at home, though he was probably not conscious of these varying concepts, he sometimes became frustrated, engendering verbal conflict. Family members also became frustrated,
engendering more conflict. While Carl sometimes held on to my concept of reading, other times he reverted to the family's concept. Since he felt he was not learning to read with their concept, he again became frustrated, again engendering conflict. His course of learning, like Marie's, also became an uneven series of waves.

The changes taking place in the students, initiated by me as the tutor, were needed for learning, but these changes also seemed to halt their learning at times, perhaps to stem the disharmony created, as the individuals tried to negotiate change within themselves and their families. Neither learning nor change occurred simply or singly; both appeared to be conflict-ridden and conflict-driven as the elements interacted with each other.

Cross-case Analysis of the Students and Families

As seen in the findings, the two students entered the literacy program with a similar concept of literacy—as a skill-based act of decoding/encoding. Carl's family valued reading as a tool but found little value in writing. Marie's family seemed to value neither reading nor writing. Although their concepts of literacy were similar, the students entered with different perceptions of themselves. Carl appeared to have high self-esteem while Marie appeared to have low self-esteem. Carl's
family appeared to respect him as he was; his literacy level was not a factor in their esteem. Marie's family, according to both her mentor, Sondra, and Marie herself, would lose respect for Marie if her literacy level were to be known.

Literacy-related interactions with their families prior to the start of their tutoring sessions were also different. Carl's family was fully aware of his literacy level and expected to help him learn, much as they had previously helped him with literacy tasks. Marie's family may have known covertly about her literacy level, but there had been no prior assistance on literacy tasks, and there were no expectations of assistance now. In fact, Marie clearly stated that her family members "ain't goin' to help me learn to read." Although both students dropped out of the program before becoming fluent readers and writers, Carl made progress in his reading and writing; Marie made little, if any, progress in her reading and writing, but she seemed to have elevated her self-esteem. While I never heard from Carl again, Marie often called to talk and to ask for help with spelling as she began to let others see her writing, sending letters and making gifts of her words.

From the students' progress and actions, six patterns emerged. These patterns, like my questions, appeared
interrelated.

Overt literacy action. Overt literacy action is a term I have coined to mean utilizing or discussing reading or writing in public view of people other than the tutor or classroom teacher. Overt literacy action, appropriate to the students' level of literacy, may be necessary for learning if the student is to practice outside of class what is learned in class. Carl practiced his reading at home with family members, on the job with co-workers, and in any place he found willing and friendly helpers. His overtness garnered praise from others and encouraged him to learn. For the most part, Marie practiced only when she was sure her secret was safe from discovery, and when she felt there was no safe place, she refused to do much of anything outside of our sessions, asking, instead, for more sessions. The exceptions to her secrecy were her literacy actions in her Bible study group, her letter to Sondra's daughter, Keisha, and her applications for jobs. The responses Marie received from both the Bible group and Keisha seemed to encourage her learning; her inability to fill in the application until after we had prepared for it in class was discouraging.

Self-esteem and learning. Self-esteem may not only be necessary for learning, but it may also be necessary for
overt literacy actions. Carl's self-esteem was high. He showed this when he told Janine, "Don't tell me how to talk. I just as good as you are." He again showed it in his pride in his work for the sanitation district when Janine's boyfriend scorned such a job. Perhaps Carl was able to announce his intentions and his need for assistance because he had high self-esteem. In contrast, Marie had low self-esteem. She felt a need to "cover up" her marital problems from her family, she believed she would be fired quickly from her job, and she was dissatisfied with both the inner and outer images she saw in her mirror. Perhaps Marie could not announce her intentions or engage in overt literacy actions because she believed her family would think less of her for her inability to read and write already, and her low self-esteem made her fear their ridicule or scorn.

Family involvement. The family's involvement, though a possible source of conflict, can aid the student's learning. When Carl's family and friends helped him build his dictionary and read his books, he made progress. Although their insistence on decoding activities may have impeded his learning at times, their willingness to continue was encouraging to him. His bonding with Brenda as they read in bed seemed to add to his enjoyment of reading, and his reading with Janine seemed to enhance
his fluency more than my tutoring. Although Marie's family was only indirectly involved on rare occasions, those few seemed to encourage her. Cody's need for assistance with schoolwork forced her to use her literacy skills and made her better able to recognize what she wanted and needed to learn. Her letter to Keisha was written with her children's input, and Keisha's response was an exciting moment for her.

Changing concepts of literacy. The concepts of literacy held by the students changed throughout the tutoring. This change in concepts altered actions and interactions. Marie's conceptual change of writing from encoding to making meaning increased her writing activity; her reflective writing changed her perceptions of herself and her life; and her altered perceptions changed her interactions with her family. Carl's conceptual change did not change his perceptions of himself, but it changed his easy acceptance of his family's help based on their unchanged concepts; while they continued to assist him, the nature of their interactions changed, becoming first more harmonious in their working together with him and then less harmonious as accusations emerged.

The tutor's role. As the students' tutor, I was more than a teacher. Both consciously and subconsciously, I
was an agent of change. When I urged Carl to use contextual meaning to figure out words, I was consciously trying to get him to change his strategy from one of decoding. Yet when he tried to use this strategy at home and Brenda complained that he was "reading too fast" rather than stopping to sound out words, I unconsciously changed the tenor of their interactions. When I urged Marie to think of writing as ideas and not a list of spelling words, I was consciously trying to get her to write more. Yet when she selected her topics for writing and discovered her dissatisfaction with her marriage, I unconsciously changed the interactions between the couple. I encouraged Carl's family to work with him at home, trying to make his learning a cooperative family activity, but frustrations and arguments arose and sometimes made it a divisive activity, too. The same was true for Marie: working with her children was a change both beneficial and detrimental at the same time.

Materials, whether selected by the students or the tutor, also carried hidden messages of change. When materials were at the appropriate level for Carl, they indicated to him that reading was enjoyable, yet when they were too difficult, they told him his goal might not be attainable. Marie, who chose her own materials, found the same messages depending on whether she read the Bible
or some of her religious self-help books. Even more important for Marie were the words she wrote. A comment, the finding of a misspelled word, the omission of a word during a language experience, all carried messages which she interpreted to fit her own self-concepts and concepts of literacy. In fact, every element of tutoring seemed to create multi-layered changes with far-reaching consequences, often involving conflict in the students and their families.

**Arising conflict.** Conflict arose in both families. Some of the conflict was from non-literacy-related events, but other conflict, though not about literacy itself, arose from literacy-related interactions. Tory's gambling appeared to be a non-literacy-related event that created conflict which interfered with Marie's learning. It is not clear whether or not Tory may have sensed a change in Marie and unconsciously increased his gambling until a crisis arose. However, prior to the gambling crisis, Marie's dissatisfaction with Tory had emerged in her writing. Brenda's accusation that Carl was sexually interested in Janine stemmed directly from Janine's literacy assistance. Whether the conflicts were literacy-related or not, they affected the students' learning. Both students explicitly stated their inability to learn while under the emotional stress of these family
conflicts.

Relationship of Analysis to Literature and Theory

All six of the patterns emerging from my analysis have bases in extant theory and literature. However, some of those bases are more firmly established in education than are others.

Overt literacy action. Although there is a question about whether one needs to make some progress before stating a goal or needs to state a goal before progress can be made (Bagozzi & Warshaw, 1992), public goal statements are often used as a standard counseling technique for fostering behavioral change. Without such a statement, however, the goal remains secret, and there is little opportunity for others to support the goal. With my former literacy student, Len (Moulton, 1994; Moulton & Holmes, 1995), once he felt he was making progress, he announced his intentions to his family and continued his progress with their assistance and support. Carl had clearly stated his intention of learning to read by telling his family and friends long before he even found a literacy program in which to enroll. Marie did not. At one point, when she felt she was making some progress, she told her Bible study group and received encouragement. Unfortunately, as she felt her progress erode, she abandoned the group. Marie thought about
telling her husband and told me she would, but the opportunity passed and, along with it, her feeling of improvement.

Marie's secrecy was similar to Mr. Paynter's in Fingeret and Danin's (1991) report on a New York literacy program. Mr. Paynter said he never told anyone other than his immediate family that he couldn't read because "I always felt like I was a dummy" (p. 121). Marie said essentially the same thing, but she kept her secret even from her immediate family. Like the other persistent students in the New York program, however, Mr. Paynter received help from his family, but like Carl, he and family members argued over the type of help. While members of Carl's family claimed, "He holler at me," Mr. Paynter claimed it was the other way around: when his sister helped him, he said, she "like to holler" (Fingeret & Danin, 1991, p. 124).

The family is not the only arena of potential support for overt literacy actions. Carl was able to find help in his public life at work and with friends. While most of the students in the New York program (Fingeret & Danin, 1991) were not as open as Carl in requesting help from others in public, they were part of a group learning situation, and those seen as successful learners reported that they made great effort to integrate literacy into
both their private and public lives. Marie made little effort to use her literacy skills in either her private or public life for fear of uncovering her secret, but she apparently realized a need for more overt literacy support and requested more sessions. Darkenwald and Silvestri (1992), in their evaluation of a New Jersey program, recommended tutors and classes be available on a more frequent basis than one or two days a week. While the researchers attributed this recommendation to a desire by students to make faster progress, it is unclear whether the progress is due from additional instruction or additional support in practice of literacy learning. Whatever may be the case, it seems that more overt practice and use of literacy learning is required for progress. As Coles (1984) said of his student, Earl, it was not enough that his self-concepts changed; Earl needed "to act in the world as a changing person" (p. 466).

Self-esteem and learning. The importance of self-concept and self-esteem in education, and adult basic education in particular, has a wide base of support. Findings from Eberle and Robinson (1980), Goodman (1985), Norman and Malicky (1986) and Smith-Burke, Parker, and Deegan (1987) indicated that many adults entering literacy programs had low self-esteem. In fact, raising
their self-esteem was the motivation for some adults' enrollment in literacy programs (Beder & Valentine, 1990; Eberle & Robinson, 1980; Mezirow, Darkenwald, & Knox, 1975; Norman & Malicky, 1986; Smithe-Burke, Parker, & Deegan, 1987). After completion of programs, when asked what was the outcome of their learning, adult literacy learners cited improved self-esteem more frequently than improved reading skills (Darkenwald & Valentine, 1984). Low self-esteem inhibited other adult students from learning (Belz, 1984; Coles, 1984; Johnston, 1985).

If self-esteem is a factor in learning, then the two students I worked with were comparable to students in these previous studies and others. Prior to his enrollment in the literacy program, both Carl and his family already perceived him with high esteem. Unlike one of the students in Johnston's (1985) study, Carl was not embarrassed about his lack of literacy skills and was, therefore, able to receive help from his family and others. Carl was more like the student in my previous study (Moulton, 1994; Moulton & Holmes, 1995), whose family respected him highly and, once he had divulged his enrollment in a literacy program, provided uncritical help and support as he moved from a second to seventh grade reading level.

Marie's low self-esteem prevented her from receiving
help from her family or others. The discomfort she felt when she tried working with her son was the same as that felt by Johnston's (1985) student working with a daughter. In fact, the words of the two students commenting on their experience were almost the same. While Marie said, "I won't try that again," Johnston's student said, "Never did that again" (p. 173). Marie was also similar to Belz's (1984) and Coles' (1984) students, who needed to solve personal relationship problems, which affected their self-esteem, before they could progress. Marie's final words about her learning experience, how it had been "a positive thing," focused on the improvement of her self-concept rather than on her reading, which showed little improvement. High, or at least improved, self-esteem may, thus, be a precursor to learning to read as an adult.

Family involvement. While there is little research on family involvement of adults learning to read, there is a large body of literature supporting family involvement with children's literacy learning (e.g., Chall & Snow, 1982; Smith, 1988; Snow, et al, 1991; Taylor, 1983; Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines, 1988). With adults, Kazemek and Kazemek (1994) have advocated family involvement, but only Fitzsimmons (1991), Holmes (1991), and Morse (1992) seem to have touched on this aspect with inconclusive and
contradictory results: Fitzsimmons found that adults learned despite non-supportive families, Morse found that adults learned with supportive families, and Holmes found the difference between supportive and non-supportive families was statistically insignificant. Theories on literacy acquisition (see Cambourne, 1988; Smith, 1988), adult learning (see Freire, 1970; Knowles, 1980), and family systems (see Lappin, 1988; Minuchin, 1974), all state a need for support from those surrounding the learner or the person making a change, particularly the family. At the same time, however, studies have found the family environment to be an obstacle to change and learning (Cross, 1979, 1981; Horsman, 1990; Rigg, 1985; Stanton & Todd; 1979).

For Carl and Marie, the families were both a help and a hindrance, but in varying degrees. Carl's family supported his efforts through verbal encouragement and assistance in reading, but the type of reading assistance often undermined his efforts, as did the conflicts that arose from it. Marie found inadvertent support in her son's use of her improving ability to help him with his schoolwork; for the most part, however, the family was an obstacle not only because of her secrecy about her learning and their presumed attitude toward it but also because of conflict arising from non-literacy-related
events. It seems fairly clear that support from the family is needed for change and learning to occur, but it is far less clear what that support comprises and how it can be given without creating conflict.

**Concepts of literacy and learning.** In studying the concepts of reading held by adult literacy learners, Keefe and Meyer (1980) and Malicky and Norman (1982, 1989) found that low-level learners and newly enrolled learners at different levels often saw reading as Carl and Marie did, as an act of decoding print. Their concepts seemed to change, however, as their level of reading increased (Malicky & Norman, 1982, 1989). The concepts held by Carl and Marie also changed as they were tutored. The pace of their conceptual changes seemed to differ, however, perhaps because their levels of literacy differed. Carl entered the program unable to read at all, and he seemed to cling to his concept of reading as decoding longer than Marie did. Marie entered the program at a higher level of reading than Carl, a level where Malicky and Norman (1989) found adult literacy students had already shifted their concepts, and perhaps for this reason, Marie adapted her concepts of reading and writing almost immediately.

There appears to be little research on adult literacy students' concepts of literacy learning, but both Moll
(1994) and Ziegahn (1992) found that low-literate adults perceived few problems when they wanted to learn something other than reading and writing. Their concepts of literacy learning, however, were associated highly with school experiences, usually negative ones, and seen as totally different concepts. Carl and Marie also seemed to begin their literacy programs with concepts for learning literacy that differed from their concepts of learning in general. However, it seemed that Carl's and Marie's concepts of learning and what they needed to do to learn began to change to accommodate their altered concepts of literacy. These two conceptual changes did not appear to be synchronous; concepts of literacy learning seemed to change only after concepts of literacy had changed. The lack of synchronization, however, may have been influenced by my acquiescing to requests by Marie and by Carl's family for activities that better suited their earlier concepts of literacy. As the students' tutor, I had to make a choice between what I believed would help them and what the students believed would help them. Choosing the students' suggested activities, I temporarily reinforced their concepts of both literacy and learning rather than encouraging change in either.

Research on learning in children and youth clearly
shows the need to teach learning strategies at the same time as content (e.g., Armbruster, Echols, & Brown, 1982; Johnston & Winograd, 1985; Kletzien, 1991). With adults, who may have misconcepts about both literacy and learning, teaching a combination of literacy and learning concepts seems just as necessary.

The tutor's role. There has been little research on the role the tutor plays in students' lives, but if the tutor acts as a catalyst of change, then it would seem that the tutor needs to know more than just a philosophy of and some strategies for teaching reading and writing. In studying tutors, Ceprano (1995) found that volunteers, who had not been taught strategies appropriate to their philosophies of reading, relied on activities that often reinforced students' (mis)concepts of reading rather than changed them. Her notation of the need for change in tutor training seems well taken but does not, perhaps, go far enough. For Carl and Marie, the changes I encouraged by being their tutor created conflict, within the students, between the students and tutor, and between the students and families.

Recognizing this facet of the tutor's role, the adult literacy special interest group of the International Reading Association (1991) suggested that adult literacy tutors and teachers have a background in counseling as
well as in reading and adult education. This suggestion
has some basis in the studies of individual students by
Belz (1985), Coles (1984), and Johnston (1985). The
stories of Carl and Marie, both of whom encountered
strife at home during their tutoring program, also
suggest the need for tutors to have a background in
counseling.

**Arising conflict.** In family systems theory,
disharmony in the family accompanies change in an
individual member (Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 1991; Lappin,
1988; Minuchin, 1974; Stanton & Todd, 1979; Stryker,
1972). Families can make accommodations and accept the
change, they can reject the change and force the
individual to change back, or they can break apart if
both the individual and the other members fail to
negotiate the change. Learning to read and write is
change. At first, Carl's family successfully negotiated
the change, but the disharmony escalated into a conflict
that was much more difficult for them to handle. By
keeping her literacy learning secret, Marie did not allow
her family to negotiate. She was changing, but she did
not make them aware of how or why. To maintain her
changes and her secret, she broke apart the family. While
Fingeret and Danin (1991) found in their study that adult
literacy students had to negotiate changes in their
social relationships in order to be successful at learning, they did not report the level of conflict which occurred in both my students' families. Only a few studies have.

Horsman (1990), reporting on women in literacy programs at much higher levels than either Carl or Marie, found that some encountered such obstacles from their husbands that they divorced them. On the other hand, Rigg's (1985) basic literacy student encountered such obstacles from her husband that she dropped out. In my own study (Moulton, 1994; Moulton & Holmes, 1995), the student's situation was similar to Carl's in that the family knew about the literacy problem and tutoring; it was even similar in that one of the daughters, along with her husband and children, lived with them. The student's wife walked out of the house several times because of the level of conflict, as Carl did once, but she never left the marriage. Instead, she evicted her daughter's family. Ivers (1995) reported on a student whose situation was more similar to Marie's in that the student kept his literacy problem and tutoring a secret from his family. The student's wife divorced him during his period of learning because of all the changes in him. They remarried a year later, but his words of advice to other students were that the family needs to "become aware of
the changes that will take place" (p. 8). These words seem almost too mild to describe what took place not only for this student himself but for Horsman's (1990) and those I worked with as well. It appears that it was not merely change that occurred, not merely disharmony, but outright conflict, which could either destroy a family or the individual's desire to learn.

Implications

The findings of this study seem to have several implications that do not seem to have been recognized previously. Unfortunately, these implications lead neither to clearcut guidelines for students, tutors, or agencies nor to simplification of any of the problems they face.

Perhaps the most important implication, and one that underlies all others, is the recognition that conflict not only may, but probably will, occur during the course of adult literacy learning. It is the level and frequency of conflict that appears to vary rather than its occurrence. It may stem from differing concepts of literacy and literacy learning; it may stem from interactions that may or may not be specifically related to literacy; it may stem from real or perceived relationships between the student and family members. Whatever its cause, such conflict creates emotional
stress; students who are under continued emotional stress cannot learn (Goleman, 1995).

If this is true, students and families should be aware of potential conflict. The need for awareness, however, raises the issue of a student's right to privacy. An agency or program cannot require that families be informed of a student's enrollment. Nor can it refuse to serve students who wish to maintain the secret of their literacy level and enrollment, especially when divulging the secret may lead to other problems in the family. Professional counseling may be a partial, albeit expensive, means of dealing with these problems of both students and families, but students should not have to choose between learning to read and maintaining their family relationships.

Another implication is, perhaps, best stated in the words of Ivers' (1995) student: "Family involvement and support is everything!" (p. 8). Students should be encouraged to enlist the aid of their families through overt actions. Families or significant others play a vital role in the student's learning, but if conflict is going to arise, then programs and tutors must plan for that role. Recognizing that they and their tutors are acting as agents of change, agencies must take responsibility for enabling change and its accompanying
conflicts. To avoid some conflicts, perhaps concepts of literacy and learning should be aligned. That would mean, however, that agencies must not only teach tutors appropriate strategies for working with their students in sessions but also provide a means of teaching families how to work with the students at home. For those students who do not have families or who feel they cannot divulge their secret and/or enlist their families' aid, programs and agencies may need to provide alternative support through both study groups and group counseling.

A third implication lies in the phrase I have coined as overt literacy action. Students must not only be encouraged to make use of their literacy learning outside of their tutoring sessions or classes, but they must be helped to recognize when their new knowledge can be appropriately used. Overt actions may start within the family if the family is a safe haven for the student, and they may continue with other students in support groups or class, but these actions need to be extended beyond these arenas. If students wish to become literate, then they must act as literates in a literate world as soon as it is possible for them to do so.

A final, somewhat indirect implication is that since learning to read as an adult appears to be such a difficult task, it behooves educators to teach all of our
children to read at an early age when their primary activity in life is school and learning. Adult literacy learners have difficulties not just because of the task of acquiring literacy itself but also because of the problems in family relationships that seem to arise from it. While some children may have problems that interfere with learning to read, they usually do not have the complexity of relationships that adults do. Young children do not have the responsibilities of adult life that often take precedence over learning. It is by reaching the children that we can best eliminate the problems of teaching adults to read.

Conclusion

Familial conflict in the context of literacy learning has not been previously identified as a major factor in either adult literacy learning or persistence in adult literacy programs. Before identifying it as such, however, more research is needed to explore whether or not such conflict is truly inherent and if it occurs in varying degrees in different literacy learning contexts. If conflict is truly a part of adult literacy learning, ways of ameliorating it must then be discovered and implemented. Amelioration is not a simple task, however, since it involves multiple factors of literacy, the students and their self-perceptions, literacy tutors, and
family members and relationships. Yet it seems that it is only through such amelioration that those adults who want to learn can learn...without sacrificing their families in their pursuit of literacy or sacrificing their dreams of literacy for the sake of their families.
APPENDIX A

HUMAN SUBJECTS REVIEW
TO: Margaret R Moulton
FROM: Dr. William Schulze, Director, Office of Research Administration
DATE: 16 November 1994
RE: Status of Human Subject Protocol entitled: "Impact of the Family on Adult Learning to Read"

This memorandum is official notification that the protocol for the project reference above has been approved. This approval is for a one year duration. At the end of the year, you must notify this office if the project will be continued.

If you have any questions or require any assistance, please give us a call.
DESCRIPTION OF STUDY

1. **SUBJECTS** for the study are native English-speaking adults who read below the sixth grade level and who have voluntarily enrolled in the Henderson Public Library's adult literacy program to improve their reading, writing, and spelling abilities. **SUBJECTS** also include family members of the literacy program participants as well as the tutors of the literacy program participants.

2. The **PURPOSE** of this study is to investigate the impact of the family on an adult learning to read. A review of research indicates that families have a large impact on children learning to read (Chall & Snow, 1982; Heath, 1983; Snow, Barnes, Chandler, Goodman, & Hemphill, 1991; Taylor, 1983; Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines, 1988), but there is very little research on how low-literate adults are impacted by their families. While Coles (1984) postulated that cognition must be studied as part of an individual's social relationships, only Fingeret and Danin (1991) and Moulton and Holmes (in press) have actually demonstrated a relationship between learning to read and social-familial interactions. Since drop-out rates are high (Bishop, 1991; Bowren, 1988) and learning gains are low ((Diekhoff, 1988; Wikeland, Reder, & Hart-Landsberg, 1992) in adult literacy programs, more research is needed to investigate the relationship between cognitive and social change.

A qualitative research design, employing case study methodology, will be used. Data will be collected through interviews, journals, and visual family maps as well as through miscue analysis and informal reading inventories. All data and data interpretation will be available to volunteers at any time during and after the investigation. The researcher will act as a participant observer by training tutors to work with adult students.

3. There are no **RISKS** involved in this study.

4. The results of this study will **BENEFIT** the adult students involved, people engaged in providing adult literacy services, and professionals in the field of adult literacy. Results of the study will add to the body of knowledge about adult literacy, an area in which few systematic studies have been conducted.
5. **RISK-BENEFIT RATIO**: Not applicable.

6. The **COSTS TO THE SUBJECTS** are none.

7-8. **INFORMED CONSENT FORMS** will be read to and signed by all volunteer subjects and collected by Margaret R. Moulton, the principal investigator. When children are part of the families of volunteer subjects, forms will also be read aloud and signed by both children and parents. Originals will be stored in the researcher's home office. Volunteer participants will also receive copies.
APPENDIX B

CONSENT FORMS
CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY
UNIVERSITY OF NEVADA, LAS VEGAS
STUDENT FORM

You and your family are being asked to participate in a research study from which I hope to learn more about how adults learn to read. I am doing this project as part of my doctoral program in the College of Education at UNLV. You have been asked to be in this project because you are an adult who has expressed a desire to learn to read better. If you decide to volunteer, I will be your tutor, and our tutoring sessions will be audio-taped each time, beginning with our initial interview. The other members of your family will also be asked to participate in interviews at your home. For you to participate, the members of your family who live in your home must also agree to participate.

Your real name will not be used in the study when it is reported to my professors or the general public.

Your participation in the current study is entirely voluntary and you are free to withdraw your consent at any time. If during your association with the research study, before or after its completion, you have any questions, please feel free to ask for any further information from the project researcher, Margaret Moulton, at 458-4907. You may also find out more about your rights as a research participant by calling UNLV's Office of Research Administration at 895-1357.

YOUR SIGNATURE BELOW WILL INDICATE THAT YOU HAVE DECIDED TO VOLUNTEER AS A RESEARCH PARTICIPANT AND THAT YOU HAVE READ THE INFORMATION PROVIDED ABOVE.

_____________________________  ______________________________
Date                                         Signature of participant or legal rep

_____________________________
Date                                         Signature of investigator
CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY
UNIVERSITY OF NEVADA, LAS VEGAS
ADULT FAMILY MEMBER'S FORM

You are being asked to participate in a research study from which I hope to learn more about how adults learn to read. I am doing this project as part of my doctoral program in the College of Education at UNLV. You have been asked to be in this project because an adult in your family has expressed a desire to learn to read better. If you decide to volunteer, I will be asking you to participate in audio-taped interviews with me in your home once a month, starting right after tutoring sessions begin and ending at the end of the UNLV semester or when the student decides to leave the program. You will also be asked to keep a week-long journal twice. If you need help writing it, I will help you.

Your real name will not be used in the study when it is reported to my professors or the general public.

Your participation in the current study is entirely voluntary and you are free to withdraw your consent at any time. If during your association with the research study, before or after its completion, you have any questions, please feel free to ask for any further information from the project researcher, Margaret Moulton, at 458-4907. You may also find out more about your rights as a research participant by calling UNLV's Office of Research Administration at 895-1357.

YOUR SIGNATURE BELOW WILL INDICATE THAT YOU HAVE DECIDED TO VOLUNTEER AS A RESEARCH PARTICIPANT AND THAT YOU HAVE READ THE INFORMATION PROVIDED ABOVE.

________________________  ____________________________
Date                     Signature of participant or legal rep

________________________  ____________________________
Date                     Signature of investigator
CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY  
UNIVERSITY OF NEVADA, LAS VEGAS  
CHILD'S FORM

You are being asked to be part of a research study on how adults learn to read. I am doing this project as part of my doctoral program in the College of Education at UNLV. You have been asked to be in this project because one of your parents has expressed a desire to learn to read better. If you decide to volunteer, I will want to interview you once a month in your home, starting right after tutoring sessions begin and ending at the end of the UNLV semester or when your parent decides to leave the program. You will also be asked to keep a week-long journal twice. If you need help writing it, I will help you.

Your real name will not be used in the study when it is reported to my professors or the general public.

Being part of this research is completely voluntary, and you are free to withdraw your consent at any time. If you have any questions, please feel free to ask me for more information. You can call me at 458-4907.

YOUR SIGNATURE BELOW WILL INDICATE THAT YOU HAVE DECIDED TO VOLUNTEER AS A RESEARCH PARTICIPANT AND THAT YOU HAVE READ THE INFORMATION PROVIDED ABOVE.

________________________     ________________________________
Date                     Signature of participant

________________________     ________________________________
Date                     Signature of parent or legal guardian

________________________     ________________________________
Date                     Signature of investigator
APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS
Initial Student Interview Questions

Name __________________________________________

Age ___  Sex ___  Occupation ________________

How far did you get in school?

What experiences with reading have you had previously?

What did you like/dislike about them?

What kinds of things do you want to read?

Why did you decide to do this now?

What do you think reading is? Writing?

Do you try to read/write on your own?

When you are reading/writing and come to something that gives you trouble, what do you do? Do you ever do anything else?

Do you know someone who is a good reader/writer? Do you think he/she ever has a problem reading/writing? What do you think he/she does when he/she has trouble reading/writing something?

Throughout your life you've learned how to do a lot of things. Tell me about something you've learned to do and how you learned to do it.

Do you think it's easier to learn things on your own or to learn them with someone else who is learning, too?

Who are the other members of your family?

Do the other members of your family read/write? What do they read/write?

What do you do while they're reading or writing?

What things do you do with the other members of your family?

Do the other members know you're coming here? What do they think about it?

What changes do you anticipate in your life/family as a result of learning to read?
Initial Family Member Interview Questions

Do you spend much time with the other people in your family? What kinds of things do you do with each one?

Who do you ask for help with your homework?

When did you first know that your father/mother/husband/wife couldn't read? How did you find out?

What do you think about (student's name) learning to read?

What kind of changes do you think it will create?

Do you help your father/mother/husband/wife with reading and writing now? How do you help?

Will you help him/her study? How?

What do you like to read? How often do you read?

What do you like to write? How often do you write?

What do you like best in school? What do you like least?

What kinds of things do you do outside of school?
Interview Questions for Sondra

When did [Marie] first tell you about going to the library to be tutored?

Does she ever tell you about our sessions or ask for help with reading/writing/spelling?

Have you noticed any changes in her since she began being tutored?

How much reading/writing does [Marie] see you and [Al] do at home? What kind of things?

What do you think of [Marie]? I know you love her, but do you think she can become a good reader/writer?
Dear [Marie],

Here are the questions I wanted to ask you. If they don't make sense, give me a call so we can talk about them. If you want to write out your responses, that's great, but if you want to talk them over with me, I need to meet with you so I can get them on tape. OK?

We started talking about this one the other day. You've gone through a lot of things since we met...problems with [Tory], changing jobs, moving to a new place. How do you think any of these things are related to the increased reading and writing you were doing during this time?

How do you think your increased reading and writing affected your relationships with [Tory] or [Sondra] or other members of your family? At one time you said that writing so much for me made you think more about how you felt about things and then caused you to think more about the relationships in your life and try to make changes. Do you still think that's true?

By learning more about reading and writing, do you feel any differently about yourself? Do you think other people see you any differently now than they did before?

I've enclosed the first thing you ever wrote for me. Would you rewrite it for me? You can change words, ideas, spelling, punctuation...or you can just kind of copy it. I think this activity may give both of us an idea of how much change there has been in your writing.

I've enclosed an envelope for you to send this back to me, or give me a call and I'll pick it up and take you to lunch at the same time.

Talk to you soon.
Final Questions for Carl

Since you've started learning to read, [Tony] says he thinks you've changed while [Brenda] thinks you're just the same as ever. What do you think?

Do you think your relationships with the other people in your family have changed? Are you closer or do you get into more arguments?

What do you think about the progress you've made? Sometimes you came in and said things were getting harder, but other times you said they were getting easier. Why do you think that was so?

What do you think about reading? About writing?

If we were starting over again, what do you think we should change?
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