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THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

MOTIVATION AND IMPACT:
THE VOICE OF ILLITERATE WOMEN

by

(C) BARBARA BAER PILLAY

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH
IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE
OF MASTER OF EDUCATION

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION

EDMONTON, ALBERTA

FALL, 1986

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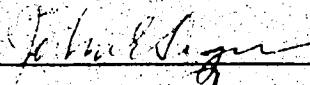
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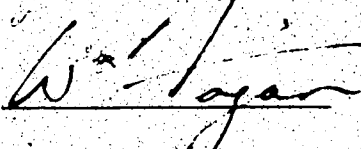
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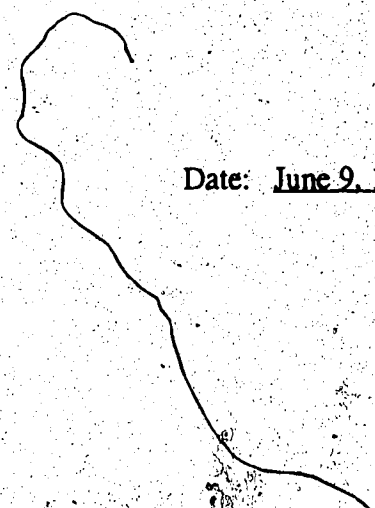


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ABSTRACT

The primary focus of this study was to explore the motivations of women who had decided to become involved in a literacy programme of some type. A further consideration became the impact of this involvement on the women's lives. The research process revolved around two questions: a) why are you involved in a literacy programme? and b) what impact has this involvement had on your life?

The existence of an illiterate population in a developed nation, such as Canada, has only come to the public's attention in the last ten years and therefore its realities have only begun to be defined. While a vast majority of the illiterate population never enroll in a literacy class and adult literacy classes typically have high drop-out rates, little research has been devoted to adult illiterates as adult learners or about the conditions of their lives. An intent of this research was to add to the scanty literature regarding adult literacy from the point of view of the learners involved.

To match purpose and setting with methodology, a qualitative study was designed. The study owes its philosophical underpinnings to the interpretive paradigm and is essentially a qualitative look at an aspect of women's lives; namely, their decision to come to learn. Four women of various ages and involved in a variety of literacy programmes took part in focussed interviews over a period of seven months. For the purposes of triangulation, documents produced by a different group of twenty-seven women were scrutinized and added to the data collected. Member checks were carried out with each of the original respondents and a credibility check was undertaken with another surrogate sample of six women in a group setting. Taped interviews were transcribed, field notes were categorized and all data were analyzed through a process of analytic induction.

The findings were reported in two separate chapters, one chapter for each major

research question. In total, seventeen thematic statements were derived from the data collected. These statements were grouped according to their function: instrumental, situational or psychological.

Ten thematic statements encapsulate the reasons for the women's involvement in literacy programmes. The instrumental reasons include the desires of the women to learn how to read for everyday tasks, to help their children and to increase their employment prospects. Situational factors speak of the opportunities for learning that the women now have and of the encouragement that they have received from others. The psychological reasons include their desire to stop being embarrassed, feeling ashamed, to do something for themselves and to be involved with other people. The women also speak of their confidence and pride in themselves as factors which encouraged them to come to a literacy programme.

Seven thematic statements describe the impact this involvement has had on the women's lives. Their involvement has enabled them to improve their reading and writing skills and has given them some hope regarding employment in the future. The women's situations have changed in that they feel that they now have more control over their lives and their families are happy and proud of them. Psychologically speaking, the women are gaining in confidence, they feel better about themselves and they are no longer sitting at home, bored.

The four major conclusions of this study are: a) women become involved in literacy programmes for a variety of individual reasons and no single factor fully explains their motivation; b) involvement in literacy programmes changes peoples' lives; c) the present emphasis on employment-oriented literacy programming does not reflect the reality nor the needs of beginning readers; and d) gains in self-respect and positive self-concept in the learners should be stressed and valued.

Two general implications arise from the conclusions: (i) the multi-faceted nature

of the phenomenon must be taken into account when working with or on behalf of learners in adult literacy programmes and 2) alternatives to institutionalized, employment-oriented literacy programmes must be envisioned, enacted and fully supported.

The last word has been left to the women themselves who remind us that although they cannot read, they do not lack intelligence, skills or abilities. As human beings, they are inherently worthy and they deserve to be given every opportunity to develop their potential as valued members of society.

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Chapter One

INTRODUCTION

Can you read this? Millions of adults in the United States and a few million in Canada cannot and yet, this thesis is about them. This is their story, as told primarily through the voices of four women. It is a story of courage and fear, determination and disappointment, dreams and realities. Ultimately, it is a story about more than reading and writing. It is a story that will be recognized by anyone who has, by choice or happenstance, participated in a fundamental life changing experience.

SETTING THE SCENE

The Statistics

On February eleventh, 1986, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation televised a documentary entitled "Hidden Minority." This exposé revealed the nature and extent of the problem of adult illiteracy in Canada. The shocking statistics were given: four million Canadians cannot read the newspaper, fill out application forms, read poison labels and one million Canadians cannot read at all. One quarter of the entire adult population in Canada can be labelled "illiterate" and this is in a highly developed country where, when we consider illiteracy, we dismiss it as a Third World phenomenon. The "functionally illiterate" make up one-quarter to one-third of the adult population in the industrialized western world (Thomas, 1983:20). In Canada, a grade eight level of achievement is considered necessary for functional literacy; the undereducated are those with less than grade nine. 28.4% of Canadian adults have less than grade nine; 5.5% have less than grade five. In Canada, as in the rest of the technological western world,

grade ten is the minimum required for most skilled jobs and less than grade eight means exclusion from many areas of employment and skill training. This is regardless of one's abilities (Thomas, 1983:2).

The statistics from the United States are as shocking: Carman St. John Hunter and David Harman's report for the Ford Foundation published in 1979 found that one in five American adults does not have the functional competency to manage effectively in this society (1979:1). More than one-third of the adult population has some trouble with everyday tasks requiring some degree of literacy (1979:103). Where did they find this "hidden minority?" Hunter and Harman (1979:31) found these adults wherever there are poor people and congregated racial and ethnic minority groups. They also found them in prison where 75% of the inmates have not completed high school compared to 38% of the general adult population.

For whatever reason, illiteracy is hidden in our society; its victims go to great lengths to mask their "inadequacies" and fear an indifferent or sceptical response, if or when they are "caught." As a result, those most in need of a basic education, tailored and responsive to their needs, are not likely to receive it. They are the poor, the native, the imprisoned, the "hidden minority" and their low status does not contribute to a strong lobbying position. That their illiteracy keeps them from effective participation in our society is one point on which all the experts agree (Thomas, 1983:2).

The Definition

Yet, the new requirements posed by technological change and the transformation of communication systems makes functional literacy an evolving concept and renders more and more people at a disadvantage in dealing with their increasingly complex society. The United Nations (U.N.) recognizes the importance of literacy throughout the world; Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states every person has

the right to an education, free and compulsory at least at the elementary level (Thomas, 1983: 22). The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) goes further in its assertion that adult illiteracy is a form of discrimination which divides mankind. When literacy is seen as "the ability to utilize effectively the communication systems of a given society at a particular time and to participate fully in the rights, responsibilities and privileges of citizenship" (Thomas, 1983:2), we are talking about much more than reading and writing. We need the political will to see literacy "not only in light of Canadian manpower needs but in the overall context of life-long learning" so that "adults can fulfill themselves and join the mainstream... discover their potential... have the chance to participate as members" (Thomas, 1983: 9) - of our increasingly complex society which is so badly in need of everyone's contributions, not just the educationally advantaged.

One of the reasons for the lack of political will in North America is the definitional problem. The governmental bodies, policy-makers and educators cannot agree on a uniformly accepted definition of the rudimentary characteristics of adult literacy. Huster and Harman (1979: 12) argue that every society has expectations about the level of literacy required and the percentage of the population that should meet that standard. Historically, they point out that at one time, the ability to read and write one's own name was sufficient proof of literacy; the 1951 UNESCO definition included the ability to read and write a short, simple statement on the person's every-day life. deCastell and Luke (1983: 375) also point out that literacy has been systematically redefined and credit the world wars of this century with giving us the terms Intelligence Quotient (I.Q.) and functional literacy. Apparently, one of the legacies of First World War Army testing was the concept of I.Q. as a measure of ability; during the Second World War, the term "functional literacy" was coined by the United States (U.S.) Army and set at the fifth grade reading level at that time. This variability and their own research

has led Harman and Hunter "to believe that all definitions of literacy or illiteracy are completely relative" (1979: 7).

In contrast to the relative position is the traditional view held by most stakeholders that literacy is a psychological capability acquired by access to appropriate educational opportunities (Guthrie and Kirsch, 1984: 351). As such, this leads to the conclusion that there is only one kind of literacy, permanent and general, despite the historical evidence to the contrary, and therefore, appropriate training, materials and incentives can eradicate the problem. Scribner, in the U.S. and Charnley and Jones in Britain, see literacy as neither static nor as a permanent state which one attains forever and therefore can be eliminated forever (Scribner, 1984: 8; Charnley and Jones, 1979: 8). To this end, however, argues deCastell and Luke (1983: 385), traditionalists attempt to fit literacy into a set of neutral behaviours which can be operationalized through behavioural objectives in value-neutral terminology. Scribner (1984:7) also argues that the search for the "one best" way of defining literacy goes on so that the components of literacy can be broken down and made targets for instruction; an objective which is based on the belief that literacy is an ability of an individual.

Not only is this view in contradiction with historical circumstances, but it is inconsistent with the cross-cultural findings of Scribner and Cole and the recent research from many disciplines which favours a definition of literacy as a social interaction process (Guthrie and Kirsch, 1984: 352). People read different materials in different ways for different purposes so that one can be literate in one setting and illiterate in another (Guthrie and Kirsch, 1984: 353). In fact, "the single most compelling fact about literacy is that it is a social achievement; individuals in societies without writing systems do not become literate. Literacy is an outcome of cultural transmission" (Scribner, 1984:7).

The one aspect of literacy that deCastell and Luke (1983: 374) argue is universal

for all time is that the concept of literacy and literacy instruction has always been part and parcel of the concrete historical circumstances of a given time and "[e]ach has aimed to create a particular kind of individual, in a particular social order" (deCastell and Luke, 1983: 387). Perhaps this is why there is a definitional controversy over literacy; we have differing views about literacy's social purposes and value (Scribner, 1984: 8). While we continue to lack consensus, we will continue to produce different measurements of the scope of the problem, determine different objectives for programmes aimed at forming a literate people and continue to judge individuals on those bases (Scribner, 1984:6).

For the purposes of this study, the definition of an illiterate adult will be borrowed from Charnley and Jones who, in their recognition of the relativity and realities of literacy, suggest that "an illiterate adult is an adult who thinks he has a reading or writing problem" (1979:171).

The Programmes

In the meantime, governmental bodies continue to view literacy in the traditional, static sense and continue to devise policy and implement programmes on that basis. This occurs despite overwhelming statistics which indicate incredible failure, especially in terms of attracting students and in keeping them. In Canada, education is a provincial responsibility while job-training is largely part of the federal sphere. The paper, Federal Task Force Report. Employment Opportunities for the 80's, included a recommendation that the federal government commit itself to an elimination of illiteracy in Canada. The link was made between the shortage of skilled trades and high unemployment and the large proportion of adults who lack even the requirements to enter training programmes (Thomas, 1983: 6). Thus far, programmes have been employment oriented," implemented by the provinces under various arrangements which have little to

do with functional illiteracy and quantitatively have little impact" (Thomas, 1983:4).

North Americans continue to assume that illiteracy will soon be a thing of the past as our public schools increase in efficiency but international experience does not support this view (Thomas, 1983: 8). "Experience has shown that there will always be a number of adults who for one reason or another, are not successful in the regular school system. For these people a "second chance" is needed in more flexible situations and supportive environments" (Thomas, 1983: 109). Instead, adult literacy training in Canada since the sixties has operated largely through the federally funded Canada Manpower Training Programme with its emphasis on training leading to employment and its strict time limits of eligibility. There exist some community programmes run by volunteers and private organizations who work with learners on a one-to-one basis and then there has been some school board and college activity (Thomas, 1983: 12). The result is that opportunities for literacy have come to be identified with work oriented literacy programmes that fit into the established economic order, providing the workplace with the needed manpower. However, that was in the seventies; unemployment levels in the eighties have made a farce of the employment goals of the policy-makers and the forced employment goals of the individuals who enter these programmes.

So, people with literacy problems in Alberta can attend classes at a vocational institution, hope that their school district offers classes or become involved in a volunteer tutoring programme. Most, simply, do not come. Harman and Hunter (1979: 103) report that educators and legislators have agreed on a figure of fifty-four to sixty-four million Americans as the target population for publicly funded up-grading classes and that figure was derived in the mid-sixties. "Yet only 2 to 4 percent of them ever enter the programs....an enormous gap remains between the number who seek help and those who need it. This gap has important implications both for policies and for programs" (Harman and Hunter, 1979: 103). Fingeret (1982), Kavale and Lindsey

(1977) and Boraks (1981) all describe the population that is reached as miniscule and representative of only a small proportion of those who are in need. When discussing their research in Britain, Chamley and Jones (1979: 23) also speak of "looking at a small surviving group out of an originally small minority out of a quite large minority of the adult population."

Despite the lack of consensus regarding the term illiteracy, research has given us approximate numbers of adults who have reading and writing problems (Hunter and Harman, 1979; Thomas, 1983;) in North America. These statistics shock us. Fingeret also points out that we have research documenting their predominant poverty, erratic employment and oppressed social class (1982: 1). When we look further into the statistics and realize that only two-four percent of this population are receiving help, we recognize that something is drastically wrong. Guthrie and Kirsch (1984: 351) argue that a continuing preoccupation with the statistics of the problem will only continue to lead to inappropriate evaluations of adult literacy and inefficient educational programming. Kavale and Lindsey (1977: 368) make the case that the statistics continue to be shocking because programming has been based on research descriptors which are misleading and instruction is based on scanty empirical evidence.

Most research in the area has been carried out by reading specialists and psychologists who are mainly concerned with how literacy should be taught (Levine, 1983: 263). This does not address the issue of the absence of the people in need. Scribner (1984: 7) is also concerned that the search is focussed on the fundamentals of literacy, the "one best" way of conceptualizing literacy so that we can "teach" those components. In Canada, too, Thomas (1983: 107) argues in her recommendations that we know the nature and size of the problem, we have documented the activities happening around the country but what we need is substantive, phenomenological research. She points out that only Quebec has attempted to come to grips with the

conceptual, psychological and sociological aspects of adult illiteracy and undereducation. It is these factors which need further research.

Indeed, it is argued that much of the reason for the lack of progress is the scant attention paid to learners, their characteristics and their needs (International Council for Adult Education, 1979: 33). Further, we do not know the actual conditions in which they live or what literacy can contribute to their lives. "Most evaluations and descriptions of literacy programs portray participants only through quantitative tables, statistics and ratios; rarely does the information assess learners' feelings and experiences in their daily lives" (International Council for Adult Education, 1979: 39). Boyd and Martin quote Manzo et al. "[m]uch of our failure as educators in helping America's illiterates is a by-product of not knowing who they are, what they feel, or just what they are all about" (1975:1). They continue "[a]rguing that adult educators lack factual knowledge and insightful experiences with Adult Basic Education students and, therefore, tend to relate to them with pity or resentment rather than empathy and understanding, they suggested such students are 'treated', 'remediated', and 'manipulated' but rarely 'educated' (Boyd and Martin, 1984: 87). Kavale and Lindsey agree that a fundamental problem is that we fail to meet the needs of our students because we lack a significant body of knowledge regarding them as people (1977: 370). Fingeret suggests that an understanding of adult illiterates in their social world is our biggest challenge today (1983:133).

Not only do we need to understand who they are but we need it from their point of view. Mezirow, et al.'s study published in 1975, was the result of two years of research focussed on literacy program operation, classroom interaction and human motivation. They made it clear that "[i]t seemed particularly critical to see what was happening from the point of view of Adult Basic Education students because efforts to improve the program depend on improving their performance" (1975:viii). Thomas

(1983:99) points out that planning is done on behalf of this population because of their "invisibility" and Amoroso (1984: 1) argues that a serious consequence is that much of the planning and instruction is not "fully grounded in the central concerns of the adult." Fingeret (1982: 10) is more scathing in her contention that social scientists and educators involved in the field of literacy have acted as if the only perspective on literacy that matters is their own. She says that

[w]e are missing half of the picture. We view literacy and lack of literacy from the vantage point of the literate. How do illiterate adults view literacy? There are millions of illiterate adults who are not enrolled in literacy programs. Why not? Do they share our overwhelmingly positive attitude toward learning to read and write? Do they share our condemnation of illiteracy? (1982: 1)

It may not be flattering for people involved in adult literacy work to contemplate but Harman and Hunter came to similar conclusions when they referred to Ziegler's work, "[t]hose who write papers about, design programs for and describe the 'problem' of illiteracy - educators, social workers, researchers, bureaucrats - do so to meet their own needs. It may well be legitimate ... to seek to discover why those with low levels of literacy attend classes" (1979: 20). It is also UNESCO's conclusion that programmes must take into account the question of why people are attracted to them and ensure that the programmes are devised according to what adult illiterates do want rather than some other's notion of what they should want (International Council for Adult Education, 1979: 34). They point out that little is known about the events or characteristics that signal or produce readiness to enter and carry on literacy courses (1979: 36) and that the motivation to do so comes from more than a general publicity campaign (1979: 44). In the United States, Mezirow and Richardson were also concerned with this question when they conducted their studies. Mezirow specifically set out to see how the students see themselves in literacy programmes, why they are there and what they think is in it for them (1975: viii). Richardson saw those adult illiterates who had not enrolled in literacy

programmes as a puzzling unknown and wanted to seek out variables which affected attendance (1981: 53). Finally, Charnley and Jones, in Britain, also looked at the population and speculated that it would be pertinent to ask why are some students enrolled and the vast majority are not?

The Focus

It is only in the last decade that the problem of adult illiteracy in Canada has come to the attention of the public and the various levels of government. After recognizing the fact that there exists a significant minority of adults in our society who have serious problems reading and writing and knowing that very few of the many who need help ever attend literacy classes, I decided to ask students enrolled in literacy programmes these two questions:

- 1) Why did you become involved with a literacy programme?
- 2) What impact has this had on your life?

I then had to decide on a sample and an appropriate methodology which would best serve this focus.

The Sample

My first inclination to limit this study to women was reinforced after speaking with a small group of literacy teachers who also speculated that men involved, especially in institutional programmes, were mainly at school to enable them to enter trade training programmes. Manpower was funding them and Manpower was sending them so their decision to upgrade was perhaps more of an external one. Secondly, I felt that interpreting the women's experience would be an easier task for another woman, myself. I did not feel that I could understand the men's experience as easily and there was more chance for misinterpretation because of that. Thirdly, I was aware of an informal drop-in

tutorial programme run by women for women in the downtown area so that I already had a connection for data collection.

The International Council for Education (1979: 39) reports that the majority of the illiterate people in the world are women and it is the Council's recommendation that profiles of participants in literacy programmes need to focus on the problems and conditions of the women's lives. Junge and Tegegne's 1985 study (606) did concentrate entirely on the women's experience as they had concluded that research on "qualitative change in the lives of the women who have participated is less well-known."

NATURE OF THE STUDY

In Boraks' article, "Research and Adult Literacy Programs," it is emphasized that the methodology employed in the study of adult literacy be matched appropriately to the information sought (1981: 5). Boraks contends that the context of the area is too complex and uncharted to be able to isolate important variables, never mind simplify and control them as in an experimental setting (1981: 8). It is argued that an interpretive inquiry approach would best accommodate the complexity of the literacy setting and add important understandings to the emerging information base.

Richardson (1981: 55) attempted a study which sought to correlate attendance in literacy programmes with age, gender, employment and marital status but found no significance for any of the selected variables. Her conclusion was that clinical interviews, observation and ethnographic studies may be better vehicles for determining attitudes and motivations in this setting and she urged further research using these types of methodology. Charnley and Jones (1979: 173) also felt that most methodological approaches would lead to an oversimplification of the nature of the learners' perceptions and would not be useful. Besides, as they also point out, by definition, communication

with the learners could not be in writing (1979: 6). They chose to use a qualitative approach in their study and were happy with their decision as they felt that they were able to more clearly locate commonalities of experience and gain greater insights into the true progress of Britain's national literacy campaign (1979: 6). Fingeret (1982: 10) also became involved in a qualitative field study to determine literacy as perceived by the learners, themselves, and she recommends further studies of this type which should include adults who would be considered as "successes" of literacy programmes.

Mezirow, et al. (1975: vi) wanted to contribute to the development of qualitative data on adult literacy. They felt that it would allow us to see literacy from those most directly involved and that generalizations emanating from this data could be used with more confidence in our attempts to understand the dynamics involved and educate on this basis. Thomas, in Canada, argues for more qualitative research into the whole area and laments the fact that there are only four universities here who have any ongoing activity and that there is only one professor working full-time in the area of adult literacy (1983: 107). It seems that the experts all agree that we know the statistics; the variables are inconstant and that the questions which need answers are most appropriately approached through the learners in the natural setting.

From the start, it had seemed obvious that the questions of this study would not fit into any framework but qualitative. Like Charnley and Jones, my "data was gathered from very loosely structured conversations with the students, recorded on tape, transcribed and grouped" (1979: 6). The bulk of the data was gathered from four female respondents, over a period of seven months, involved in three different literacy programmes. The respondents queried were women chosen by their teachers as people who would be comfortable discussing the issues. The literacy programmes were representative of the type of help offered in Alberta today: one woman was involved in a programme run by a vocational institute; one woman was attending classes in a

school-board-run programme; the last two women were involved in a drop-in programme which arranges for individual tutoring. The findings were confirmed through member checks with the original respondents and a credibility check which involved a group discussion with six women who were students in a school-based programme.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

It is Goodman's contention that literacy development must be rooted in the social web of values and cultural experiences of a group and its life opportunities and access to functions requiring literacy (1985: 391). "So literacy programs must be rooted in the realities of the communities they serve, and they must relate to real opportunities to use literacy in improvement of the quality of life" (Goodman, 1985: 391). Furthermore, Fingeret (1982: 1) clearly states that the perception of community needs must not be generated from the middle class perspective on literacy which counts it as one of the inherently "good" things in life. She says that "[w]hen we view illiteracy and literacy from the perspective of adults who are unable to read and write, we do not see just the reflection of ourselves, minus literacy skills. We see a different picture" (1982: 11). The end result of our refusal to see this different picture is that we will continue to project an image of inadequacy and dependency on to illiterate adults and therefore fail to attract more than the present token number of literacy programme participants (Fingeret, 1983: 142). Instead, we need to let the people speak for themselves.

Ultimately, the issue of literacy is and always has been an issue of power. deCastell and Luke (1983:374) say "[b]eing 'literate' has always referred to having mastery over the processes by means of which culturally significant information is coded." In the same vein, Goodman sees written language as the repository for the sum total of the world's information "[b]ut in an information age the extent to which people

are literate and therefore can directly access, contribute to, and use information will strongly relate to their power and roles in society" (1985: 389). In their study for the Ford Foundation, Harman and Hunter were reminded "how directly the level of program funding reflects the perceived importance - and power - of the people for whom a program is designed" (1979: 2). More direct explicit evidence that reveals this system's need for a certain proportion of its population to remain in their powerless roles is the successes of nation-wide literacy campaigns in Cuba, Nicaragua and China where the need and political will was demonstrated. Harman and Hunter (1979:20) argue that here, in North America, such a campaign would require a radical restructuring of pedagogy to accommodate the changes in both the literacy criterion and the target population. Furthermore, what will the system do with all of these people with higher educational levels since "except in time of war - there are not enough jobs for all who want to work" (Harman and Hunter, 1979: 20)? Against this, is it any wonder that literacy programmes have records of low achievement and high attrition rates (Amersoso, 1984:1) in North America when problems and solutions continue to be seen through educationally advantaged eyes? As long as we do not see their lives and hear their voice, we will, as educators, "be participating in creating the problem we seek to address: feelings of powerlessness and disenfranchisement" (Fingeret, 1983:143).

CHAPTER ONE SUMMARY STATEMENT

In this chapter, statistics of adult illiteracy have been cited, definitions discussed, adult literacy programmes described, past research efforts reported, the study focus sketched and the sample delineated. A discussion of the methodological nature of the study and its significance completes Chapter One.

The methodology employed is discussed in greater detail in Chapter Two. The

findings of this study, interspersed with findings gleaned from the literature, are reported in Chapters Three and Four. The final chapter is comprised of a summary of the study, its findings, conclusions and implications. The last word belongs to the women who have shared their story.

Chapter Two

INTRODUCTION

In Chapter Two, I discuss in a more systematic fashion, the methodology chosen and employed in this study. I begin by delving into the nature of interpretive inquiry, its philosophical basis, assumptions, methodological stance and implications for research. The next sections describe the research process of this study, from the suggestions of the experts to how I carried them out in the field. I explain the methods used for making contacts, collecting and recording data and finally, analyzing the data. The methods do not stand, however, without a clear understanding of the interpretive domain which is the focus of the following section.

THE NATURE OF INTERPRETIVE INQUIRY

The choice of methodology employed for a given study must be directly related to the information sought and the setting to be examined. But those are not the only factors to be considered. The purposes, underlying assumptions and implications of a particular methodological paradigm are perhaps even more important aspects which must fit one's intents and research area. Guba and Lincoln stated this clearly "the choice between paradigms in any inquiry or evaluation ought to be made on the basis of the best fit between the assumptions and postures of a paradigm and the phenomenon being studied or evaluated" (1981: 56).

According to Burrell and Morgan, it is the purpose of the interpretive paradigm to understand the world as it is, at the level of subjective experience (1979: 28); Guba and Lincoln agree that it is this search for *verstehen*, understanding, that is the focal

point of interpretive inquiry (1981: 57). Eisner also emphasizes the search for meaning, illumination and penetration when one is concerned with the study of human phenomena rather than the search for laws as in experimental science (1981: 6). Thus, multiple realities are recognized and sought as layers of truth which are intricately related to form patterns and it is the search for these patterns that is the purpose of a interpretive inquiry (Guba and Lincoln, 1981: 57).

Subscribing to, or conducting research on the basis of, a particular paradigm automatically forces a particular view of the world based on different assumptions regarding the nature of science and society (Burrell and Morgan, 1979: 24). For the interpretive paradigm, the central concern is with "an understanding of the way in which the individual creates, modifies and interprets the world in which he or she finds himself" (Burrell and Morgan, 1979: 3). Burrell and Morgan therefore define the social world as: "an emergent social process which is created by the individuals concerned" (1979: 28). Further, this social world can only be understood from the point of view of the players involved (Burrell and Morgan, 1979: 5). Owens also posits that:

one cannot understand human behaviour without understanding the framework within which the individuals under study interpret their environment, and that this, in turn, can best be understood through understanding their thoughts, feelings, values, perceptions, and their actions (1982: 5).

Secondly, human behaviour is so influenced by the context in which it takes place that the parts cannot be separated from the whole (Owens, 1982: 5). Guba and Lincoln also argue for a holistic treatment of the subject matter and a recognition and use of the fact that inquirer and respondent interact to influence one another (1985: 38). Blumer, when discussing the premises upon which symbolic interactionism, a theoretical affiliation belonging to the interpretive paradigm, rests, speaks of this social interaction from which meaning is derived and which is central to the interpretive process (1969: 2).

When searching for insights regarding human behaviour, Guba and Lincoln (1981: 62) argue that it is "virtually impossible to imagine any human behaviour that is not heavily mediated by the context in which it occurs." Furthermore, generalizations that are declared to be context-free would be practically meaningless and therefore of little value. When dealing with human behaviour, Guba and Lincoln clearly opt for the interpretive paradigm because of its assumptions which ring true in this area. The assumption of multiple realities is more credible; a researcher gaining insights into people cannot keep a distance and would lose rich data if [s]he did; people phenomena exist in the minds of people; and finally, behaviour is contextually tied (Guba and Lincoln, 1981: 63). Agar agrees that when one is interested in understanding the interpretations and behaviour of people from their point of view, then "[t]he classic model of hypothesis testing, with a small number of covarying variables, is simply too impoverished a paradigm to handle this quest" (1980: 194).

The methodological implications are clear. In order to see things as the participants see them, one needs descriptive accounts from them regarding the reality in question (Blumer, 1969: 51). Because it is an unknown, it must be learned and best learned through a pattern that is gradually discovered and then interrelated with other patterns (Agar, 1980: 195). The research techniques will actually build on the developing insights and the design will emerge as the search proceeds (Guba and Lincoln, 1981: 73). The research design itself will not place any constraints on the inquiry.

Adult illiteracy, from the point of view of the adult illiterates, is largely an unknown and it is this missing fundamental aspect of the issue that has largely been identified as the cause for the failure of past and present policies and programmes. The interpretive paradigm, with its assumptions and implications for research, seems to provide the best fit between these and the questions of concern to this study. It provides

the world view and is the "method of choice," considering my purpose of giving voice to the point of view of adult illiterates.

Burrell and Morgan (1979: 6) define the methodological stance of the interpretive paradigm as ideographic. This approach calls for the research focus, itself, to reveal its nature and characteristics throughout the investigation. This implies an emergent research design where the plan simply specifies that a highly interactive process of collecting data and developing analysis is simultaneously carried on (Owens, 1982: 11). Because the researcher is involved in on-going analysis, further data collection strategies and aims are constantly being developed. One begins with questions of broad scope, ever looking for unanticipated information or leads. One ends with subject saturation; all paths have been followed and confirmed and no new relevant paths have been found. In summary, the chosen research design calls for 1) direct contact between researchers and respondents as a means of collecting data; 2) emergent strategies in research design rather than *a priori* specification and 3) data categories developed from examination of the data itself (Owens, 1982: 9).

The interpretive paradigm provided the conceptual framework for my research design and the ideographic research approach guided my search for the realities of illiterate women in our society. I began by talking with a small number of illiterate women who are presently involved in literacy programmes. Data collection was through focussed interviews; the next steps emerged.

MAKING CONTACTS

In keeping with allowing the multiple realities and intimate contextual knowledge to determine the focus rather than the inquirer's preconceptions (Guba and

Lincoln, 1985: 42), my first conversation was with the person responsible for literacy programming throughout the province of Alberta through her position with the provincial Department of Advanced Education. "Catherine" certainly has a holistic view of the setting and context (McMillan and Schumacher, 1984: 317) through her work and contacts and she was able to suggest specific groups and individuals who would be interested in my study. It should be noted here that the names of all of the people that I spoke with have been changed. The literacy programmes themselves have also not been named and identifying material has been kept to a minimum. June of 1985 was spent making my first contacts with the people in a school-based programme. Catherine had also suggested contacting Sister Grace, who runs an informal, drop-in literacy programme for women on the street. I also made preliminary contact with Sister Grace in June as well but work with her programme did not proceed until that September. With these two contacts made, I had only to speak to the people responsible for literacy training in a provincial vocational institution to have a contact in a representative programme of each of the settings which currently provide learning opportunities.

Having made the initial contacts in June, it was then necessary to justify my work to the literacy teachers I had approached so that they would feel comfortable with my presence and would suggest women that would feel comfortable as respondents. I needed the teachers' support if I wanted support and cooperation from the women. As McMillan and Schumacher remind us, "[g]aining entry into the field requires establishing good relations with all individuals in the host institution" (1984: 316). My initial teacher contact in the school programme was very interested in my concerns and wanted to help but unfortunately, all her students at that time were male. However, she sent me to another teacher in the school who also agreed that the study should be done; fortunately, she did have women in her class who, she felt, would potentially agree to take part. Both the principal and the counsellor in the school were made aware of my work by the

teachers and they also expressed an immediate interest in the outcome.

Gaining access to the drop-in centre programme was not so easy. When I met again with Sister Grace in September, she was very interested and believed in the study's purpose and usefulness but she was wary of her students' participation. Like any moral educator, she was worried about the effects of self-disclosure on the part of the women to me, another academic stranger who would simply take, leaving little of benefit to those who have given. Frankly, she was afraid of her students feeling 'ripped off' by another institution person; I would be long gone and they would all have to live with the results. I immediately spoke of my protective feelings towards my students when I taught and reassured her that I thought her hesitations were admirable. I went into greater detail of how I thought the interviews would proceed and explained that I would be in a position of self-disclosure as well and would not hesitate to lay open my own vulnerability as a person. Her reservations were not entirely quelled but we did continue our conversation with the added presence of Helen, a co-teacher, who was supportive and listened carefully to both Sister Grace's points and my rejoinders. By the end of the conversation, it was agreed that I should proceed and that they would think of women in the programme who would perhaps agree to be participants. Sister Grace did seem visibly reassured about the project and began to get excited about its possibilities as she is on a continuing quest herself for an ever-clearer understanding of the women she relates with every day.

Theoretical (Glaser and Strauss, 1969; Denzin, 1970), purposive (Guba and Lincoln, 1985) or opportunistic (Agar, 1980) are labels which all describe a sample which is chosen consciously to fit one's purposes', uncover multiple realities, compare data already available, seek out deviant cases and reach eventual saturation when "all available and relevant sources of data have been exhausted" (Denzin, 1970: 241). So, it was that I asked the literacy teachers in the two programmes to suggest women who

would potentially participate. All teachers immediately thought of at least one woman who would like to talk and who would probably yield rich data and insights. It was one of the teachers at the school who first suggested that I talk to Laura, a vivacious, confident mother of five children who had already participated in a television interview dealing with a programme she had been involved with previously. The teacher thought that Laura would not hesitate to become involved in this project as well and she was right. Laura and I first talked in June, 1985.

Sister Grace and Helen both recommended women, who in their opinion, were very determined to overcome this problem of illiteracy and therefore would probably have something interesting to say about why they were there and what impact it has had on them. Anita, a fiftiesh grandmother is Sister Grace's student and Sarah, also a grandmother, is Helen's student. I met with them individually from September, 1985 to January, 1986. Before I made the arrangements to meet with the people at the vocational institution, Sister Grace was able to recommend that I contact a woman who spent some time at the drop-in centre but who was now in her second year in the programme at the institution so that is how I contacted Dorothy, a young mother of one child. It was while I was meeting with Anita in September that arrangements were being made to interview Sarah and after Sarah, Dorothy. It should be kept in mind that these four women were suggested to me by their teachers. I did not place any restrictions on whom I would talk with other than I wanted the women to feel comfortable as respondents. Nevertheless the women picked by the teachers may be the more successful and therefore more positive students of their programmes and the chosen women's thoughts may reflect that bias. On the other hand, the four women were of varied background, represented two different generations and were involved in three different literacy programmes.

COLLECTING AND RECORDING DATA

Interviews

The interview was chosen as the main method for data collection because it "is used to gather descriptive data in the subject's own words so that the researcher can develop insights on how subjects interpret some piece of the world" (Bogdan and Biklen, 1982: 135). Besides matching perfectly with the aims of this study, the interview technique offers several advantages pertinent to the setting. McMillan and Schumacher (1984: 151) point out its adaptability in that it can be used with "many different problems and types of persons such as those who are illiterate or too young to read and write." Its flexibility allows one to restate, paraphrase, extend, follow up leads and ask for clarification where necessary. It is McMillan and Schumacher's conclusion that the interview generally provides greater depth and detail than, for example, a questionnaire (1984: 30).

There are various types of interviews but for my purposes, the nonscheduled, standardized or focussed interview, described by Denzin, seemed most appropriate. According to Denzin (1970: 125), the focussed interview is used when particular information is needed from all respondents but the phrasing of questions and their order is sequenced according to the respondent's readiness and willingness to converse on a topic as it comes up. Because I was interested in the women's lives, especially in the recent past and present, I did bring a set of questions with me to each interview which I hoped would allow us to uncover their perceptions of the two main issues, their reasons for involvement in a literacy programme and its impact. However, these questions were never used in the same order, many were not referred to at all; they were actually my "crutch" in case the conversation broke down or they were needed to bring us back on track. In reality, most often, only the first few questions were posed; after that, the

women themselves guided the conversation and then I would use reclarification questions at the end of the interview to sum up the ideas we had been talking about. After initial rapport was established, the interviews consisted more of the women's comments reflected back to them by me and the occasional extending or clarifying question to encourage further reflection.

Agar suggests that "[r]ather than contacting the group directly, an introduction from a person or institution that is well thought of by the group can be helpful" (1980: 29). Because the teachers involved did make the initial contacts with the selected women, I met individually with each one to explain the purpose of this research, ensure that they did want to participate and secure their permission to record our conversations. Then we discussed convenient times and places to meet and I left, giving them a few days to think over their decision and bow out if they wanted to before our first taped session. I left enough time between interviews to allow me to transcribe the tape and to consider where I wanted the conversation to go next. In so doing, I was able to look closely at what was talked about and what was left out, search for any major concerns or consistent feelings or perceptions and then sketch out possible questions to ask the women during the next sessions, as suggested by Agar (1980: 104). After the interview, as suggested by Guba and Lincoln (1981: 182), I would write out my own observations and perceptions in a set of field notes and speculate on preliminary analysis and hypotheses. In this way, I was not only collecting and recording data, but I was beginning and refining the analysis so that it was indeed a dialectic rather than linear process (Agar, 1980: 9).

Documents

It was in the midst of the interviews that Carol, the coordinator of literacy programming for a school board, heard about my research from Sister Grace and

suggested that I contact her regarding some information that I may find useful. I called her at her office and she invited me down to have a look at some documents. As Bogdan and Biklen mused (1982: 97), personal documents are usually discovered rather than solicited by the researcher and in my case, people were actively drawing me to more and more sources. What Carol had in her office was a file on each student, in the past twelve months, who had applied to get into an up-grading class of some sort. It was Carol's job to test these potential students and place them in an appropriate programme. Part of the test was a written component which asked the students to write a paragraph on a personally selected topic and one of the topics was: "Why I am Returning to School."

Guba and Lincoln define document as any written material not prepared specifically for the purposes of the researcher (1981: 228). McMillan and Schumacher (1984: 159), Guba and Lincoln (1981: 232) and Denzin (1970: 260) all agree that using documents as a non-reactive, unobtrusive measure of data collection is an effective triangulation technique which extends and buttresses findings from other sources such as interviews. Their firm support for inclusion of this data collection method is based on its unobtrusiveness, that is, nothing out of the ordinary is introduced into the situation; the respondents are not aware that they are part of a study and therefore their behaviour or perspectives will be true to life (McMillan and Schumacher, 1984: 159; Guba and Lincoln, 1981:234; Denzin, 1970: 309). Further, Guba and Lincoln argue for a triangulation of techniques as a way of allowing multiple value perspectives on the same event and verifying information already gained (1981: 257). Denzin agrees that document analysis can be used to verify respondent reports from interviews (1970: 309) and that the rationale for technique triangulation "is that the flaws of one method are often the strengths of another, and by combining methods, observers can achieve the best of each, while overcoming their unique deficiencies" (1970: 308).

I was easily convinced that these documents would indeed be useful and I spent

a week in Carol's office going through each file, lifting out the female names, checking for the paragraph topic and then determining what class they were attending. I eliminated all subjects that were recommended for a class higher than Adult Up-Grading as these other classes were actually Junior/Senior High level and the students would not consider themselves as part of my defined group of low-literate adults, those with reading and writing problems. They were there to get high school credit to gain admission for further study in most cases. Those files identified as part of the Adult Up-Grading classes were examples of adults with reading and writing problems, mostly admitted and they seemed to fit into the sample I had already identified.

In the end, twenty-seven pieces of writing became part of the study. As requested by the donor agency, all identifying material was removed so that anonymity could be assured. A preliminary content analysis was completed at the time that I first gathered the documents. It was interesting to see how closely these written concerns reflected the information from the interviews. It seemed clear, even at this initial juncture, that the documents would add to and reinforce the interview findings.

Member Checks

Analysis of the interview and document data was proceeding along and working hypotheses were being developed throughout November and December of 1985. The four women involved expressed an interest in the results of the study and were very willing to meet with me one last time so that I could share these developing themes with them. I thought that this process could serve two purposes: I would be able to share with them that they are not alone in their concerns and carry out a member check with each of them. Guba and Lincoln's 1981 book (110) defined member check as the process of going back to the sources to verify the researcher's interpretations of the conversations and the results. In their 1985 publication, they made it even clearer why

this is a valuable procedure. As it is the respondents' reconstructions of reality that the researcher seeks to reconstruct, it only makes sense to check those reconstructions with the people who originally offered the data (Guba and Lincoln, 1985: 41). Both Owens (1982: 15) and LeCompte and Goetz (1982: 42) also speak of member checks as a technique which enhances the credibility of the findings.

So, armed with these two purposes, I went back with the developing themes and spoke with each of the women in January of 1986. It had been late November since I had conducted any interviews with them so time had given all of us a chance to think about our conversations. I spent some time at the drop-in centre first and was able to arrange a meeting with Sarah. The next week, I met and spoke with Anita. Sister Grace and Helen were also very interested in the results so I shared with them the preliminary statements that I had developed from the interview and document data. Next, I travelled over to the school programme and spoke with my first respondent, Laura, and then the two teachers involved who were my first contacts. Arranging to meet with Dorothy, the respondent from a provincial vocational institution was more difficult as her schedule was much tighter but eventually we got around to having coffee and looking over the results. In each case, I took notes as the women were talking and added to my field notes after the sessions were finished. It was a very satisfying experience for all concerned but I had one more idea that I wanted to pursue with the help of the teachers in the school programme.

Credibility Check

Guba and Lincoln also advise that a credibility check is a useful procedure in that it checks findings with a surrogate sample, representative of the original respondents (1981: 112). Agar (1980: 120) suggests that sharing the learning with a group that the researcher has not spoken with builds credibility. Owens (1982: 14) also recommends

that one should cross-check themes, as they arise, with other sources and Blumer (1969: 51) advocates that "key objects that emerge from the accounts should be subject to probing and critical collective discussion by a group of well-informed participants in the given world." Backed with this support, I thought that it would be an interesting and valuable exercise in "presenting the inquirer's 'reality' to those who live it, and asking them whether it does represent their common and shared experience" (Guba and Lincoln, 1981: 186).

I approached the teachers of the school-based programme and discussed this idea of a credibility check with them. They agreed that it would be useful and that interesting perspectives would probably emerge at such a meeting. Without hesitation, they thought of six women in the "beginner's" class, who were very open and comfortable in speaking situations and who would probably enjoy the discussion. The teachers' only concern was leaving any of the women out; they hoped that I did not mind including all of the women of this class. I did not see any problems with the numbers so it was agreed that I would meet with the women of the first class on a particular day; whoever was in class that day participated.

When I reached the school, the counsellor attached to the literacy programme, asked if she might be allowed to sit in on the discussion. So six women plus the counsellor plus myself gathered for a very lively discussion centered around the statements that had been developed thus far. The night before, the C.B.C. aired their exposé of the illiteracy problem in Canada and one of the teachers had videotaped it. I decided to use a portion of that as an introduction to our discussion. The videotape certainly did encourage reflection and discussion. I stopped the programme after about ten minutes of viewing and asked, "Well, has that been your experience?" They nodded their heads in agreement.

They needed no further introduction but I felt it that it was only fair to explain

the purpose of and methodology employed in the study. I then introduced each rough thematic statement, asked them for their reaction and again, took notes throughout. I only spoke of the first two themes before they simply volunteered their experiences and their statements matched what I had on the paper. I asked them for comments on the statements that they did not identify. The counsellor left after about seventy minutes but we continued to talk for another thirty minutes. Certainly, speaking with these women and seeing their eyes light up with recognition of each statement made me feel more confident about their veracity. As with the member checks, it seemed that we had constructed a small piece of reality.

ANALYZING THE DATA

Analytic Induction

After I had defined the problem and decided on the literacy setting, I had to find a process of analysis which would remain true to the purpose and underlying philosophy of the study. I needed some way of making sense out of all the transcript data and field notes and documents that would accumulate so I searched for material on content analysis. I found the most useful references in the literature on qualitative research methodology. Glaser and Strauss described the process of "grounded theory" via constant comparative analysis (1967: 1), and Bogdan and Biklen (1982: 65) and Denzin (1970: 239) detailed the process of analytic induction.

Because analytic induction has been identified as a procedure which is primarily concerned with a specific problem, question or issue (Bogdan and Biklen, 1982: 66; Glaser and Strauss, 1967: 104) as opposed to constant comparative analysis' emphasis on general problems, it seemed to be the method of choice. Bogdan and Biklen (1982: 66) tell us that the first practitioners of the method were Znaniecki (1934), Lindesmith

(1947), and Cressey (1950). Like Glaser and Strauss' grounded theory through constant comparative analysis, "[a]nalytic induction is an approach to collecting and analyzing data as well as a way to develop theory and test it" (Bogdan and Biklen, 1982: 65).

In discussing the generation of theory, Glaser and Strauss (1967: 23) describe how "one generates conceptual categories or their properties from evidence; then the evidence from which the category emerged is used to illustrate the concept." Furthermore, they argue that a single case can be the basis of a category; a few more cases can confirm the insight (1967: 30). They posit that it is not their purpose to generate a perfect, all-cases-accounted-for description of a problem but to develop a theory which accounts for most of the relevant behaviour noted. Glaser and Strauss (1967: 32) see theory generation as an ever developing entity, not as a perfected end product. The process I had in mind was a search for themes or conceptual categories from the accumulated evidence and I saw the study as providing a picture of an event, interpreted by the actors themselves. But rather than taking in the whole picture, the purpose was to provide insights into one small but nevertheless significant part of that human picture.

In this search for themes, the process includes looking for recurring regularities in the data (Guba and Lincoln, 1981: 93; Agar, 1980: 115). Bogdan and Biklen, in their discussion of a modified analytic induction approach, suggest that early on in the study, one should develop a rough definition and explanation for the particular phenomenon concerned (1982: 67). Agar has several basic suggestions for "analyzing cassettes full of talk" (1980: 103). He suggests that one transcribe the first tapes fully; selective transcription is adequate later on. Next, one should read the transcripts in their entirety several times and seek to categorize the segments of talk. Data that focuses on the same topic should be marked off and named as potential categories or themes. It is

hoped that these developing categories will cover as much of the transcribed talk as possible. Once the data is categorized, Agar (1980: 104) suggests that one use scissors and cut the transcripts into segments of talk so that one can physically place all the data that belongs to one category together. This allows for easy manipulation of the data should their designated categories be in question; an internal consistency check, as it were.

I interviewed Laura during the month of June, 1985 and so had the summer to fully transcribe the tapes and begin a preliminary analysis. As Bogdan and Biklen suggested, I could already begin to see some important perspectives that surprised me in their force. I also transcribed each succeeding interview fully and searched for those common messages. Fortunately, time allowed me to transcribe before I went back to my respondents so that I was able to flesh out the developing categories (Guba and Lincoln, 1981: 94). It was when I reached saturation with each woman and no new ideas were being discussed (Guba and Lincoln, 1981: 100) that I searched carefully through each woman's story and recorded each item which dealt with either of my two research questions. I grouped all similar items which made categorization much easier. Fortunately, most of the data was relevant to the two issues; the few left-over items were essentially descriptive dealing with the woman's family or background. Then I noted which themes were part of every story and I came up with a summary statement which I felt encompassed all the items in a particular group. In this way, I summarized all of the concerns voiced by at least two of the women. Individual concerns were later subsumed under the appropriate established categories. Eventually, ten summary statements were developed for Question A; seven summary statements for Question B.

The seventeen statements seemed rather unwieldy in their initial form and I, all along, had vague notions that some could be logically grouped together. I then purposely set out to determine which statements fit together and what word or phrase

would describe, inclusively, the sentiments expressed by these grouped statements. The most numerous and most forceful statements all seemed to revolve around the women's feelings about themselves, their self-concepts and their attitudes towards learning. I decided that these concerns could be labelled "psychological," that having to do with emotions, feelings and thoughts. Eight of the seventeen statements fit this category. I examined carefully the rest of the statements and noticed that quite a few spoke of factors which enabled the women to do things. The word "instrumental" seemed to fit these five statements and so the second category was derived. Finally, the last four statements all seemed to arise out of the life circumstances of the women at this time so I thought that the word "situational" would adequately describe these factors. From then on, the seventeen statements were seen as a part of their respective categories and this is how they will be reported in Chapters Three and Four.

Analysis of the interview data was proceeding but I had to decide what to do with the documents in my possession. This clearly did call for a particular method of content analysis. One procedure is discussed at length by Guba and Lincoln in their 1981 text. Their process is rule-guided and systematic. It carefully lays out selection criteria and is concerned with a comparison to the researcher's theory (1981: 241). One must deal with the manifest content of the document or, at a later stage, may draw inferences from its latent content. The categories must reflect the purpose of the research, be exhaustive, mutually exclusive and independent (Guba and Lincoln, 1981: 243). As I intended to compare the documents to the interview data, I decided to code the content according to the categories already derived from the interviews to see if the content would fit. This it did. I went through each written work and noted its particular concerns; most spoke of more than one. The manifest content of the paragraphs did fit easily into the developing schema; while the data source was different, it seems the concerns of the people were very similar.

Methodological Rigour

Just as the world view, underlying assumptions and research strategies of the interpretive paradigm differ from more common research practices, the bases upon which to judge the rigour of the method also differ. Even the terminology used differs so that when one is speaking of the study's truth, others may call it internal validity; applicability is external validity; consistency is reliability (Guba and Lincoln, 1981: 104). The questions of concern are still: are we observing what we think we are observing?; are the results applicable across groups? (LeCompte and Goetz, 1982: 43) and given this perspective and these data, would another researcher have come up with the same results? While the terminology may differ, the questions and concerns look familiar; what is really different are the strategies which promote a study's methodological rigour.

The truth criterion can be most successfully met through prolonged data-gathering (Guba and Lincoln, 1981: 105; Owens, 1982: 14), triangulation of sources and/or data-gathering techniques (Guba and Lincoln, 1981: 106; Owens, 1982: 14; Denzin, 1970: 237), and member/credibility checks (Guba and Lincoln, 1981: 110; Owens, 1982: 15). The data-collection phase of the study took place over seven months. For the purposes of triangulation, I spoke with different women on the same topics either in a one-on-one interview situation or in a group interview. Further, I used interviews and documents as data-collecting devices. With regard to the usefulness of member/credibility checks, Guba and Lincoln say

[t]he determination of credibility can be accomplished only by taking data and interpretations to the sources from which they were drawn and asking directly whether they believe - find plausible - the results. This process of going to sources - often called making "member checks" - is the backbone of satisfying the truth - value criterion (1981: 110).

I met with each of the original respondents once I had developed the seventeen statements. I went through each statement and asked them if it spoke of their reality.

They recognized themselves in most of the statements and for some statements, they voiced even stronger sentiments of support. They agreed that it was their reality and they were interested to know that they were not alone in their struggle. I took this procedure a step further and shared the statements with Sister Grace and Helen. They were amazed at how closely these statements reflected their intuitive experiences with the women. Though they had never articulated these thoughts before, they recognized them immediately as truth. It was much the same when I spoke with the group of women. Before I had the chance to verbalize many of the statements, they gave them to me in our general conversation. The experience of conducting the member/credibility checks was definitely the technique which gave me the confidence to conclude that we had collectively articulated truth regarding the issues and concerns at hand.

Guba and Lincoln (1981: 118) contend that it is more appropriate to speak in terms of applicability rather than generalizability when dealing in the interpretive paradigm. To this end, one should aim for working hypotheses that fit more or less well into a context other than the one in which they were developed. This assumes that the context, actors and process are all part of the thick description of the report. LeCompte and Goetz (1982: 51) also argue that applicability or external validity, in their terminology, depends on the clear identification and description of the characteristics of the phenomena which would provide for easier comparison with other similar types. This thick description will be a major part of both Chapters Three and Four.

Consistency, concerned with whether another researcher would obtain the same results, can be served also through providing the pertinent information. For LeCompte and Goetz (1982: 36), this means one should specify precisely what was done and where, describe the researcher's social role within the situation, delineate the types of people who served as respondents and how they were chosen, clarify the underlying assumptions and definitions, theoretical premises and units of analysis, and

identify the general strategies used in analysis. Guba and Lincoln (1981: 122) add that triangulation procedures also improve a study's consistency and they agree with LeCompte and Goetz (1982: 41) that the classification or categorization of data must make sense and be appropriately arranged.

CHAPTER TWO SUMMARY STATEMENT

The study's methodology was the focus of Chapter Two. Because it was my intent to undertake an interpretive inquiry, it was necessary to discuss the philosophical basis, assumptions and methodological stance of the interpretive paradigm. Having outlined the implications of this research posture, I then detailed how I came into contact with the four women who would serve as the primary respondents. Data were collected through focussed interviews and documents and were substantiated through member and credibility checks. The last section of Chapter Two described the process of analytic induction used to analyze the data and what procedures were adhered to that met the tests of methodological rigour. The only procedure not addressed in this chapter was the delineation of the types of people who served as respondents. The first section of Chapter Three introduces the women who shared their story.

Chapter Three

INTRODUCTION

The focus of this chapter is a discussion of the themes that developed around the research question - Why did you become involved with a literacy programme? The ten thematic statements are reported via their respective categories, instrumental, situational or psychological. The statements are supported by quotations from the women; the findings from other studies are also included here. But before we deal in a more systematic way with the findings, it is necessary to go back and introduce the four respondents more fully to enable a better understanding of the context in which the findings are embedded.

Laura

Laura was my first respondent, suggested to me by her teacher at a school-based literacy programme. At our first meeting, when I explained to her the purpose of the research and why she was one of the 'chosen'; she was enthusiastic and did not hesitate to consent. She had already been interviewed for another programme she had been involved with so she was not reticent. Laura's teacher felt that Laura would feel free to comment and that she would be a fairly typical example of a student involved in a literacy programme.

At our first tape-recorded session, I began by sharing with her my family and schooling background and why I was interested in literacy. I had frustrating experiences as a high school English teacher when I occasionally had semi-literate students in class whom I could not adequately help. After we established some sort of understanding, Laura was equally willing to share her background experiences. She grew up in

northern Manitoba, one of seventeen children, left home at fifteen after very unhappy experiences at school and at home. She blames a doctor for her troubles at school as the doctor would not allow her to go to school in the winter-time because of chronic ear infections. She figures that she spent half of her young life in hospital instead of in school with the result that she failed four or five times and was fifteen years old when in grade five. As Laura tells it, "the principal came into my room ... said - Laura, if you want to quit school you can, so I just got up and walked out of the classroom; I was fifteen when I quit." With nothing much else to do and her mother away, Laura ran away from home soon after; it took her three weeks to get to Winnipeg where she spent the next ten years of her life. She had her first baby three days before she turned seventeen and now at the age of thirty, she has five children. For three years of her stay in Winnipeg, she lived with a man who abused her and her children until one day her sister, from Edmonton, came to visit. She told Laura that if she did not come with her back to Edmonton with her children, she would call the Children's Aid Society to come and take them away so Laura moved to Edmonton in 1980.

She soon met her present husband and had another child who is now four years old. Her troubles did not end. In her words, "all I did was stay at home and go nowhere, [at five-foot-two] I weighed one hundred and eighty pounds; all I did was clean house, make supper, get the kids ready for school, look after my little boy, that's all I did, never went nowhere." Her nerves were bad so she went to the doctor who gave her 'nerve' pills, "I was hooked on pills, all kinds of pills; I took pills to get my energy started, I took pills to go to sleep ..." Finally, an outreach worker, from the school system in which her children were enrolled, came to see her about her children's absences from school. It was only on his fifth attempt that Laura allowed the man to come into her home and talk with her. He enrolled her in a counselling programme called F.L.I.P. (Family Life Improvement Programme) and from there she made

enquiries about the possibilities of returning to school. She was tested and placed in a school-based programme and has been in attendance there since September of 1984.

Dorothy

Dorothy, while she is attending literacy classes at a provincial vocational institution, was actually contacted through Sister Grace who Dorothy had first come to for some help. She soon graduated to other programmes but she always keeps in touch with Sister Grace and it was to Sister Grace that she proudly announced her latest successful mathematics test score. Dorothy is now in her twenties and she is a single parent with one child at home. Her daughter is three years old and a great source of pride and concern for Dorothy.

Dorothy has spent her life in Edmonton and is a product of the school system in the city. She failed grade three once or twice before the school authorities transferred her to a special programme in a different elementary school. She never went back to a regular classroom but was transferred to a secondary special education school when she was twelve years old. When asked what grade she completed, she sheepishly revealed that she was never placed in a particular grade so she really did not finish anything. She quit school for the first time when she was sixteen because she felt like she was not learning anything anyway; went back at seventeen but quit again after the Christmas holidays.

Like Laura, Dorothy has never worked for real wages; Laura has looked after others' children at various times and Dorothy has helped her mother with housekeeping in private homes and in hospitals. Dorothy was also involved in another programme which assisted her to find help for her reading and writing problems. She is now in her fourth semester at the provincial school and learning how to type as well as keeping up with her reading and mathematics work. She finds the work very difficult but she is

determined to keep going.

Sarah

Sarah is a born story-teller and perhaps that is why Helen suggested that she participate in the study. Sarah has been Helen's student in the learning room for the past three years and because of Helen's introduction and encouragement, it did not take her long to warm up to the telling of her story. As with the others, I began with my story and then Sarah took over. She was born in northern Alberta approximately fifty years ago but was adopted by people who brought her to Calgary when she was a small child. She was their only daughter after six boys and she supposes they thought to let her do as she wished. What she wished was that she did not have to go to school so mostly she did not. When she did attend, the teachers would bring her something to do but she would not know how to do it so she would walk out and go play instead. She was about nine or ten years old when she finally never went back to school. At that age, she was still learning how to draw; she was not even a part of a grade. She did not learn how to read; she could not do grade one work.

The years passed, two husbands came and went and left her with eight children. She has been in Edmonton for the past twenty-seven years and for the past five years, she has been living on her own. Her two youngest children live with their elder sister in Calgary as Sarah has many health problems which prohibit her from working or from looking after anyone but herself. She lives in the same building as her niece and nephew so she is not too lonely and she is enjoying the company of their two year old daughter who amazes her with the concrete evidence of how fast children learn.

It was a social worker who was taking the place of her usual worker, who first asked Sarah if she would like to get some help for her reading and writing problems.

The social worker introduced her to Sister Grace and Helen and Sarah has been a part of

the learning room ever since. Despite her hard life and her present health problems, she is a very enthusiastic learner and likes to encourage others to take this same step, especially members of her natural family whom she is now getting to know, in this, their late middle-age. She is on good terms with her adopted family as well, but she wishes that they would have forced her to go to school, all those many years ago.

Anita

Before I consciously sought out a 'negative case', I found her in the person of Anita, Sister Grace's student. Bogdan and Biklen (1982:67) recommend that the researcher seek out a 'negative case', one which does not fit the developing model, when employing analytic induction methods. Anita is also a grandmother and has been coming to the learning room for about one year at great trouble to herself. A one-way trip entails a journey of three different buses, but she keeps coming. After the ease with which Laura's interviews had gone, Anita's suspicions and hesitance were something new. Unlike the others, who are all very positive in their views on coming back to school and who were very enthusiastic about being able to help others through their participation in the study, Anita was probably justifiably sceptical. What help will there be for her or anyone from one more academic coming to ask nosy questions?

After interviewing me for the better part of an hour, we got on to her story which was much briefer than the others; I did not want nor did I see the necessity to pry. She is living with a daughter in the city with whom she has trouble communicating. It seems that she was abandoned by her husband to raise the children herself and it was a life of poverty for which she feels her children still blame her. As for her own childhood, in her own words, "I missed school, I never went to school whatsoever because my people were too poor for one thing and another thing, they didn't care that much, my father..." She revealed later that her father did not think it was necessary for a

girl to get schooling. She said that she has tried for the last forty years to get some help but without any reading and writing skills, she could not even phone for assistance.

After a big run around from her doctor and his nurse and a hospital out-patient clinic, she was finally put in touch with Sister Grace and she now travels three times a week to the learning room.

Underneath the apparent sceptical indifference is a real desperation to keep coming and keep learning. Anita's statements will probably be recognizable in their more harsh assessment of reality. These are the statements of a woman who has been kept back and apart, time after time. She sees no reason why this time should be any different but she keeps talking to me and she keeps coming to learn with Sister Grace. Just this year, 1986, she has extended her learning opportunities by also becoming involved in a formal class for two days of the week. By the end of our sessions, she still wonders if her participation in the study will be of any benefit. But now, she can admit that she hopes that the study will do some good.

One Voice

Even though the women's stories seem quite diverse, by the time we finished the member checks and the credibility check, the women were so amazed at the common perspectives that they shared with other women in like situations that they impressed upon me that it was really their story, not stories; one voice, not voices. In reporting the findings then, I have decided to include their words from all sources so that the quotations used may be from the taped interviews, the member or credibility checks or from the paragraph writings. To preserve the unity of the one voice and anonymity, I have not attached any names or other identifying material to the individual comments that are quoted here. No quantitative value should be read into the number or length of the quoted material as in some instances, I have included two or more statements from the

same woman on the same topic. Quotations were included on the basis of their significance and what they had to offer to the discussion. This, then is their story.

THE INSTRUMENTAL CATEGORY

This category speaks of the skills and activities that the women would like to be involved with through their gains in literacy. They are involved in literacy classes because they believe that it will enable them to do certain things. In some cases, these statements were the first answers as to why they are involved.

I want to learn how to read, especially for everyday tasks.

Jack Mezirow, et al. (1975: 37) completed a comprehensive, qualitative and evaluative study of all aspects of adult illiteracy in the States. This is his picture of the adult illiterate in North American society.

A functional illiterate finds himself desperately hobbled in trying to cope with everyday life. He may have difficulty reading the newspaper or signs telling a bus's destination or the time of day - if he reads at all; he has trouble understanding an application for employment or any of the myriad other forms and documents - income tax, bank loan, installment contract, Medicare, welfare - that confront him; he cannot help his children with their school work; he cannot pass a simple test to qualify for a promotion or a better job; he is often a gullible consumer, an easy mark for deceptive business practices, and a citizen ill equipped to participate in the public life of his community and nation. The cumulative effect of these disabilities seals the fate of the illiterate. Even if he can read at fifth or sixth grade level, he is found disproportionately at the dirty end of every index of social well - being.

All women spoke of their need to read and write to function in this society and they too spoke of the frustrations in not being able to read instructions or read soup can labels at stores or of the fear of getting lost on buses and how that can make them simply stay at home.

the reason I wanted to go back was because when you live somewhere like in [city named] they don't go by numbers, they go by numbers but

there's a name beside the street and all that, I didn't know how to get around and go places ... when I get something coming to me and you know, I have to read that, I have to go and ask somebody to read for me, oh.. it's very hard when you can't read; you, you keep getting these letters from different companies and so important ...

I told them I wanted help 'cause when I was taking that course, we had to do a lot of writing eh and I couldn't keep up with the class and I couldn't spell any words hardly (nervous laughter) or anything so I talked to one of my counsellors there, one of my teachers and she told me about Sister Grace ...

The reason I came back to school is because, I would like to learn the proper way of doing things. Like writing, reading, so I would be able to write good interesting letters to my friends and family back in [province named].

I want to learn how to read in general; as long as you can read, you can read anything, can't you ...?

Ulmer (1969: 12) and Bowren and Zintz (1977: 11) write of the adult illiterates' motivations and they both agree that while the reasons are diverse, the common thread is the desire to learn how to read and write, if only to be able to sign one's own name. A study conducted in Ethiopia based on the lives of thirty-one rural and urban women also found that these women enrolled in classes for different reasons but that the ability to read letters from family members, or acquire book knowledge were prominent and common reasons given (Junge, and Tegegne, 1985: 609). To some people this motivating reason may seem so common sense; in our conversations, it was not always the first thing that came to mind. It seems that achieving literacy is much more than just being able to read but before we look at the other categories of reasons, there are two more instrumental reasons which will not be surprising.

I want to help my kids and people in general.

Most of the women who participated in this study had children of their own; some had young children just starting school or still in daycare, while others were grandmothers who were seeing their grandchildren in school. The motivation to be of

some help to their kids was voiced very strongly but this reason also included elements of self-pride on their part.

I had two kids going to school; a lot of times they would come, kids would come and ask you some of the words like what's this mommy?, what does that say?; and it's very embarrassing when you can't read little things like that to a kid, that's outa a school book, you can't do it...

I'd like to help my daughter, eh, she'd probably wonder why when she grew up that I couldn't help her, that's one of the reasons why, yah ...

it's the kids, too, I wanted to do this for my kids, and since I've been back, they don't want to quit school, their grades have improved and they don't miss any days, well hardly ...

The other reason for returning back to school is that I will be able to help my children with the homework they bring home. I feel so helpless when they ask for help and I'm not able to help ...

... children can't understand why you can't read...

While the main consideration was for the children, the women did not hesitate to say that they would like to be in a helping position for anyone. My negative case did put a damper on all this enthusiasm as her comment was that one would have to go to school for a long time to be able to help anyone. Nevertheless, with a look of wistfulness that spoke of lost time, one woman summed up the sentiments neatly when I asked her, if nothing else was gained, was it still worthwhile to learn how to read and write?

oh that's for sure, it's always nice to read for anything; people will ask you sometimes somethings often, they'll want you to read something; you can help people with your reading (pause), reading is a lot of help to anybody...

Bowren (1977: 15) calls this desire to help one aspect of the Self-Improvement Motivational Forces; mothers want to help their children with homework and they do not want to lose the respect of their children. Ulmer (1969: 12) concurs that there is a strong motive to help their children in school. Hunter and Harman (1979: 9) conclude that it is one of the reasons why parents spend so much precious time and energy on basic education classes. The "concerned mother" is one of six categories that Mezirow

developed from his qualitative study in 1975 to classify typical basic education students. His theory is that mothers enroll in literacy classes to become better mothers "to keep the respect of children who are moving ahead of them in formal schooling or to set an example for school-age children" (Mezirow, et.al, 1975: 44). For mothers with young children, this was one of the most important reasons for coming to learn but certainly not the only reason.

ossible. I want to get a good job to help support my family.

Since most literacy programming offered in North America is tied to job-training, one would expect that the clients would be motivated to attend for job-related reasons. While this is a consideration for most of the women, surprisingly little was said about this concern. For most, the thought of better job prospects was a vague hope as their employment records to date were full of scattered, temporary, unskilled and poorly paid labour. They intuitively felt that a higher level of education would be of help to them in the job market but they knew that schooling was only part of the employment story. Proportionately, much more talk was spent on the other factors in their reasons for attending; for most, the dreams of a good job was just too much to hope for. Nevertheless, they did want to be a financial support to their family if they could; if not now, in the future.

I'd like to try and support my own daughter by myself ...

my husband is working; father is his foreman; hasn't finished his grade 12; as he has a back problem, he wants to go back too [to school]; he may be in a wheel chair crippled; that's why I told him I'm going back, I said to him what if this happens to you right away I says and I don't have no education for me to go to work, I told him so he agreed right there too ...

I had to work part-time with my children but like house-cleaning and that; in the farm you know I'd work in the farms; over there you don't need to read and write over there; private housework you don't need that but then like when you wanta get a good job, you haveta read and write properly but then I could never get a proper job because I couldn't

read or write; that's why I had to work on a farm ...

I'd like to work but ... it would be hard ...

I've been fired from hundreds of jobs once they knew I couldn't read or write... they wouldn't give me a job before, now I'm too old... the people who wouldn't hire you, they should be changed...

From the hours of transcripts, this was all the women had to say about job-related reasons for improving their literacy skills. Document analysis of the paragraphs contained many more examples of job-related concerns. However, the issues were not many; basically, they all said that they wanted an education so that they can get a proper job, "maybe someday I will be working in an office, not slinging food."

Bowren and Zintz (1977: 13) would place this statement under their category of Vocationally Oriented Motivational Forces and when speaking of women, they conclude that women's reasons in this category can be the result of a change in marital status, a need to supplement the family income, a desire to get off welfare or a need for activity once the children are grown. Each of the four respondents had been deserted at some time in their life by their mate or mates so the need has been to provide the family income, not just supplement it. As for getting off welfare, again, it is a vague yet desired dream and the need for activity once alone is not so much job-oriented as relationship-oriented as will be seen in the discussion of the last category of motivational factors. Nevertheless, the Ethiopian women (Junge and Tegegne, 1985: 609) also cite a desire to improve their job situation as one of eight main reasons to attend literacy classes.

Hunter and Harman (1979: 9) see the seeking of credentials and job-related skills as factors but they too see this in the harsh realities of North American life when they point out that the evidence suggests that literacy in itself does not contribute significantly to wider employment opportunities (1979: 15). Mezirow, et al. (1975: 43) also found this ambivalence in attitudes with regard to how education would help in their aspirations for future employment. He found that the students queried stated very

low levels of educational and career aspirations. Except for Laura, the women I queried did not talk about future aspirations. Sarah and Anita felt that their health or age would keep them out of a job and Dorothy would just be happy to get a job. Perhaps they know, after a lifetime of experience, that literacy is only one barrier to the good life and that others can be set up in its place. This is what a middle-aged black man, who had failed tests for the post office and transit system said to Mezirow, et al. (1975: 41),

[e]verywhere you go you have to take a test for a job. And how you gonna take that test if you don't know a job? It's just a front. It's just a front 'cause a man can do the job without a college education. Schooling knocks me back everytime.

If it's not literacy, it's a diploma; if not a diploma, it's a degree or class or race or gender; the system will always provide reasons to blame the unemployed for their predicament when the truth of the matter is that it needs its pool of desperate people who will work the jobs no one else will, for wages below the poverty line, only to be cast aside and blamed for their "employment inadequacies" when they are no longer needed. It is this truth that the poor know only too well and is it any wonder that job-related motivation is an after-thought for most who no longer believe that it is simply their literacy problems that keep "knocking them back?"

These are the three statements which logically fit under the instrumental category; a category which speaks of the things that literacy will enable the women to do. The first two statements are spoken with enthusiasm; the third statement is spoken with wistfulness.

THE SITUATIONAL CATEGORY

This category logically developed out of the situations of the women's lives and what they shared with regard to how their present situation allowed them to be involved in literacy training. In most cases, I asked them why they were involved now as opposed

to some other time in their life. Much of their response spoke of the situational factors as outlined below.

I now have the chance and the opportunity.

For the women, the chance to attend meant that their family and life responsibilities were such that they could afford the time. Having the opportunity meant that they knew of a program that would suit them and they were accepted into the class or someone was there to help them. For some, it had been a long wait before the opportunity presented itself and for many, it meant that other people made them aware of the learning possibilities for them.

lotta times I'd think about, you know, and I'd ask; I went to this church here... talk to some of those nuns and I've talked to the priests; all they'd say, yes, we'd get you a school, they'd give me a number but then you'd have to know how to read before you'd get in to those places, lotta places I coulda went but I had to know how to read before I could get in there ...

how could I try them schools if I didn't know anything about them, I know there was such a thing because, I just knew but if you don't know the phone number, you can't find the phone number because you can't look in the telephone book, you might as well look at the floor, you don't know how to read it, you don't know how to get it so how could I? and ask somebody and ask and they just turn you down, turn you away and that's it and don't come and see me again but don't say it in that way, in a kind of better way that sounds worse ...!

with children at home, I was too busy to even think about going to school ...

one day my worker was away ... yah ... maternity leave ... there was a different worker there taking her place for till she was back working; well her and I got to talking, she was asking me if I could read something and I said ... ah no I can't read or write; oh she said ... are you interested in reading or writing? I said of course, right away, you know, I sure would like to read and write ... well, she said, I'll take you to a place where you ... if you're sure ... I'll show you where you can go ... Would you ...? so we came here and ever since then I've been here, you know, I thank her for that and I thank her once in awhile when I go see my worker and she asks me: How are you doing? Oh, I tell her, thanks to you; I'm reading now and I'm starting to write a few things, thanks to you ...

this is my chance to go now, for I'm not getting any younger. My children are in school all day, so I'm not needed as much.

well, I wanted to go to school for seven years, seven years ago; when I was saying that my kids were missing a lot of school and the school phoned the Secret Circle, last year, the guy came to my house and ... this counsellor wanted to talk to me why my kids were missing so much school and I wouldn't let him in the house, I told him I don't want to talk to you, he came about five times, the fifth time I finally said okay ...

The last speaker eventually got involved in a counselling session where this first counsellor did direct her to literacy classes and in her estimation, it was because he came to see about her children that she found out that school was a possibility for her at long last. Others spoke of family members bringing them to a programme or case workers for Manpower or Welfare acting as referral agents. In one case, her child's teacher found out and was sympathetic to this mother's plight and got her in touch with the programme she is now attending. For most of the women, their desire was not enough; they had to know about a suitable programme and their low literacy skills made this first prerequisite a big hurdle. Other contact people were needed. As Mezirow also found, the learners find out about literacy programmes from family, friends, co-workers or through churches, hospitals, or are referred by employers, welfare, job-training agencies or some hear through the public schools and the mass media. Finally, some just walk in off the street (Mezirow, et al., 1975: 48). However it is made, that first contact is essential and that is why it was part of every woman's story.

I am encouraged by others.

This brief statement actually encompasses three ideas that the women spoke of: others encouraged them to become involved in a literacy programme; at the initial contact stage, others involved in the programme encouraged them in their learning; and, finally, the success of others encouraged the women.

in [city named], I wanted to go back to school too but I couldn't, I didn't encourage myself enough ... nobody was there to say, go for it ...

the main thing that got me here was that I was encouraged by others... my family, my sister ...

when I started going back to school, the counsellors encouraged me to go for, if you want that in life go for it so I did...

when I first came here, when she started asking me some things, Sister Grace was the first one, then Sister Linda, oh, I can't read that, oh right away you know, I can't read that, I've never read before; she'd tell me, oh yes you could, you can read, anybody can read if they want to and I started to think, you know everytime I'd go home, maybe she is right, I wasn't sure yet you know but I kept thinking to myself she must be right because ... then I kept wanting to come ...

Sister Grace told me about Carol who works with students and gives them tests and all that so she arranged with Carol to come down and give a test on me and the test, well she told me that I can learn, you know and it would just take awhile for me to learn ... after I got tested by Carol, I kept going to Sister Grace ... I think Sister Grace helped me a lot, you know, she's really given me encouragement to do ...

when you go back to school, you think that you're too old to go back and then you hear from other people they went back, they did pretty good and now they're counsellors and all this and once you find out this and then you think to yourself that you can do it too, just go for it and you can do it ...

Again, it seems that, universally, encouragement is a pre- and co- requisite for a person to attend to the lengthy task of improving literacy skills. In a UNESCO study cited in the International Council for Adult Education's 1979 publication (34), it is reported that motivation comes from knowing other people in their situation who have improved their lot through literacy and that it is sustained through the encouragement and support of peers, family and the group process. In some cases, the women spoke of literally being dragged to attend, their fear was so great and most spoke of the strength they derive from the support and encouragement given. Sadly, this was not everyone's tale, and for those women who push on without support and, in some cases, encounter hostility and abuse because of their involvement, it is an even greater tale of courage and determination.

THE PSYCHOLOGICAL CATEGORY

The most numerous and striking statements that were developed seemed to revolve around what the layman understands by the term psychological, that having to do with the mind, one's thoughts and feelings: The statements do not arise out of the life situations nor are they a means to some other goal. Instead, they speak, most vividly, of the women's self-concept and also of the need to be a valued part of humanity; that humanity which heretofore has denied them their dignity.

I want to stop being embarrassed, feeling ashamed.

This statement actually speaks of two conditions; the embarrassment is external to themselves while the shame is very much an internal feeling. All spoke of their fear of being laughed at by others for their 'inadequacies'. The embarrassment came from other people's assessment of their worthiness while the shame came from their deep feelings that they are missing something inside; they are not quite whole.

for a long time I didn't know how to write my name, I'd go in the hospital for tests and that, you know, and they'd say, sign your name and then I'd say I can't and they'd look at me, you know ... that look...

when you go in a bank and places like this you gotta sign, read this and fill it out, you gotta fill out some form, always!; that's very embarrassing when you have to ask somebody to do that, I can't do that... especially at my age ...

I am VERY, VERY MUCH ASHAMED, ... made fun of because I have been made fun of all my life from my own people and from other people who were supposed to be nice or whatever ...

I want to read, like I said before, so nobody could make a fool of me too much, they have all my life but if I could read, I could at least maybe even think that book might help me a little bit, take my mind off of the awful bad things that has happened and does happen and are happening for a half second or so ...

Hunter and Harman (1979: 9) and Mezirow, et al. (1975: 49) both use the

word embarrassment to describe the initial condition of the adult learners in their massive studies. They have to overcome embarrassment in the first place to attend classes and once there, their condition is apparent for all to see. Amoroso interviewed adults enrolled in literacy classes and they too spoke of their determination not to be made fun of and their further conviction that they do not want to have to say "I don't know" any more (1984: 6). Clemmons also quotes one woman who echoes sentiments of the respondents of this study, "[p]eople could make such a fool of me if they knew I couldn't read, so I stopped letting anyone get close" (1985: 26). During the credibility check, the women agreed that they were much more open now to other people and were therefore not missing out on so much. In other cultures, the shame also runs deep as reported by Junge and Tegegne, as one of the eight reasons for attending literacy classes was the strong desire to learn because of the shame of being ignorant (1985: 609). The shame and embarrassment was a common condition and a common reason for seeking help but it was only one of five psychological factors that ultimately brought them to a literacy programme.

I am now confident that I can learn.

For the older women who were really denied an opportunity for schooling in their youth, confidence in their ability to learn did not enter into the equation. For them, it was their belief that, given the opportunity, they could learn that was more of a factor. But for the younger women, who have spent some time in school, their confidence has been severely eroded over the years, mainly through the insensitivity or maliciousness of others who for their own gain, wished to keep these women in dependent positions. One of the respondents spoke for a few when she said,

like when you're home and when you get married or live in common law with a guy and you talk to him about going back to school and they say, you can't do it, they just put you down; you can't read, you can't do this, they won't take you back, they keep saying then you start to

believe them ... I kept believing them that I couldn't go back to school, my boyfriend and then my husband both said that, that I'm a mother, should be a housewife but there's more to life than just staying at home ... so I needed the confidence to learn ... I came back when I believed in myself ...

The group of women told similar tales of husbands telling them that they are too dumb to learn, keeping things and information from them and ruling their lives completely because they are 'dummies'. In most of these cases, it was their determination and some luck that brought them into contact with people who gave them a different picture and reinforced their fragile feelings that they were not 'dummies', no matter what skills they did or did not possess. But for many, it took many years to come to this fragile resolution and it is why it is the combination of psychological factors that finally enabled them to take the big step. According to the International Council for Adult Education, confidence comes from seeing others succeed in the difficult task and from overcoming the block that says that they cannot learn. It seemed to be the consensus of the group that one would not attempt, in public, to improve one's literacy skills unless one had some confidence that improvement was possible.

I want to do this for myself: to be somebody.

Again, this statement actually speaks of two different ideas but because the sentiments were usually voiced together, I included them as one. Again, this was of greater a concern for the younger respondents who had more of lifetime to come and who perhaps were closer to the situation of having to do for others, meeting the demands of young children and husbands to the neglect of their own needs. For the women in the group check, this statement also spoke to them of their desire to be independent and to be able to rely on themselves in their new found strength. It also spoke to all of them of the need to be literate in this society in order to do anything deemed important and therefore be important oneself.

I wanted to prove to myself that I can go to school, eh, and try to be

somebody ...

I had to convince my husband and when I started school, he used to make me feel guilty because my kids were in a day care ... he used to say, you should feel guilty then; I just started ignoring him, said I wanted to do something for myself; he went to school, it's my turn, I wanted ..., I got a chance to go back and I'm here ...

I think what really got me going was I wanted something better for myself ... I feel I will be doing something for myself for once ...

I think it's exciting, doing something for yourself, trying to make something of your life after the kids are gone; you'll have a job instead of just sitting at home thinking you're nobody ...

Amoroso (1984: 3) asked his respondents about the high drop out rate in literacy programmes and they told him "[t]hey may be doing it for somebody other than themselves and they decide that it's no use because they don't have the drive. You know, they're not doing it for themselves."

A qualitative study completed in the United States (Mezirow, et al. 1975:44) and a quantitative study carried out in Saudi Arabia and reported in the International Council for Education's publication (1979: 36) found these sentiments also expressed and with such conviction that the researchers created a category to encompass these feelings. This, they called the 'self-improvement' class. It was the older women who had their working lives behind them who wanted to "better" themselves in Mezirow's, et al. study (1975: 44). While the older women in this study did agree that this was a consideration, it was not one of their primary motivators. For them, they had lived a lifetime of being undervalued by society so if any credit was going to accrue to them now because of their efforts, it was an unanticipated reward. Their personal sense of worth is more important to them than that which is deemed by society; but that is the subject of the next statement. However, a statement from the qualitative study completed in Ethiopia, sums up succinctly the underlying motive for this category " [a]n illiterate person has no value" (Junge and Tegegne, 1985: 609). While that may be society's assessment, it is not the conclusion of the women who work hard to improve their literacy skills.

I feel good about myself; I am proud of me.

This statement, again, mainly expressed by the younger women, literally screamed out at me from the very first interview when we were simply talking about events in a person's life. It was corroborated forcefully when I asked one respondent, unexpectedly, what made her different from all the women who have literacy problems but do not seek help and her response was,

well, what I learned from Native Women [a pre-employment programme that she attended prior to her involvement in literacy training] is that you should be proud of who you are and not of what other people think who you are; so I guess I'm proud of me ...

The strength of this feeling was also expressed by another respondent who went on to argue that feeling good about oneself was an absolutely necessary pre-requisite for involvement in a literacy programme. In the member check conducted with this same respondent, she went further and said that nothing could be done without a sense of worthiness in oneself.

I'm proud, I'm proud of myself, being here, trying, well trying to do something for myself, I think that's good; felt like when I first started school, screaming out to the world that I'm doing something for myself ...

I have decided to return to school for many reasons ... it has been a year and a half since I have last swallowed any type of alcohol and I feel very good about myself. I would like a fresh start ...

he phoned one of the girls from ----[a counselling programme] to come and interview me, she came and we talked and she told me how the programme is, about how everything when you were young, if you had a bad childhood; that's what this programme is about so I started going there and all the things about that I couldn't talk to my husband [about], my closest sister I couldn't talk to; I brought everything out in that programme and after I got everything out, I felt much better about myself so that's when I took my step to go back to school ...

before you can go back to school, if you have problems, then you need to get counselling first before you could feel good about yourself, before you could decide that you could do stuff ...

The women in the group check agreed without reservation that this was a

very important factor and that, further, this is the first time in a long time that they have felt good about themselves and proud of what they are doing. I did not find any reference in the literature that comes close to suggesting this type of relationship between self-worth and involvement in a self-help programme. Yet, it seems to me, through discussions with the women, that this is the most significant factor and is the end result of the other psychological factors. They have all felt the shame, the unworthiness, the slow realization that they can do something about it for themselves, and finally the conviction that they are worthy. With the support and encouragement of others, they are ready to face the world with their 'inadequacies' and seek help which will not make them any worthier but which will allow all these new found feelings to grow and strengthen, leaving them as stronger, happier people.

I want to be involved with people.

A consideration voiced by the older women was the human need to socialize which was a factor which also motivated them to become involved in a literacy programme. For one woman, it was the main factor besides the wish to become more self-reliant and for another, it was a factor in the beginning but had lessened lately as her family had become situated geographically closer to her.

I came to learn to read and write and for to get some company... I have learned some good things but I would still come, I wouldn't care if I learned anything, I can't stay at home alone forever and ever and ever, a person can't do that, I don't care how much they say they can ...

I used to come for the company but, ah, now, I have lotta company at my place. Yah, at first I felt that I'd be walking and walking, trying to find a place; you can't, you can't go anywhere when you don't drink and you don't have very many friends on the street if you don't drink; everybody wants to give you a drink; I used to just go sit in these parks but you can't sit too long if you don't drink, everybody bugs you ...

However, the credibility and member checks indicated that while it was not a tremendously important factor, the opportunity to meet other people was a consideration

and a plus now that they were involved in this very social process. In their words, they were meeting people that they could confide in, that they could learn from and this socializing helps them overcome the shyness born of their previous isolation. Mezirow, et al. (1975: 44) also describe the majority of the older, female respondents in their study as social isolates who desire the opportunity to meet others like themselves and to socialize. Bowren and Zintz (1977: 15) call this return to school a social outlet and contend that the women want to be part of a group or at least have the chance to visit with others. As worthy people, they seek out others to be worthy companions.

CHAPTER THREE SUMMARY STATEMENT

This chapter has focussed on the first question - Why did you become involved with a literacy programme? Brief background information was given on each of the four primary respondents. Ten thematic statements were discussed and supported through comments from the respondents and the findings of others' research. Three statements spoke of the instrumental desires of the women acting as motivating factors; two statements spoke of aspects of their life situations which served as motivators and finally, five statements addressed the psychological readiness and needs of the women.

As can be seen from the responses, it was sometimes difficult to separate the conditions which lead the women to seek out a programme, from what initially happened when they did attend which encouraged them further in their efforts. Nevertheless, it can be seen that discrete conditions do have to be present before that big step will be taken. The impact of the decision to become involved in a literacy programme is the subject of Chapter Four.

Chapter Four

INTRODUCTION

The focus of this chapter is a discussion of the insights gained from the respondents with regard to the second major research question - What impact has this decision had on your life? For all the women, going back to school or becoming involved in a literacy programme has had many ramifications which were voiced without much prompting from me. The seven statements developed in response to this second research question also fit neatly into the three categories of instrumental, situational and psychological. It is in this order that they will be discussed in this chapter. Each statement will be supported by the respondents' own voice or written word and then relevant literature will be cited. The impact of literacy programmes on women, resulting from their own reflections, will be clear by the end of Chapter Four.

THE INSTRUMENTAL CATEGORY

I am improving my reading/writing skills.

This statement is really the corollary of the first statement reported in Chapter Three in that the women came to be involved because they wanted to improve their skills. Happily, all said, without reservation, that they have indeed gained in reading and writing skills. Their levels were different to begin with and they may all measure their success in different terms. While acknowledging the hard work, effort and time that goes into making these gains, they are all very satisfied with their progress.

I read better now, my writing is better, everything is better than it was before ...

I learned a lot since I came here; we even did science, about the world

and the stones where they came from; I learned a lot, we do a lot of reports on the books we read ...

my reading and writing has improved a little; Sister Grace helps me now with my math and I read her those problems and she can tell that I read better now than what I did when I started ...

started with times tables, now I am doing business math; I've gone from whole numbers to fractions and decimals ...

I can go places now, that I didn't read before; lotta places I've been gone, I'd wonder what these signs say, lot of these places I'd like to go back and see them, just for that, you know, just read what those signs were ...

this learning isn't going to change me; the only thing it's going to do for me is that I can read a little bit ...

The last sentiment expressed reveals that even for those who do not expect too much out of their work, the fact that they will be able to "read a little bit" is still acknowledged as an achievement. In a telephone interview study that attempted to assess the outcomes of participation in adult basic skills education, Darkenwald and Valentine (1985:19) found that 82.8% of their respondents indicated that participation in a programme had helped them become better readers; 85% said that their mathematics skills had improved; 62.6% concluded that their writing had also improved because of their involvement. Academic improvement was seen by this group as one of the top benefits. In Charnley and Jones' massive, qualitative research into Britain's nationwide literacy campaign, they specifically looked for evidence of impact on the students. They eventually came up with a five group schema which included the categories of "cognitive achievement," or better reading and writing skills, and "enactive achievements," or more reading and writing skills (1979: 174). It was their conclusion that while these categories were important to all, they were more crucial to those who were already in the upper levels of literacy ability (Charnley and Jones, 1979: 175). While no such discriminating claim can be made from my data, it is clear that while academic achievement is a felt impact, the other impacts which follow have as much if not more importance.

I would like to try working in the future.

Increasing their skills has given the women some hope about their future and all expressed the desire to get a job. They spoke of the increased choices they hoped that their advances would give them and of the credentials which they were always asked to produce. They spoke of their intermittent employment records at unskilled jobs and now of their different dreams, different hopes. Their optimism, however, was veiled as they knew from experience that they would still be at the bottom in terms of the marketplace. Their realistic assessment was evident in their statement that they would like to get a job as opposed to a statement like they will get jobs.

you look in the newspaper for a job, even for washing dishes, you need your grade 12; everywhere you look in the newspaper for a job, you gotta have your grade 12 or else you don't get hired anywhere so that's why; I'll go for what I want and finish school, then I'm gonna take some courses ...

never had a real steady job, just off and on, eh; I worked in a car wash; I know a lot about housekeeping; I worked in nursing home housekeeping and that, so, that's about all I really have experience with, I never worked for wages or nothing ... I'd like to try work for a little while and see how it is ...

now, I figure, I always think I could go to work whenever I'm well enough to work ... but I don't think my health will let me ...

I won't go for a job again because I've been turned down too many times; welfare won't let me work but they would rather half starve me to death; what kind of work could I do? What I could do is what they think that I can't do, they just don't care; they have people there that are supposed to find jobs, the ones that they do, they do, the ones that don't, they don't ...

For the last speaker, the door has been shut too many times for her to even think of job possibilities. Darkenwald and Valentine's quantitative study (1985: 22) found that job related benefits were correlated with participation in schooling but these were low on the list of "most important benefits." Charnley and Jones devoted one out of five categories to what they call "socio-economic achievements" as a category of impact on literacy students. Literacy programmes had given these British students a better chance

of entering or re-entering the job market and chances at better jobs with more responsibility (1979: 174). However, socio-economic achievements were also at the lower half of the five category schema, placed with cognitive and enactive achievements, in no particular prioritized order, indicative of their lesser importance in the minds of the students.

The fact that the students are bettering their literacy skills and that they are more hopeful about job prospects are the two statements which speak directly to instrumental impact. Improving literacy skills and employment prospects are the major aims of most literacy programmes. It is clear from the picture here that the former aim is largely met while the latter presents a much more difficult challenge. Secondly, while these may be the only or most important goals stated for the programmes, many other impacts are felt. These important impacts are discussed in the next two categories.

THE SITUATIONAL CATEGORY

My family is happy and proud of me.

Arising out of their situations and their participation in a literacy programme, the women spoke of the pride expressed by at least some members of their families for their perseverance and achievements. In some cases, this has led to a closer family relationship as all are working together to enable the mother to participate while in other cases, it has encouraged other members of the family also to become involved in some type of schooling. It should be noted that the family members who are happy and proud of these women are their mothers, their brothers and sisters and their children. Only one of my original respondents is married at this time and it may be significant to note that her husband was not supportive in the beginning and while he no longer throws up barriers, he would not be an example of this position. His wife spoke of the

happiness and pride of her children and siblings and of how most of the men in her life had put her down and scorned her desire to become literate. She is also the one that said that while it is great that their families are happy and proud of them and therefore supportive, other impacts are more beneficial. Nevertheless, this is how they described these changing relationships.

my sister says I'm a different person from the way I was before and she likes the new me ... my brother thinks it's good I'm going back to school, he's taking computers ... my kids are happy, they are happy for me going back to school, think it's great ...

my mom really praises me ... it would be hard without family support

the other day we were making supper, a meat pie, I cook my own but on TV see if this nice recipe is in the book; I found it, had a heck of a time reading it but I got it, I got it; several of those words I didn't understand, my niece was there; I said 'help me please' and she said 'sure, aunty, you're trying to help yourself, we'll try to help you anytime ...'

my kids are very proud; my eldest daughter was looking for her grocery list but I had taken it and bought all her groceries; took me over two hours but I did it, they all grabbed and hugged me; I felt like a kid, when they learn something, they are so proud, I was so proud ...

Better relationships with family and friends was a felt impact in the Charnley and Jones' study in Britain; this category they called 'affective social achievements' and it numbered in the top two of the five category schema (1979: 174). Research in others cultures suggests as well that this statement speaks to the experience of women. In Ethiopia, Junge and Tegegne asked the women what were the results of their participation in literacy classes and of six statements developed, one was " my family praise me and encourage me to continue " (1985: 610). While this was not an anticipated outcome for most of the women, their families' attitudes have been a very welcome added benefit. However, one must remember that all these studies are looking at a very small percentage of those women who do make it to classes. It is a miniscule proportion of those who could use literacy help. For those who begin and quit or those who stay

away, perhaps they do not have the support of husbands, mates, parents, siblings and children. It does appear that while women's situations can be enriched because of their literacy involvement and ensuing happier family relationships, other aspects of their situations are not so easily changed. This can be seen in the next statement of the situational category.

I have more control but not total control over my life.

After we had talked a great deal about their lives, their decision and its impact, I generally asked them one more question. They had so many positive things to say, seemed so self-assured and self-aware that I asked them if this fundamental experience they were going through was going to give them any more control over their situation, their life. As this was sort of an unexpected tack, they pondered the question carefully and with the same astute perception as before, they tempered their general optimism with the realities with which we all live.

well, I don't know, you can't get control of your life; you got the kids, you got your husband, you got to do things for them, doesn't matter if he didn't like me going back, I still love him and yah ... I feel like I can do more things now than ever did before ...

I was thinking that, but then in a way, no, money is always involved; you can't always have what you want ... I probably would have more choices like if I got to a higher level but I don't know ...

no one has total control ever ... you've got your commitments ...

I had specifically asked this question because I wanted to know if the notion of empowerment was an added benefit of participation in literacy programmes for my respondents. While other studies where the focus was also on the individual learners did not confront this issue, the broader studies of illiteracy did and it seemed that my respondents' intuitive knowledge echoed what the theorists have been saying - literacy, of itself, has many wonderful benefits but for fundamental, qualitative change in their lives, there are just too many other obstacles. This is true of the Third World where

Scribner asserts "the capacity of literacy to confer power or to be the primary impetus for significant and lasting economic or social change has proved problematic in developing countries" (1984: 12). It is also the conclusion of Hunter and Harman whose work was centered in the United States.

For most persons who lack literacy skills, illiteracy is simply one factor interacting with many others - class, race and sex discrimination, welfare dependency, unemployment, poor housing, and a general sense of powerlessness. The acquisition of reading and writing skills would eliminate conventional literacy among many but would have no appreciable effect on the other factors that perpetuate the poverty of their lives. (1979: 9)

The situational category is therefore one of limited impact but nevertheless, is viewed by the women as realistically as possible and is seen as important, if not as important, as the next category of impacts.

THE PSYCHOLOGICAL CATEGORY

I am not sitting bored at home.

This statement actually arose out of a question I had asked some of the women; what would you be doing if you were not going to 'school'? They spoke of the boredom of their lives, their lack of involvement with living and their escape into TV soap operas, pills, alcohol, whatever escape was available. For the most part, they look forward to coming to school and they enjoy learning. This is no captive audience here; they take three buses to get to class, get up at 5:30 A.M. to get the kids organized for the day, put their children into daycare, rush home to make supper, do laundry and then study some more at ten o'clock when everyone else is finally in bed. They make tremendous sacrifices and put forth tremendous effort into their learning and their reward "a new world is opening up."

when I get home from school, I do housework, do the laundry, clean the house, iron clothes, watch less TV, read more; I don't go to bed 'til

midnight; every day before I used to sit in front of the TV and watch soap operas, I prefer what I'm doing now than what I did then ... I am going to miss it during the holidays ... I even asked [teacher's name] to give me more of those lessons that I could do during the summer holidays ...

learning is good, of course ... I sure enjoy it a lot better than sitting at home especially as I don't have a home to sit at, that's not a home actually but it's a place to live ...

without school, I'd probably be sitting at home, sitting bored ...

The women all present an exterior of involved vitality and are animated when speaking of what they are learning. A lot of it involved hard work on their part but the feeling one gets from being around them for awhile is that they may give up on some things in life but they will not give up on this opportunity for learning, no matter what. This factor alone separates them from the many students who drop out of literacy programmes.

I feel more and more confident; I can do it.

When asked about changes in their life, some of the women answered directly that their confidence in themselves strengthens and grows with each passing day.

Learning new things, each little success spells for them greater confidence in their abilities and the conviction voiced by one but agreed to by all is that - "I do it my way now."

I feel more confident about everything in my life ...

School? ... I guess it just brought more confidence in me ...

I have more confidence now, it's easier now that it was before ...

I've learned that I can do it and not to be afraid, I am doing it and I'm going to finish school some day ...

now that you go back to school, you know more about yourself; with me, I never used to know how to say 'no' to people, I used to ... they used to take advantage of me but now I say 'no', I don't let them do that to me, I have more confidence in myself than before ...

Out of a list of five, Darkenwald and Valentine's study placed enhanced self-confidence

as the second most important benefit from participation in adult basic skills education (1985: 22). A learner centered investigation carried out in Tanzania in 1977 reported that once the learners got over their initial fear and alienation, they gained in confidence, acquired a new self-awareness and regained their dignity. This in turn made them no longer the objects of exploitation and humiliation as before (International Council for Adult Education, 1979: 39). These results are strikingly familiar to the results reported by the women in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada. Further, Charnley and Jones' schema placed "affective personal achievements" as the most important category of impacts of involvement in literacy programmes for the learners and "confidence" was the generic word used to label the entire category.

Although the notion of confidence is complex, it is the basic constituent of affective personal achievement and because of its importance, it places affective personal achievement as the prime, yet pervasive, objective of a project concerned with ameliorating adult illiteracy or, indeed, of any project concerned with subcultures of the 'disadvantaged'. (Charnley and Jones, 1979: 101)

This leads directly to the last statement in the psychological category and the last statement to be discussed with respect to the impact literacy programmes have had on the lives of the women reported on in this study.

I feel better about myself.

This last statement is also a generic phrase which reflects the women's over-all attitude towards themselves. Their increasing feelings of self-worth began before they became involved in a class and has since been reinforced through their involvement. For all of the women, there was absolutely no doubt that this is how they feel although their positive feelings vary in degree. For some women, it is the most important impact felt; for others, this statement speaks of the whole experience and they do not separate it from the other good feelings they have.

... learning helps a lot; you think more of yourself when you can read ... maybe people will laugh at me but I said I'm still proud of what I'm doing; I said let'em laugh but I'm doing this for myself, if they can't see that, I said that's too bad ... you feel good for yourself

...
I feel good about myself that I could do stuff and I'm doing what I wanted to do from seven years ago ...

I feel a lot better about that my kids are in school regularly ...

school has helped me a lot; it's good to go back ...

Ninety-two per cent of the respondents in Darkenwald and Valentine's study said that they feel better about themselves because of their participation in classes and that their children are also doing better at school (1985: 21). Bhola (1981: 13) also speaks of the positive relationship between parents' literacy and their children's schooling experiences. The statements that came from Ethiopian women reflect the positive self-image change, "I would not consider myself a complete human being in the past. I now feel that I know something and I want to know more. Today I can read and walk with my head up" (Junge and Tegegne, 1985: 611). Bhola points out that literacy, as a categorical and demonstrable skill, has built-in social certification which releases the individual from feelings of inferiority and automatically enhances self-image (1981: 11). They can do what seemingly everyone else can do. One of the students that spoke with Amoroso on the value of education had this to say,

[t]here's one point about education that a lot of people don't really stress. It's not necessary to get you a good job or the ability to carry on a good conversation, but it's a feeling inside a person of self-worth and self-gratification ... a satisfaction about, yes, I have an education, yes, I do know this and, yes, I can work this problem myself. I don't need you (1984: 14).

Finally, Charnley and Jones include these feelings of self-worth and improvement in self-reliance as part of "affective personal achievements," their most important category of impact (1979: 174). "Perhaps the most important conclusion that can be asserted is that students did not primarily judge their success in terms of utilitarian

objectives; they registered a feeling of increased confidence, often described as a feeling of being at ease within themselves" (Charnley and Jones, 1979: 175). Feeling better about themselves is really the end product of all of the other feelings and experiences that have resulted from their involvement in a learning programme.

CHAPTER FOUR SUMMARY STATEMENT

The impact on the women's lives of the learning experience has been felt in different ways. For the most part, however, the impact of instrumental gains, especially in skills acquisition, has been very rewarding. Their lives have changed ever so slightly but two statements of situational impact are declared. Three psychological impacts are noted with great enthusiasm.

Once again, the psychological impact speaks most deeply to the issues deemed important to the women. Nevertheless, the instrumental and situational impacts are also important and one should not undervalue these impacts as they are all part of the larger picture. Taken together then, it seems that the women's involvement in literacy programmes has been a positive experience. It has made a qualitative difference in their lives, certainly in terms of their self-image and skills acquisition, and in lesser ways, in their life situations.

SUMMARY OF THE STUDY AND ITS FINDINGS

Purpose

A review of recent and relevant literature revealed that research into adult education, specifically, literacy, has been relatively scanty and important aspects of the problem are missing. Generally, the demographics of the adult illiterate population in North America are available and programmes and practices have been documented. It was the intent of this study to add to the literature from the point of view of the learners involved in adult literacy programmes.

Two questions became the focus of the research. Initially, I wanted to find out what motivated the learners to become involved in a literacy programme at this point in their lives. The impact of this involvement on their lives became the second interest and focus. After the focus was defined, it was necessary to make methodological decisions which would best suit the nature and intent of this inquiry.

Methodology

The purpose and setting called for a particular methodological framework within which to work. The search was for an understanding of the subjective experience of the learners in literacy classes. To this end, an interpretive inquiry, whose purpose is to seek understanding, seemed most logical. Focussed interviews were conducted over a seven month period with a theoretical sample of four women. For the purposes of triangulation, documents produced by a different group of twenty-seven women were scrutinized and added to the data collected. Member checks were carried out with each of the original respondents and a credibility check was undertaken with another surrogate

sample of six women in a group setting. Taped interviews were transcribed, field notes were categorized and all data were analyzed through a process of analytic induction.

Findings

Findings were reported in two separate chapters. The issue of the reasons for the women's involvement in various programmes is dealt with in Chapter Three. Ten thematic statements were derived from the data collected. The statements reflecting the women's general considerations regarding their involvement were voiced by a minimum of two of the original respondents and reinforced in the member and credibility check discussions. The seven thematic statements, reported in Chapter Four, voice the women's conclusions regarding the impact on their lives of their involvement in the literacy programmes. These seven statements were derived in the same manner and went through the same process as the first ten statements reported.

For the purpose of clarity, the thematic statements were further sub-divided into three categories. A statement became either part of the instrumental, situational or psychological group. The statements were grouped according to what they commonly addressed. Thus, a statement belonging to the instrumental category has something to do with literacy as an enabling function; situational statements arise out of the conditions of the women's lives; psychological statements speak to their emotional needs.

The following three diagrams serve as visual summaries of the results. Figure One is a visual representation of the motivational factors which encourage women to participate in literacy programmes. The thematic statements belonging to their respective categories are encircled and the lines of dots represent the interaction of factors. The solid lines depict the uni-directional influence of the factors on the person. Figure Two is a visual representation of the potential impact on a person of involvement in a literacy programme. Finally, Figure Three is a compilation of the seventeen thematic statements

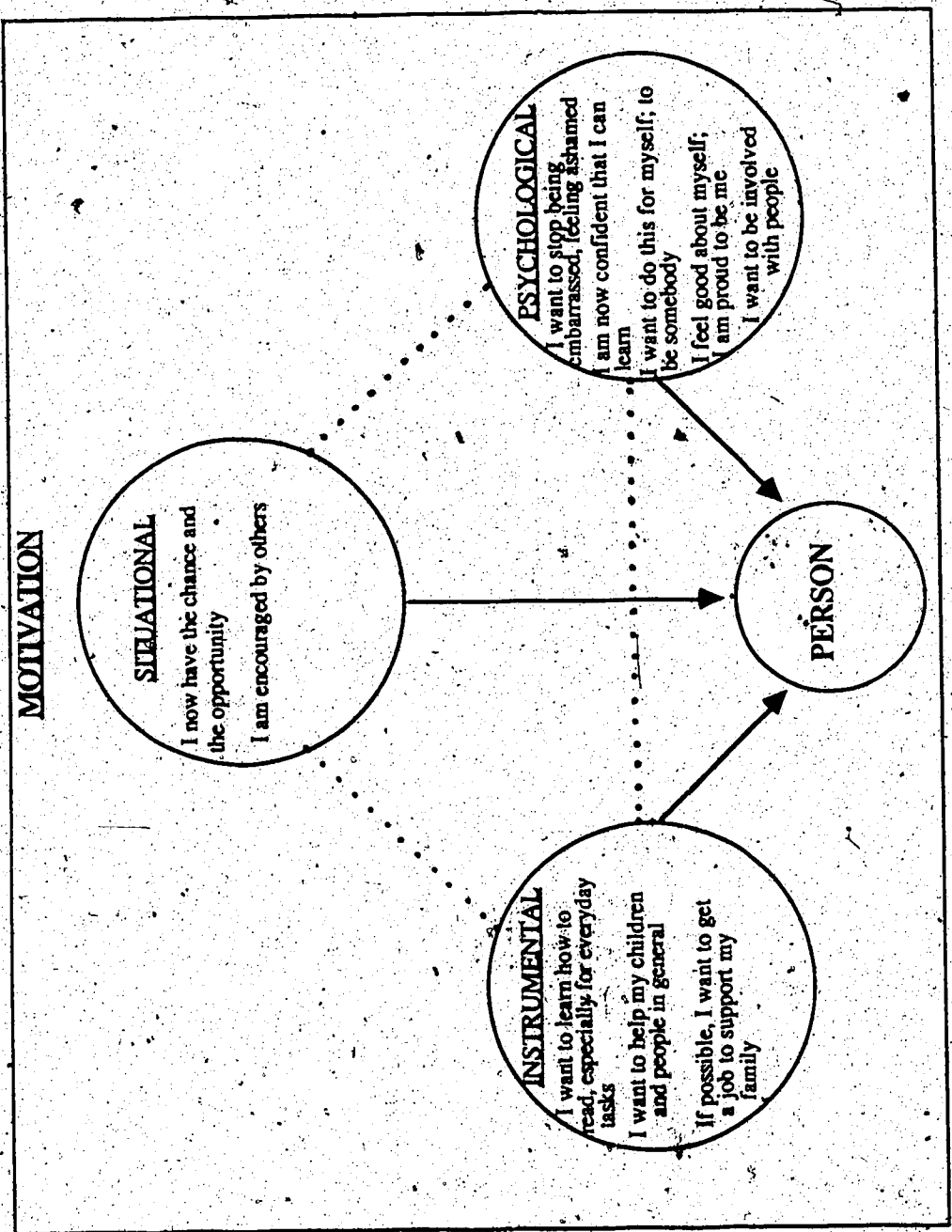


Figure 1: Motivating Factors

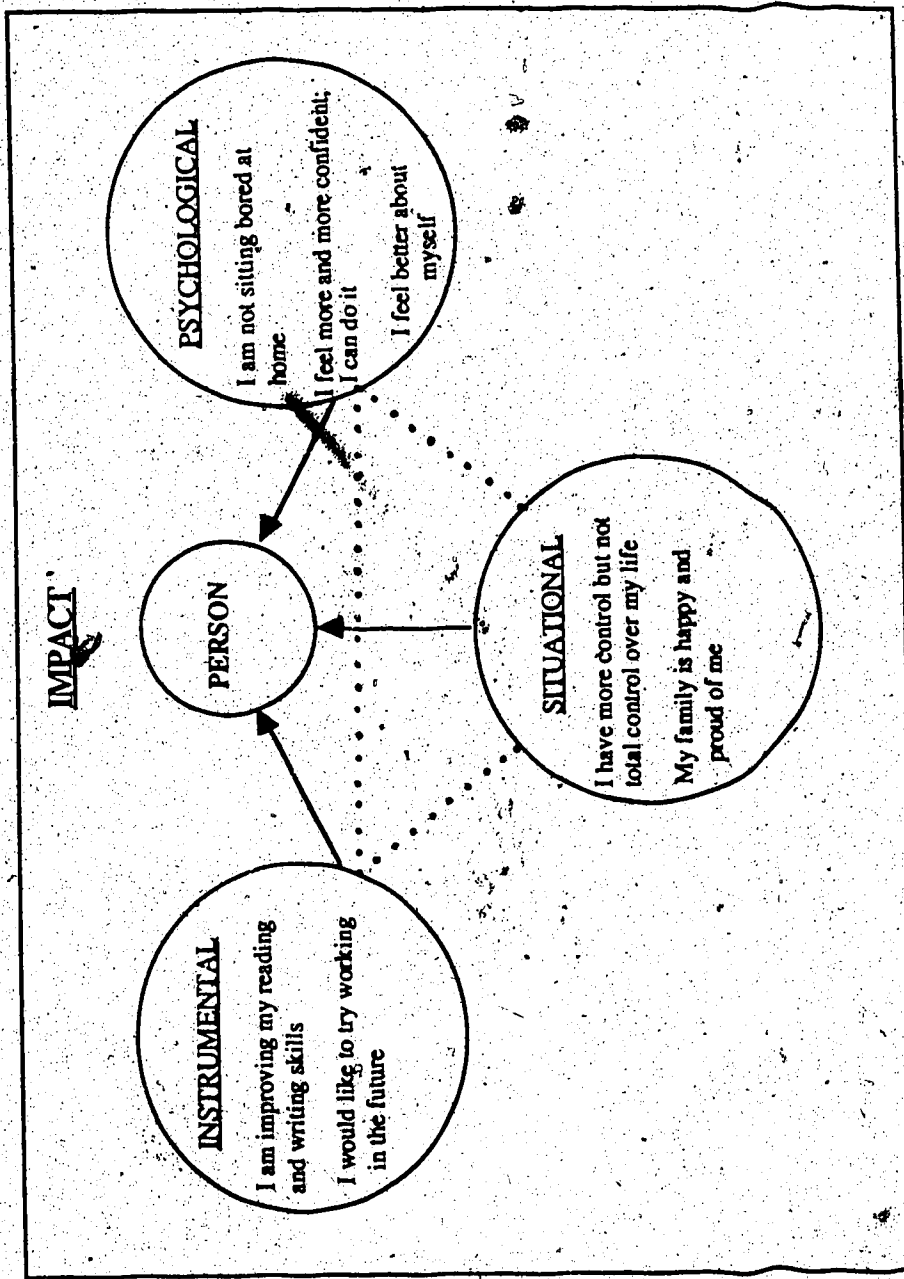


Figure 2: Potential Impact of Involvement

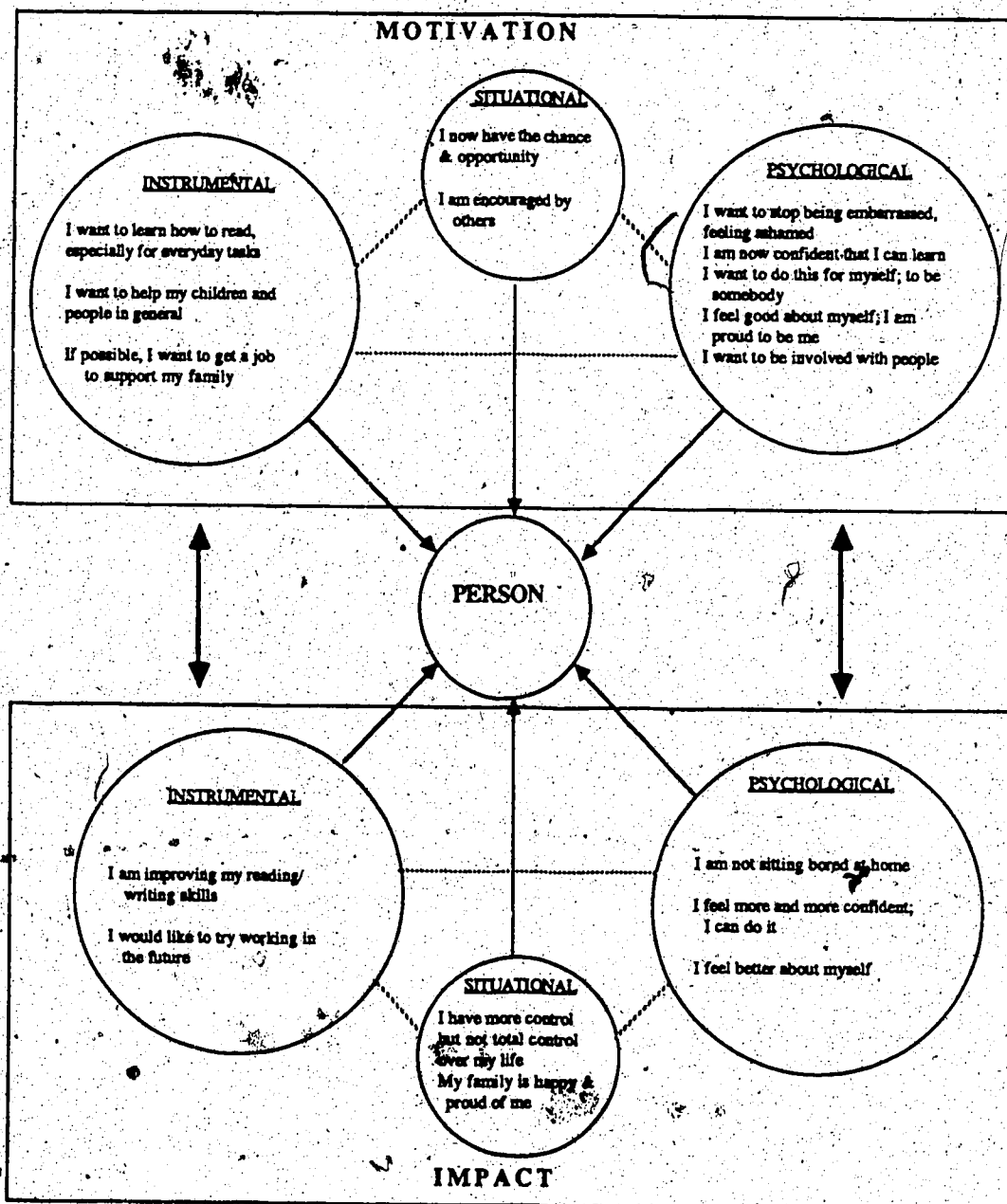


Figure 3: A Visual Summary of The Results

in their appropriate groupings and in boxes according to the question they were addressing: The double arrows of this figure show how motivation and impact interact with each other in an almost cyclical fashion. Taken together, these figures summarize and show clearly the interdependability of the findings.

CONCLUSIONS

The four main conclusions reached in this study will be outlined in this section.

A. *Women become involved in literacy programmes for a variety of individual reasons and no single factor fully explains their motivation.*

After the data were analyzed, each of the ten statements developed spoke of a different factor that led to the women's involvement at this time in their life. The statements speak of their felt desires, their psychological needs which must be met, the conditions in their lives which now allow them to be involved, and their psychological state of mind at the time that they made the decision to attend. Not every discrete factor had to be present in the lives of the women before they became involved but in each case, a number of the factors did figure in their story. For most, at least one factor from each category (instrumental, situational, psychological) convinced them to take this big step and enroll in a class or go to a drop-in centre for help.

They wanted to be able to do something; either the opportunity presented itself or was sought; and, they had some psychological readiness which allowed them to perceive their further psychological needs. For each person, while the number and combination of factors may be different, all reflect some elements of the statements outlined. This reinforces the conclusion that a variety of factors must be taken into account when speaking of the reasons why learners become involved in literacy programmes.

B. Involvement in literacy programmes changes peoples' lives.

The seven thematic statements derived regarding the impact of the women's involvement speak of seven disparate impacts on their lives. Not every statement is part of every women's story. However, the member and credibility check process revealed that most of the women did feel strongly about all of the statements. They felt that these statements were an accurate reflection of the impact their literacy involvement has had on their lives and it is a variety of positive impacts that are felt. Some are felt in the instrumental sphere; situations are slightly changed; and, psychological needs are being met. The women are improving their skills, they are gaining more control over their lives and they are feeling better about themselves. These are widely differing impacts yet all are associated with the women's involvement in literacy programmes.

C. The present emphasis on employment-oriented literacy programming does not reflect the reality nor the needs of beginning readers.

Thomas' study (1983: 4) of illiteracy in Canada found that most literacy help offered through the various levels and agencies of government is confined to employment concerns. Mezirow (1975: 4) reports that in the United States, the National Advisory Council on Adult Education specified four goals of literacy training. The first goal is that the students get a job or a better job. In the meantime, the respondents of this present study hope that their increasing skills will improve their chances on the job market but this employment concern was only one of ten factors which brought them to a literacy programme. They perhaps know better than anyone what researchers have been more recently stating. Hunter and Harman (1979: 15) refute the assumption that "anyone who becomes literate is automatically better off economically, is better able to find employment, and becomes a better citizen." They argue that there is no evidence to support the contention that literacy contributes to wider employment opportunities and

they cite two studies (Greenleigh Associates, 1968; Patten and Clark, 1968) which suggest that literacy students rarely attribute a new job to increased literacy skills (Harman and Hunter, 1979: 15).

The women canvassed in this study are very realistic in their assessments of what literacy can do for them in terms of employment. They realize that it is an area over which they do not have much control and so a desire for employment is only one factor in their decision to begin and carry on literacy learning. Their spoken needs, which literacy can provide for, are rooted only in the aspects of their lives that they can change. Literacy programmes can help them to acquire skills, assist other people and satisfy some of their psychological needs. This is the individual reality that they can deal with and for which they come to class. The collective reality of unemployment is something which they cannot control; it is part of the wider power and poverty structures of society which needs its pool of 'underqualified' people.

Employment-oriented programmes which stress student employment goals only reinforce the myths that education or training will provide job opportunities. If after training is complete, unemployment is still the result, then it must be the failing of the individual, not the system. As one teacher lamented to me on a particularly depressing day when another former student came back to report his imminent lay-off, perhaps all this talk of goals and job prospects sends students out with too high expectations. Maybe classes are just preparing them to come crashing down when they meet up with the realities out there. Even though programmes aim to increase employment prospects and teachers believe that that is what they are doing for their students, the students at the lowest levels of training do not believe in the myths and that is why employment-oriented programmes neither reflect their reality nor their needs.

D. Gains in self-respect and positive self-concept in the learners should be stressed and valued.

The respondents in this study downplayed the aspect of literacy for employment and simultaneously played up the psychological factors and impacts of literacy. This can be seen in the number and forcefulness of the statements speaking of improved self-concept. Eight of seventeen statements are included in the psychological category and all of the statements are strong and clear. These statements are not the wistful musings of women who only wish about employment prospects; these are the statements of women who know and state very clearly that literacy makes them feel good about themselves. For the women involved, this is achievement in its own right.

Charnley and Jones (1979: 178) came to the same sort of conclusion after conducting their massive study of the nation-wide literacy campaign in Britain. They specifically set out to describe how the learners see success in the programmes and they contend that there is strong evidence to support the idea that students see success, first and foremost, in terms of affective personal or social achievements. Charnley and Jones argue that "it is therefore correct that a tutor should see success in ameliorative terms, principally in the improvement of self-image, and it is a pity that many tutors denigrated their achievements because of the lack of progress in the literacy skills."

The same denigration of social achievements that Charnley and Jones found in Britain, I found when I shared the findings of this study with some of the teachers. They were surprised at the relative obscurity of the employment factor and the strength of the psychological factors. The wry comment was made that the teachers usually do a 'good job' of building self-esteem; it was obvious that in their minds that this was a very secondary achievement, an unplanned by-product of the literacy programme. But for the women involved, this is a major achievement and allows them to continue to grow and learn and function as strong, self-aware human beings.

IMPLICATIONS

Two general implications arise out of the conclusions of this study. The first major implication to be discussed in this section is conceptual; the second implication is more procedural in nature.

1. The multi-faceted nature of the phenomenon must be taken into account when working with or on behalf of learners in adult literacy programmes; therefore:

a) while the vast majority of literacy programmes in North America emphasize employment-oriented skills acquisition, it is the conclusion of this study that this emphasis reflects a narrow view of the adult illiterate's needs and desires. Employment and skills acquisition were only two of ten concerns that brought the respondents to literacy classes. It is also a major conclusion of Charnley and Jones' study in Britain that an overemphasis on skills, either enactive or cognitive, is misdirected (1979: 185). The problem with this overemphasis is the simultaneous under-emphasis placed on progress towards affective personal or social achievements which were the two areas designated as top priority by the students canvassed in the British study (Charnley and Jones, 1979: 180).

Improvements in the social/psychological areas must become priorities of literacy programming.

b) future programming must take into account the instrumental needs, the situational needs and the psychological needs of the learners if it is to attract and hold them. There was only one woman in this study who became involved in a literacy programme for two reasons, namely, skills acquisition and social opportunities; most of the women spoke of

the many and varied reasons reported earlier. Scribner (1984: 18) came to a similar conclusion and by inference, suggested a similar implication when she stated "as ethnographic research and practical experience demonstrate, effective literacy program[mes] are those that are responsive to perceived needs, whether for functional skills, social power, or self-improvement."

We need to conceive of the whole area of literacy in this new light. This demands that we recognize the various and varying needs of the learners. This alternate conceptualization of literacy, in turn, suggests specific procedural implications, detailed below.

2. Alternatives to institutionalized, employment-oriented literacy programmes must be envisioned, enacted and fully supported, therefore:

a) given the conceptual implication, one basic approach to literacy training and programming is not a relevant or effective response to the reality described. Various approaches embodied in various programmes are in existence as noted by this study; the problem is that the preponderance of literacy training occurs in institutionalized settings with their concomitant concerns of programme standardization, rigid scheduling, behavioural goal objectives and progress measurement. In most cases, continuation in programmes depends on achievement. This is measured at various intervals and the total time spent in a programme by an individual usually may not exceed one year (Thomas, 1983: 64). These concerns set up many barriers for potential students. Their home situations may not allow them to attend classes on a daily basis; psychologically they may be not be able to function effectively in a school-like setting. Individual needs and learning style are difficult to accommodate in such programmes. This is not to say that these programmes are not needed; they are, but a "[r]ecognition of the multiple

meanings and varieties of literacy also argues for a diversity of educational approaches, informal and community-based as well as formal and school-based" (Scribner, 1984: 18).

b) Kavale and Lindsey (1977: 3) also advocate the utilization of many approaches in literacy programming and believe that the most important approach may be to "[d]etermine the illiterate adult's motives for enrolling in the program[me] and proceed accordingly."

c) Charnley and Jones (1979: 181) suggest that the provision of counselling is a necessary component of a successful literacy programme. As can be seen from this study and from the British study, students are involved in more than simple skills acquisition, they are literally re-adjusting their self-image and that psychological transition is often problematic.

d) in Canada, Thomas (1983: 108) also argues for the need for counselling, referral and community information services and flexible and informal administrative structures.

e) flexible, holistic programmes should see the learning experience as the sum of the inherent instrumental, situational and psychological factors and reflect all these concerns.

These approaches call for more than skill trainers. These approaches may call for reading specialists, counsellors, tutors, friends. What is most clearly apparent is that the conclusions reached here call for more approaches tailored to the needs of the learners.

THE LAST WORD

The preceding chapters and sections of this final chapter have focussed on the central concerns of this study; what motivated individuals to become involved in literacy programmes and what impact this involvement has had on their life. These two questions were raised and answered by women willing to share their story and through the findings of other researchers. Other important issues were also raised, specifically by Anita who has been described as the 'negative case'. I found her questions to be so compelling and fundamental to the whole area of literacy that I believe they deserve separate treatment. What further compels me to include this discussion is the fact that these issues have also been voiced by other women to other researchers and reported in the literature. They deserve to be heard.

Before I began asking Anita questions during our first interview, she had a few questions to ask of me. I explained the purpose and the plan of the research and like the other respondents, she wanted to know why did I want to talk with her? Furthermore, how was this research going to help her, or the programme or anyone? What was I going to get out of it? Anita then intimated that I was wasting my time asking women why they came to learn to read and write when the answer is so obvious. In her view, women will come; all they need is to know where and when and to be given the chance and the opportunity. She wanted to know why researchers did not do something about the real problems in the world - "letting people starve ... not get jobs ... see the lonely people on the street everywhere, why doesn't somebody do something about it? ... why don't people care?" I did not have an answer for Anita that day and throughout our conversations, Anita would occasionally return to this theme. During the member check, when we discussed the women's desire for jobs in the future, she gave me her wry smile and said again, "of course, we want jobs ... you should be asking the people who

won't give us jobs why they won't!" Because of Anita's fundamental challenge, I was forced to think very carefully throughout the study about these other issues and how I could incorporate them into a study which did not really set out to address them. It was no surprise to me then when I found other women voicing the same sort of theme in the literature.

In an article for the "Journal of Education", Pat Rigg told the story of Petra, a woman who was learning to read at the age of forty-five (1985: 130). A graduate student of Rigg's was Petra's tutor and they would both travel occasionally to Petra's home for the lesson. During one session, they asked Petra how she would help someone who was having difficulty with reading. She replied "I miss not knowing how to read. People like you, who know how, should come to help me so I could learn some stories, at least how to write my name." Rigg and her student persisted with the question and Petra answered,

[i]f I were like you who know how to read, I would be very nice to that person who doesn't know how to read. ... Someone who already knows how to read is all the time saying, 'Why do you want to learn that?' and they don't care. They are all the time judging one because one doesn't know how to read, but one knows how to think in one's head.

Later, they asked Petra if she had any questions for them. She asked "[t]his is what I want to know: Why are you asking these questions? Are you trying to help those who can't read, or are you asking them to help yourselves?" The author and the tutor learned many things from Petra - that she could not read but she could think in her head; that one must examine one's own stereotypes; that one should give the learners the lead and take cues from them; that one should ask what changes are anticipated as a result of learning to read; that it is important to remember the larger political and economic contexts because they, too, affect literacy (Rigg, 1985: 137).

Anita, Petra and a thirty-eight year-old woman who spoke with Fingeret, all

speak of society's negative judgment of them because they lack certain literacy skills. Literacy is the barrier that keeps them from securing decent jobs; it is the standard which denigrates their intelligence and abilities. Finally, literacy or education, in general, confers on people their worthiness, their inherent goodness. But as the woman said to Fingeret (1983: 140) "Education don't make people good. These kids today, they get good educations. Then they turn around and hurt somebody. Or they get to run to the army and hurt lots of people. You tell me it's not crazy out there?" Similarly, Anita thinks that it is crazy that educated people spend their time asking her questions when there are so many other important injustices that need to be rectified. She certainly wonders what mass education has done for this society. These women know that these assumptions about literacy's power are false. They have seen through the myths.

This brings me to one last consideration - a speculation on the converse of the initial research question. I asked why women are involved in literacy programmes but part of my curiosity also revolves around why are so many not involved? Hunter and Harman offer a few reasons.

The people we are looking at are variously described as illiterate, functionally illiterate, functionally incompetent, educationally disadvantaged, or undereducated. It is unlikely that any of them so describe themselves. They may feel only that they are powerless and at a disadvantage with respect to certain benefits of the society. (1979: 23) ... Many will never enroll in programs of any sort for diverse reasons: cultural or linguistic barriers, fear of failing, distrust of the institutions of the mainstream culture, reliance on electronic media as a substitute for the written word, and the ability of some to find satisfaction despite low levels of academic attainment (1979: 58).

Fingeret says that "[w]e assume that because adults are discouraged about their ability to reap the rewards of society that they do not know how it works. It may be that they know only too well; perhaps it is not their inability to understand but rather the society's refusal to hear their voices" (1982: 3). Their relative powerlessness in society, their knowledge that despite what the myths say, literacy will not get them good jobs or make them better people or earn them some token respect - these realities force me to consider

again the strength of the women who despite these odds make tremendous sacrifices to endeavor to become literate.

I think that now I could answer Anita's questions - why do we allow these tragedies to continue? why don't people care? I think that I would say to Anita that part of the reason is that the ordinary person does not realize or cannot personalize these situations and therefore care. It is this lack of public awareness of the scope and the magnitude of the problem, argues Thomas (1983: 5) which translates into very little financial support from private or government sources to fund the needed programmes. Together, by telling this story, perhaps we can reach people and convince them to act.

Society needs to know what is important to Anita and what brought her and the others to the learning room so that more learning rooms, based on the needs and wants of the people, are established. The stories of Anita and others like her need to be heard so that the myths that abound, especially the ones that say they have no abilities, lack intelligence and worth can be destroyed. Society needs to hear loudly and clearly that it is "true, [they] couldn't read, but [they] could think in [their] head" (Rigg, 1985: 130).

I do not believe for a moment that I have adequately answered Anita's questions. Those challenges deserve to be the subject of consideration for everyone in this society. The women who participated in this study have certainly answered my two questions with much-appreciated candour and emotion. I was very moved by their willingness to share their good times and their bad and their intense desire to be of help to someone else. That this study may be a small step in the direction of a society which values the "Anita's" of this world and therefore provides positive learning opportunities for all, is our small hope. It would be the greatest form of thanks that I could give to Anita, Laura, Sarah, Dorothy and the others. It would be worth all our work.

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APPENDIX A

Thematic responses to Question A:

Why did you become involved with a literacy programme?

APPENDIX A

Step One - Individual responses to Question A:
Why did you become involved with a literacy programme?

Respondent # 1

1. to learn how to fill out forms, read recipes, letters, paper, all sorts of reading and writing tasks
2. to help other people
3. to stop being embarrassed
4. to get a proper job, if possible
5. for the company
6. my social worker encouraged me
7. I was told of a programme
8. I have the chance now/ no children at home

Respondent # 2

1. because of counselling, I feel better about myself
2. I want to do something for me/ I am proud of myself
3. I want to do it for my children, my husband
4. I got encouragement from people instead of being put down
5. I want to learn how to do everyday reading and writing tasks
6. I want to get a good job
7. I have the chance now
8. others have made it; so can I
9. I want to be somebody and do something with my life

Respondent # 3

1. to meet people
2. to read what I want and learn what I want
3. to rid myself of shame/ so I won't be made fun of anymore
4. I have the chance now
5. for the mechanical tasks of reading and writing

Respondent # 4

1. to improve my reading/writing skills
2. to not be embarrassed anymore
3. I am confident I can learn now
4. my social worker told me of a programme
5. to meet people
6. to help my daughter/ support her myself
7. to prove to myself that I can be somebody
8. I am proud of myself

Step Two - Responses as synthesized into thematic statements

1. I want to learn how to read, especially for everyday tasks
2. I want to help my kids and people in general
3. If possible, I want to get a good job to help support my family
4. I now have the chance and the opportunity
5. I am encouraged by others
6. I want to stop being embarrassed, feeling ashamed
7. I am now confident that I can learn
8. I want to do this for myself; to be somebody
9. I feel good about myself; I am proud of me
10. I want to be involved with people

Step Three - Thematic statements categorized

INSTRUMENTAL CATEGORY

- I want to learn how to read, especially for everyday tasks
- I want to help my kids and people in general
- If possible, I want to get a good job to help support my family

SITUATIONAL CATEGORY

- I now have the chance and the opportunity
- I am encouraged by others

PSYCHOLOGICAL CATEGORY

- I want to stop being embarrassed, feeling ashamed
- I am now confident that I can learn
- I want to do this for myself; to be somebody
- I feel good about myself; I am proud of me
- I want to be involved with people

APPENDIX B -

Thematic responses to Question B:

What impact has this decision had on your life?

APPENDIX B

Step One - Individual responses to question B:
What impact has this decision had on your life?

Respondent # 1

1. I am reading and writing now
2. I am confident that I can do it
3. my family is proud and encourages me
4. I would like to try and get a job now
5. I think more of myself/ feel good about myself
6. I have more choices now
7. I am proud of what I am doing

Respondent # 2

1. I am a different person - more confident, talk better, no more pills
2. nobody can take advantage of me anymore
3. I was bored before
4. my family is proud
5. my kids don't miss school anymore
6. I do more reading now/ my skills are improving
7. I can do it/ I am not afraid
8. I cannot control my life totally
9. I feel good about myself

Respondent # 3

1. I am able to read a little bit
2. it is better than sitting at home

Respondent # 4

1. my reading and writing has improved
2. I feel more confident
3. I would like to try to work
4. I may have more choices but life will probably be the same
5. before, I was sitting at home, bored

Step Two - Responses as synthesized into thematic statements

1. I am improving my reading/writing skills
2. I would like to try working in the future
3. my family is happy and proud of me
4. I have more control but not total control over my life
5. I am not sitting bored at home
6. I feel more and more confident/ I can do it
7. I feel better about myself

*Step Three - Thematic statements categorized***INSTRUMENTAL CATEGORY**

I am improving my reading/writing skills

I would like to try working in the future

SITUATIONAL CATEGORY

my family is happy and proud of me

I have more control but not total control over my life

PSYCHOLOGICAL CATEGORY

I am not sitting bored at home

I feel more and more confident/ I can do it

I feel better about myself