A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF NEW ADULT READERS' PARTICIPATION IN A

COMMUNITY READING PROGRAM

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by

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The undersigned, appointed by the Dean of the Graduate School, have examined the dissertation entitled

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COMMUNITY READING PROGRAM

Presented by Jenny S. Bossaller

A candidate for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

And hereby certify that in their opinion it is worthy of acceptance.

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Everything I do is dedicated to my family…I love you all.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Reading as a social practice

Reading at Risk

Parameters of the Study

      Evolution of the questions

The Phenomenological Basis for this Study

An In-Depth Explanation of the Problems

      The One Book Phenomenon

      Adult Basic Education and Literacy

      Who are the stakeholders?

      The public library's role in adult education

      Historical connections: libraries and education in the American context

      Current views on adult literacy in the library

      Federally Funded Adult Literacy Instruction and Libraries

      Politics, Welfare, and Adult Basic Education

Why reading?

The public library in the life of the city; or, the politics of place

Summary, and Looking Forward

Summary

5. CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Findings

How do new adult readers describe their participation with One Book?

How do program instrumentalists conceive of a community reading program?

Could participation in community reading programs help widely diverse people feel more comfortable in a literary setting?

What do the various represented program participants want to read in a community reading program, and why?

What is the essential experience of reading a book for new readers? What is the essential nature of a community reading experience for both new and experienced readers?

Future directions: where to go now?

Alternate models for participatory education

Conclusions

APPENDICES

LIST OF ACRONYMS

ABE – Adult Basic Education

ACI – American Competitive Initiative

ALA – American Library Association

GED – General Education Diploma

IEP – Individual Educational Plan

LD – Learning Disabilities

NAAL – National Assessment of Adult Literacy

NCSALL - National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy

NCLB – No Child Left Behind

NEA – National Education Association

NFIL – National Forum on Information Literacy

NIFL – National Institute for Literacy

OLOS – Office for Literacy and Outreach Services (A division of the American Library

     Association

PRWORA - Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996

WIA – Workforce Investment Act of 1998

ABSTRACT

This research presents a phenomenological study of readers who participated in a community reading program. It examines participatory education in the context of a community reading project hosted by a public library. Narrative interviews, observation, and document analysis were used to find the meaning of participation and reading for the literacy students and other program participants and instrumentalists.

The study is theoretically informed by critical studies in education and society. Interviews indicated that the students in this study have had past negative experiences with education. They said that the literacy classroom was a positive step in ameliorating those past experiences. During this project, the students engaged in group reading and the discussion of literary fiction.

Public library systems across the nation have followed Seattle's celebrated "Seattle Reads" project by inviting the city to read and discuss a book. One purpose of these programs is to strengthen community ties and to create a sense of universal understanding through the discussion of literary fiction. The literacy students in this study participated in such a program. This study utilized phenomenological methods in order to find the meaning of participation in a community reading project for two major groups: program instrumentalists, and new and experienced readers.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Reading as a social practice

This research is centered on an idea of reading as bridge. Reading a common text has the potential to bring people together—it can provide another lens to view one's life, providing grounds for communication. Reading and talking about a text with others can help people see their lives in a new way, help them find solutions to problems, and find out how other people see their own lives. Reading is, therefore, a means to bridge the multiple subjectivities which can block understanding. The focus of this research is upon literacy students who participated in a community reading program. A goal of community reading programs is to bring people together around a text. According to literary theorists Iser, Fish, and Rosenblatt, each reader brings his or her own lives into a reading of the text. Subjectivity is an inherent aspect of living and what each person brings to the reading experience. The concept of phenomenology, in the community reading context, presents a model for bridging subjectivities: the text is viewed as an outside entity which readers can share. A group reading project, therefore, has the potential to bridge interpersonal subjectivities as the participants experience similar feelings.

Librarians speculate that participation in city-wide reading programs will encourage community involvement and interaction among people who might not otherwise cross paths. If, indeed, such programs do encourage such interaction, they could be potentially beneficial to the socially excluded. The research utilizes

phenomenological methods, including interviews, observations, and document analysis in order to study the essential meaning for participants in a community reading program. It aims to uncover educational and social meanings for new and seasoned readers. It especially concentrates on adults enrolled in an Adult Basic Education (ABE) literacy program to find out how they feel about reading—pragmatically and personally, or how it fits into their educational and social goals. While the main focus is on the new readers, another focus of the research is on what makes people want to read in both individual and social contexts. The multiple viewpoints reflected by the diverse methods regarding the purposes for participating in the community reading program revealed many overlapping reasons for both taking part in the program and for reading, on personal and social levels. The purpose of contrasting the social experience of literacy students with experienced readers was to explore the community reading experience for both groups of people.

In this chapter, I describe community reading programs, the historical and political roots of both librarianship and education, and the concept and uses of literacy in those contexts. The roots of education and librarianship provide a basis for understanding the inclusion of the literacy students in this project. It is my intention to explore the act of reading as a means to empower the students to become part of society, or the public sphere.

Reading at Risk

Public library systems across the nation have followed Seattle's celebrated "Seattle Reads" community reading project by developing adult reading programs featuring a single book as the focus for an array of programming. Typically, librarians or an advisory board select a book for discussion, then the entire city is invited to join in

discussions and activities surrounding the theme of the book. Many libraries provide

hundreds of copies of the book along with book discussion kits so that individuals and

reading groups can check the book out and discuss it either in their own reading clubs or

through library-sponsored events. One expressed goal of these communal reading

experiences is to strengthen community ties through the discussion of literary fiction.

The Library of Congress (2008) lists, by book title and city or region, almost five

hundred community reading programs online as "Reading Promotion Projects." Some

communities choose biographies or books by a local author, but most choose fiction.

A prevailing belief among librarians is that reading is a good habit. This belief is

especially apparent in the literature regarding community reading programs. While ideas

about reforming the leisure time of the working class (Hayes and Morris, 2005) are now

outdated and recognizably paternalistic, librarians and educators still strongly voice that

there is, indeed, an inherent personal and societal value in reading. Accordingly, many

libraries promote both individual and social reading; community reading projects are one

example of a reading promotion project. Dana Gioia is chairman of the National

Endowment for the Arts (NEA). Gioia (2008), explaining NEA Big Read project, which

was developed in conjunction with the Institute of Museum and Library Studies (IMLS),

stated a belief in the value of reading as follows:

> The prospect of an America where only a few people share a love of reading is
> just too lonely to bear. Even if statistics didn't show that readers are more active
> in their own communities and more engaged in their own lives, the act of
> reading would still be an indispensable part of what makes us fully human
> (Special Messages, para. 3).

The Big Read project was created as a response to the 2004 NEA report "Reading at Risk: a Survey of Literary Reading in America", which documented a decline in literary reading (including short stories, plays, poetry, and novels) among every demographic in America. The narrow definition of reading which the NEA used has been a source of contention because it didn't include categories of books and other reading such as biographies, history, newspapers, or magazines. The NEA linked the decline in reading to an increase in electronic media use, saying that "While no single activity is responsible for the decline of reading, the cumulative presence and availability of the alternatives have increasingly drawn Americans away from reading" (p. 7). Electronic media doesn't necessarily point toward a decline in *literacy*, but in the act of reading. The NEA did unambiguously state that this decline in reading parallels a decline in cultural and civic participation: "the decline in reading…parallels a larger retreat from participation in civic and cultural life" (p. 3). In response to this study, the NEA began a national reading promotion project: the Big Read. The NEA cited some of the diverse reasons behind the national reading program which ranged from personal (private) growth to civic life:

> This report documents a national crisis…Reading develops a capacity for focused attention and imaginative growth that enriches both private and public life. The decline in reading among every segment of the adult population reflects a general collapse in advanced literacy. To lose this human capacity - and all the diverse benefits it fosters - impoverishes both cultural and civic life (NEA, News Room, Literary Reading in Dramatic Decline, para. 3).

The implied notion in this statement is that a unified sense of culture and an understanding of what it means to be a member of our society foster a healthy civic realm.

The Big Read is a nationwide project which libraries can join, but many libraries choose to create their own programs which encourage reading. Some examples are reading programs for adults, family programs for non-native English speakers and story times for children. These might be long-term or short-term. Summer reading programs for children are very popular. Alternatively, the library might take on an ambitious, month-long program similar to the one in this study. Reading programs focus on personal growth through reading, and libraries whose focus is on bringing together the entire city will usually have the added implicit or explicit focus on some type of shared cultural experience. Cultural plurality has its advantages, but Gioia's quote illustrates a fundamental belief shared by many public entities--a sense of community is fostered by shared cultural experiences. The shared culture creates understanding within the diversity of human experiences which has the potential to enrich civic life and encourage civic participation.

Parameters of the Study

This particular study was centered on a One Book project at a library system in the Midwest. "One Book" was taken from the name given to community-wide reading programs by the Library of Congress's Center for the Book. Research methods included observations, interviews, and document analysis. All of the data were analyzed using a phenomenological approach in order to find structure and meaning to the experiences of the individuals who were involved in the community reading experience. The study is informed by neo-Marxist and critical theoretical approaches to education, especially adult literacy education, which will be explained in Chapter 2. The students' participation in the program did raise a number of questions about the purposes of the program and

5

whether the students would have similar experiences as other, more traditional library

users who go to One Book events. Some of the questions are central to the research,

while others are more peripheral, but of interest for future research. Topics include the

purposes of community reading programs, including both educational and social benefits.

Some questions were answered through interviews; others questions were answered by

document analysis and observations.

The primary research questions for this study were:

- How do new adult readers describe their participation with One Book?

- How do program instrumentalists conceive of a community reading program?

- Could participation in community reading programs help widely diverse people

  feel more comfortable in a literary setting?   Might people use the library more

  after attending the events?

- What is the essential nature of a community reading experience for both new

  and experienced readers?

- What is the essential experience of reading a book for new readers?

- What do the various represented program participants want to read in a

  community reading program, and why?

Evolution of the questions

The research questions evolved from a more general question about the nature of

adult literacy classes and the students who attend them, including what would motivate a

non-reading adult to learn how to read, and how they describe the experience of learning

to read. I wanted to learn more about local literacy services, what brought the students

into the program and the problems that they faced in attaining an education. Therefore, I

began tutoring in an adult literacy class. The instructor, program directors, and students all knew that I was researching adult education, and I frequently talked to the teacher about my research and the students in the class. One thing that I noticed when I began tutoring is that the teacher posts library events on the classroom walls. She also sometimes takes students to the library help them obtain a library card and introduce them to the library collection.

When I had been working with the class for a while, she introduced the new community reading book to the class by buying them copies of the book to read in class. This is the second year that some of the students have participated in the One Book program. The first year the students didn't read the book; the teacher read excerpts aloud to the students, and then they attended the author talk. This year's book and their involvement with the text were much more challenging because they read the entire book out loud in class.

The One Book involvement represented a unifying action in theory and practice regarding my research questions. The act of reading this book not only gave the students a reading challenge, but it also encouraged literacy skills outside of the classroom and community involvement. I also thought that a classroom environment with interaction between the students might also encourage the use of literacy as a social practice, as discussed in Barton and Hamilton (1998).

Rosenblatt (originally published 1938) discussed the use of literature in the classroom to help students understand their own lives. She also discussed the role of the teacher in selecting literature and guiding conversations about literature in order to facilitate the process of understanding through literature. Barton and Hamilton (1998)

explained the intersubjective nature of literacy; they said that literacy is essentially social, and its importance is found in the interaction between people. These two views explore both the reasons for using literary fiction in the literacy classroom: it has the potential to help the students make sense out of their own lives while they work with others who are undergoing a similar process.

One of the goals of people who created the idea of the community reading programs is to bring a wide variety of people together. It is to create a shared sense of culture. However, observations indicated that most of the people who attended the events were fairly homogenous. In one interview, a librarian indicated that most of the people who come to the events are similar to the demographics that typically read: "I think that for the most part it actually goes along with readers. You know, they have those statistics about who reads, fiction especially, I'd say it goes right along with those figures." The NEA study "Reading at Risk" delineated literary reading demographic trends; white women have the highest literary reading participation rate (fifty-one percent read literary fiction) followed by African American women and Hispanic women. Eighty percent of literary readers are white. The attendance rates were similar to those figures. While the librarians did say that they try to reach out to the wider community by advertising and reaching out to diverse community groups, the crowd did not reflect the demographics of the general population. The reality points toward the idea that the social practice of reading and attending book-related events, at least in the community where this study was completed, might not actually extend across the entire population and that bringing in new groups might be difficult. The classroom's involvement in the program was, therefore, a way to reach this distinct group of new readers.

The Phenomenological Basis for this Study

Phenomenology seeks to reveal the true nature, or the essence, of human experience through intuition and reflection. Proposed by Husserl around the turn of the twentieth century, phenomenological, or eidetic, reduction, aims to uncover the "essences, or the ideal meanings of various act and manifestations of consciousness" (Spurling, 1977, p. 8). It "refused to consider the world as essentially independent of consciousness; rather, the world was understood as a correlate of consciousness…All acts have both a subjective pole, consciousness itself, and a subjective pole, the world" (Spurling, p. 7). It offered an alternative to positivist scientific methods which fail to account for human creativity and spontaneity. It also solved the problem of subjectivity in qualitative research. As Spiegelberg (1960) explained, "Phenomenology is a rigorous science in the sense of a coherent system of propositions; it goes even beyond positive science by aiming at absolute certainty for its foundations at freedom from presuppositions that have passed phenomenological scrutiny" (p. 64). Phenomenology explains human experience as something which can be objectively observed *and* subjectively experienced by seeking truth in the space between the two, thus explaining a way of being, of making sense out of the world. It is a multifunctional philosophical tool: it can be used to explain any act of consciousness, including language, and even organizational theory (see Sanders, 1982). It has to do with the way that individuals interact with the world and the way that they describe this interaction. The act of reading is one example of a phenomenological experience: true reading requires that a person temporarily suspends physical reality in favor of intersubjective activity with a text. This is referred to as transcendental phenomenology.

9

Qualitative research has been called 'micro' research; it is based on individuals' experiences, rather than numbers which seek to explain the 'macro' social world, or the world at large. This research does aim to use some form of triangulation by utilizing multiple methods. This comes from the realization that if one can connect more dots in the array of human consciousness and reflection, a more complete picture of a phenomenon can emerge. Gubrium and Holstein (1997) explained the limitations of qualitative or 'rich' data description which phenomenology addresses. Each action that a person makes carries cultural baggage. The frameworks within which we carry out our everyday work are limited by what is socially possible. The researcher is bound by his own limitations, and thus the interpretation of outsider actions is limited by what he is able to see and feel. Through phenomenology, the researcher recognizes personal limitations, brackets them (that is, sets them aside), and finds truth in interactions or public displays of the object. Gubrium and Holstein (1997) explained this as bracketing: "The objective (of analytical bracketing) is to move back and forth between constitutive activity and substantive resources, alternately describing each, making informative references to the other in the process" (p. 119). Interpretations of activity move back and forth between previous knowledge and the unfolding reality.

While this research does not point towards generalizations about reading programs at large, it does come to some conclusions regarding the experiences for the particular readers who were involved in this community reading program. Those conclusions are useful for the creation of new ideas regarding the social explanation of the world of these program participants. Analysis of the research is accomplished by phenomenology, but it also relies upon a historical and theoretical analysis for developing

an argument in order to contextualize the experience of the readers. The historical and

theoretical underpinnings are treated as presuppositions for the analysis of the

phenomenological data, and are revisited in the final chapter, when the findings are

reconsidered in light of the informing theories. This method is in line with Husserl's later

writings on the subject, which admits that it is impossible to completely do away with

presuppositions (Bernet et. al., 1989, p. 211).

An In-Depth Explanation of the Problems

The One Book Phenomenon

As reported by Holgate (2006), when Nancy Pearl created the "If All Seattle Read

the Same Book" program in 1998, she said that she designed the program to:

> broaden and deepen appreciation of literature through both reading and
> discussion and to bring strangers together to talk about a work of literature… to
> deepen an individual's understanding of literature by introducing people to good
> new books and their authors (Holgate, 2006).

She continued:

> We deliberately choose not-particularly-well-known books that lend themselves
> to good discussions -- books that raise important questions about moral choices
> or ethical behavior or the meaning of life, but that did so without hitting people
> over the head with their message (Holgate, 2006).

She said that, "Reading and discussing the same book seemed to me to be a perfect way

to overcome our superficial differences and understand our common humanity" (Holgate,

2006).

In response to the growth of One Book programs, Pearl said that the intent of the

program was not "to be a civics lesson", and that its original purpose "is being obscured

by public relations considerations and the occasional controversy" (Holgate, 2006).

While its original purpose as its creator envisioned it has sometimes been subverted, it is difficult to imagine that a program which seeks engagement and dialogue from the multitudes could avoid politics at some level. Evidence of the potential for political or ideological dialogue is held in the list of books chosen for community reading programs. The Library of Congress (2008) lists books that libraries have chosen. The most popular choice for One Book programs (chosen by 63 libraries) is "To Kill a Mockingbird," which is also the forty-first most challenged book in America, according to the American Library Association. Other popular choices are *Nickel and Dimed* by Barbara Ehrenreich (chosen by 18 libraries) and *The Kite Runner* by Khaled Hosseini (chosen by 40 libraries). Because the purpose of the programs is to bridge social divides, it is natural to choose books which encourage discussion of sometimes contentious social issues. Social issues give people something to talk about.

There is little disagreement in library literature about the value of reading and of community, although there is not a single definition of what counts as valuable reading (as expressed in the criticism of *Reading at Risk*). Both reading and community are important components of libraries (McCook, 2000; Quezada, 1996). One Book programs serve both of these institutional needs: they promote reading both individually and in groups, and they also bring people together to discuss the book around the locale of the library. Aside from the pure intentions of its founder, One Book programs are effective promotional programs for both libraries and reading.

Adult Basic Education and Literacy

This research focused on the experiences of adult new readers who participated in a community reading program. The new readers were members of a literacy class located

in an adult education center, which is part of an Adult Basic Education (ABE) program

run through a public schooling system. By definition, the students who were enrolled in

this class read below a fifth grade level. New students are tested when they apply to enter

the program at the adult education center and they are placed in either the literacy or the

GED (General Education Diploma) class, depending upon their educational goals and

their skill levels. Some students might decide that they want to attend the literacy class,

however, without being placed in it. It seemed, in this adult education center, literacy

classes could accommodate many different reading levels. The teacher did need to test

the students periodically, but because they did not have an explicit goal of passing the

GED test there was less emphasis on testing than there was in the GED classroom. She

admitted that some students might test above a fifth grade reading level, but because they

had trouble spelling or with math, they could continue to come to the class. There was

less emphasis on meeting federally mandated goals than is described in the literature

about literacy classrooms. In other words, the literature does not necessarily reflect

exactly what I saw happening in the classroom.

This research was based upon a central idea regarding a link between reading and

social connections, especially in regards to the socially excluded. Social exclusion is the

idea that certain groups are systematically excluded from access to opportunities. This

exclusion is often passed along intergenerationally. According to the European

Commission's Employment, Social Affairs, and Equal Opportunities Task Force (2008):

> Children growing up in poverty and exclusion are likely to become entangled in
> a 'cycle' thus passing it from generation to generation. Entailing inequality of
> access to resources and opportunities, and often linked to discrimination, child
> poverty is a denial of children's rights. It has severe long-term consequences,
> restraining children from achieving their full potential, adversely affecting their

health, inhibiting their personal development, education and general well-being (Child Poverty, para. 1).

The literacy students' teacher pointed out that most of the students generally do not take part in many social or extracurricular activities. They lack the monetary and cultural resources and often lack self-esteem to take part in community-wide events. However, the students pointed out that the literacy class was a mitigative factor in their feelings of exclusion; they said that they felt acceptance and a sense of well-being in the classroom. During a pilot study with the adult literacy students, all of the students had pointed to childhood educational and family problems as one cause of their low skill attainment. During this study, they repeatedly brought up feelings of inferiority among peers and sometimes even family during their childhood and early adulthood. Later interviews indicated that they thought this might have been a cause for social withdrawal. This research asks if participation in a public reading event can enable the students to feel more accepted in a group of experienced readers.

Another way to look at social exclusion in this research is through the concept of "marked" versus "unmarked" status (Brekhus, 1998). This concept would indicate that the students are unmarked in their classroom because they fit in. They are all in a literacy classroom together, and they are accepted for who they are. When they are in the outside world where their reading skills are highlighted, they are marked as different. While low literacy is largely an invisible problem, it might come up in a reading event. Having read the book, however, they should (theoretically) not feel marked; they should feel a sense of pride. However, their social status also marks them in a crowd of experienced readers;

most of the participants in the reading events were comfortably middle class, while the literacy students generally struggle to make ends meet.

The literacy students' poverty was a reality with which they were struggling, but we can also look at their poverty as a theoretical problem. The topic of the students' lack of financial resources periodically came up during class, and also during the interviews. This shows that the students were aware of their low economic status. The students often said that they felt that they were taking a step towards a better job by being in the literacy class. Theoretically, poverty is linked to diverse personal and societal and problems such as poor health, increased incarceration rates, and familial instability. Kassam (1994) framed literacy as a power struggle. He wrote that low basic skills attainment is closely related to poverty and a lack of power: "Literacy is a struggle between the dominant and oppressed classes, between the haves and the have-nots, between status quo and social change, authoritarianism and democracy, and between oppression and liberation" (p. 34). In the context of this research question, poverty and illiteracy (or low-literacy) also represent the ideas of marginalization, involuntary associations (Walzer, 2005) and "markedness" (Brekhus, 1998). These ideas give a general sense of being visibly on the outside or out of control; of being 'the other.'

This research aimed to uncover if adult new readers feel that participating in a community reading program would help them gain a stake in the socio-political milieu of the city. Second, and perhaps less theoretically, the students are learning how to read. Participating in the program gave the students experience in the mechanics of deciphering a complicated text, and in being part of a community of readers. Conversations with the students indicated that prior to attending the literacy classes they did not generally

15

become involved in discussions about books. Their previous educational experiences were not engaging, and were often personally demeaning. Their teacher hopes that by taking part in the community reading program, they will be exposed to pleasures of literature and gain confidence in their ability to interpret texts outside of the classroom setting. Interviews with the students revealed their feelings about the community reading program, the book, and their participation.

Who are the stakeholders?

This research involves three major stakeholders: librarians, adult educators, and readers. A historical analysis of the history of public librarians and educators reveals a common ethical calling. They also share a public mission. However, they play distinct roles in society. Most teachers in the public schooling system work with children, and librarians usually help those who already know who to read (with the exception being children and adults in family literacy programs). The following section expands on the placement of remedial adult education within society and libraries' associations with the educational system. The marginalized status of adult education is indicative of the process of social exclusion. While libraries have the potential to serve the newly literate, some critics say that social and political pressures to serve the market economy could make such alliances difficult or unattractive. One presupposition is that outreach is needed to encourage library use for traditional nonusers.

Remedial adult education programs are often marginalized within the educational system—they often receive inadequate funding and resources and rely heavily on part-time or volunteer labor. According to Ross-Gordon (1999), part-time teachers make up as much as 90% of the workforce in ABE. The marginalized status of teachers reflects that

of the students. The lack of resources and program placement leaves a hole in the system

for the adult learner who is not able to read well enough to navigate the library on his

own, or for one who is not engaged in a formal educational program, such as a college or

University.

This gap has been a source of contention in libraries. The educational role of

libraries, in fact, is a debated within the profession (England, 2007). While most

librarians agree that the place (the library) should serve an educational purpose, they see

a limited role for themselves as educators, per se. Libraries store and disseminate

knowledge; the extent to which practitioners should help people learn basic skills in order

to use the information is debatable. One way to look at this split is in the focus in

professional literature on 'information literacy' rather than 'literacy'. According to the

National Forum on Information Literacy (NFIL)(2008), information literacy is defined as

"the ability to know when there is a need for information, to be able to identify, locate,

evaluate, and effectively use that information for the issue or problem at hand" (What is

Information Literacy? para. 1). The Information Literacy paradigm places information as

central and literacy as peripheral. It is assumed that teachers of information literacy are

teaching people to use information who already know how to read.

Literacy education is more problematic than information literacy education for

librarians for both epistemological and political reasons. One reason is because it forces

librarians to deal with some preconceptions about people which make could make them

uncomfortable regarding unequal intellectual abilities and social class divisions. As

librarians working within the public sector, it is easy to align oneself with the egalitarian

role of the public library without having to delve into underlying causes of inequality.

17

It's easier to assume that once people come through the doors of the library most have an equal chance to find what they need. Adults who don't know how to read don't fit neatly within this paradigm of potential equality.

The public library's role in adult education

The public library has an ambiguous role in adult basic education. There is no mandate for libraries to provide literacy training, but the ALA does have recommendations for library services for literacy programs and also for services to the poor (2007). The two are intertwined because the illiterate are usually poor. Few library schools offer a class in adult learning or literacy. Most libraries do, however, provide some type of literacy services. Libraries provide a place for adults who want to learn how to read the chance to explore a variety of needs and interests. Because practice is the basis for improvement in reading, the location of the library is ideal; it allows the new reader the time and opportunity to work on their new skill. Family literacy programs are an ideal way to break the cycle of illiteracy, but adults who do not have children do not take part in family literacy programs.

Public libraries have traditionally been associated with adult and continuous education, or self-education. Evaluation of literacy programs is largely based on case studies. Assessing the effectiveness of programs is a perennial problem for librarians, but according to Zweizig et. al. (1988), literacy providers outside of libraries have said that libraries are a critical component of their programs. They say that the most effective programs target children in preventative efforts, while adult remediation is less effective. This statement is in accordance with the theory of social exclusion, in that it emphasizes

18

the circular nature of resource deprivation. According to the American Library

Association (2004):

- 94% of public libraries provide up-to-date information about literacy programs in the neighborhood and community;

- 84% of public libraries have appropriate meeting and studying space for tutors and learners.

- 84% of public libraries offer interesting and timely materials for tutors and learners. Some libraries have special book collections for adult learners.

- 68% of public library offer library tours for adults, children and families.

- 30% of public libraries offer classes for adult literacy students.

In order to accommodate the needs of the adult literacy students, the ALA says

that librarians should be their advocates and that advocacy should take place at local,

state, and national levels.

Historical connections: libraries and education in the American context

The American public educational system and public libraries are both political

products. Both became what they are today during the early twentieth century, as an

embodiment of Progressive ideals. Progressive politics hold a tension that has been

played out repeatedly in various social movements in America. The tensions involve

both classes and political agendas. Within progressive movements are elements that are

both conservative, or paternal, and radical; this dichotomy is obvious in discourse

surrounding both library collection development and education. Libraries and schools

have served to induct children and adults into the American way of life and to keep them

out of trouble and off the streets; at the same time, professional discourse voices empowerment and democracy.

Gusfield's (1986) analysis of the temperance movement as a status politic movement was closely correlated to the development of public education and public libraries that was occurring at the same time. They were movements led with middle-class zeal which were meant to impart manners and morals to the lower classes. Though we are fortunate to have the public education system and libraries today, in their roots we can find evidence of some problems with which they both still grapple; that is, whose needs are to be met, and whose values the systems should instill. By necessity, both questions are tied to politics—the politics of culture, obviously; the politics of economics, more ominously. Gusfield describes the temperance movement as primarily driven by a middle-class ethos imposed upon the poor. His description of temperance workers was as:

> an illustration of the assimilative orientation as a means of acting out status levels. The group with the higher prestige and power presents its system of conduct as worthy of emulation by those of lesser power and prestige. To possess greater prestige in a society implies precisely this kind of situation: prestige is connoted by the tacit agreement that the way of life of the dominant group is morally superior to that of the lowly (p. 70).

Education imparts prestige, as well. Knowledge of books and the 'finer things in life' is an indication of culture, of the ability to participate in the discourse of the cognoscenti. Community reading programs impart both culture and education.

Wiegand's (1999) summary of the 1879 annual meeting of the American Librarian Association describes similar motivations among librarians of the time. They voiced a need to use the library as a force to mold the American population into an "ordered, enlightened, educated, and informed," or regimented, citizenry. These "mostly

20

male, middle-class professionals immersed in the disciplinary and literary canons of the

dominant culture…share(d) a common ideology of reading…For librarians, "good"

reading led to "good social behavior, "bad" reading to "bad" social behavior" (p. 3 – 4).

They shared a vision for creating a reading populace, formed by library collections that

reflected a common ideology. It was their mission to shape healthy minds and create

good, productive, and moral citizens who were molded in their vision of goodness. The

good citizen was compliant, rather than deliberative. Habermas (1991) described this

form of citizenship as a plutocracy, in which the wealthy dictated the appropriate public

roles (and readings) for the masses. The virtuous posturing demonstrated by the

Progressive-era librarians remained essentially consistent until the 1970's, when a

distinctly market-driven strain of collection development emerged.

Schooling, once a predominantly domestic endeavor, also became

institutionalized during the Progressive Era. Immigrants were pouring into the country,

providing labor for the rapidly developing industrial state. Their children posed a special

problem under urban blight. Child labor laws were either nonexistent or unenforced.

Jacob Riis (1890) described the horrors of tenement life for the middle-class reader:

> they are the hot-beds of the epidemics that carry death to rich and poor alike; the
> nurseries of pauperism and crime that fill our jails and police courts; that throw
> off a scum of forty thousand human wrecks to the island asylums and
> workhouses year by year; that turned out in the last eight years a round half
> million beggars to prey upon our charities; that maintain a standing army of ten
> thousand tramps with all that that implies; because, above all, they touch the
> family life with deadly moral contagion (p. 3).

The public school system and child protection laws allowed the children to escape from often very dangerous industrial work, and also served the needs of the state by teaching the children the proper American way of life and the English language, or culture.

John Dewey (1954) wrote that the relationship between education and the state begins in defining the role of the state in solving social ills; thus, education is intertwined with citizenship. His writings shaped (and reflected) Progressive-era thinking when he concluded that the state should intervene in the affairs of individuals when many people are affected. Thus, under the Progressive model, the state's role in education was secured; the education of the poor served the intentions of the state. He described an ideal education that promotes cooperation and lifts the poor from a state of oppression (though later criticism postulates that Progressive-era educational ideals also serve to keep the poor in their 'proper place', which is out of the realm of actual control).

At the same time that librarians and teachers were securing a role within the context of service to the state they were forming professional organizations to promote their status. Special schools were designed to train them, and ensured that they would be able to gain entry to a regulated line of work. They had to prove their worth to society through creeds and statements and to establish a connection with the good of society as a whole, or their role in promulgating the public good. Librarians, particularly, have struggled with the problem of legitimacy. Raber (1997) described the search for a professional and political viability as occurring within the context of, and legitimated by, the political circumstances in which it occurred. Raber said that the library was a place to resolve political tensions and contradictions, beginning with a belief that reading and

education, with the public library as the central pillar, were class equalizers. The public

library was a central to the concept of democracy, which he described as:

> a social formation that creates the conditions necessary to allow the best
> discourse, argument, culture, policies and person to emerge as dominant, while
> guaranteeing that this emergence does not and cannot serve as an excuse for
> oppression and the domination of public interest by private interest (p. 150).

The democracy which Raber described emphasized the importance of the public over the

private; the measure of good was determined by what was best for society, rather than

what was best for private interests.

Rothblatt (1995) described the process by which the new professions (following

the redistribution of power in the mid-1850's caused by Western expansion) expanded.

These professions "appeared to be high-minded" (p. 201); they are those that are outside

of the traditional Academic disciplines of Arts and Sciences, and reflect "American

egalitarianism, a dislike of inherited status combined with a sneaking desire for

reputation, albeit as a reward to those who practiced an ethic of self-help" (p. 201). He

doesn't mention librarianship, but the description is apt:

> Professional identity is created through education, apprenticeship or formal, and
> is furthered by association; but the maintenance of this identity entails
> prestige…Service must continually be legitimated, not only through the exercise
> of a skill but also by laying claim to a special moral legacy or purpose (p. 201).

The American Library Association was established in 1876. This allowed

librarians to come together in order to establish a code for the profession and in order to

describe exactly what libraries were to do, who they were to serve, and what their

purposes were. It was to ensure that the practitioners thought similarly. It also promoted

the library as an institution. The National Education Association (originally the National

Teachers' Association) was formed in 1856 in "a national call to unite as one voice in the cause of public education" (NEA, 2007). The societies provided legitimacy for the often underpaid teachers and librarians. They had to prove that they were worth something to society; indeed, that society needed them to be a force against the darkness of ignorance.

A common ideological bond was thus forged between libraries and education in service to the state. Reciprocally, the state provided funding to support their endeavors. The *existence* of this arrangement has been largely uncontested since, as most citizens believe that libraries and public schooling contribute to a larger public good. This has been periodically reaffirmed through major legislative acts which supported libraries and education. For instance, during the mid-twentieth century acts passed under Johnson, such as the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964, strengthened public education, especially in areas of urban blight. Van Fleet (1990) pointed out that during this time period, education was again brought to the forefront in the fight against poverty and inequality. Additionally, the Economic Opportunity Act designated public libraries as community educational resource centers. Thus, libraries were able to secure funding for educational purposes to support 'lifelong learning', or adult education.

Current views on adult literacy in the library

In the 1970s librarians began questioning their role as moral educators. The seminal paper "Give 'Em What they Want" (Rawlinson, 1981) marked the emergence of a distinctly market-driven stance in library collection development. It essentially dissolved the role of librarians as selectors of appropriate reading materials for their constituents by relegating the librarian's role to the library users by purchasing books which are *used*. The article itself was a defense of the 'new' philosophy. Critics of such

a policy say that the library collection is an embodiment of beliefs; therefore, the argument underscores two distinct lines of thinking regarding the role of librarianship: libraries as places for sources of popular entertainment, versus sources of good reading. Should the libraries fulfill some need that people cannot get from some other source? This argument underlies the politics of library collection management, and at its crux lays beliefs about the educational role of the library. This underlies the question of who the library is to serve, and why.

The 'moralistic' stance is not widely regarded today (though thinly veiled versions of it can certainly still be detected in professional literature), but librarians still question whether the library should be the place where people can go to educate themselves—a place for lifetime learning to happen; or a place to find sources of popular entertainment. These questions are firmly grounded in the politics of the library, but more importantly, they are caused by assessments that librarians must perform in order to justify their expenses. A numbers-based assessment (how many times an item has circulated) often determines what is kept in the collection, what is bought, and librarians use the numbers to prove their worth to the city council or other funding body. Educational materials, and especially those for adult basic education students, which might circulate less frequently than, for instance, popular DVDs, are thus devalued. Under this system, the intangible goods are ignored; commodities are valued. While only the least astute libraries would hold so tightly to a numbers-based assessment as to allow their adult education collections to fold completely, under a strictly quantitative measurement system the development of such collections might dwindle.

Federally Funded Adult Literacy Instruction and Libraries

The current political climate under the Welfare-to-Work (WTW) system (enacted in 1998 as the Workforce Investment Act) extended the commodification of the low-income worker, including the systems which were developed to help him or her. Adult Education programs which received federal funding were integrated into the "'one-stop' system of workforce investment and education activities for adults and youth. Entities that carry out activities assisted under the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act are mandatory partners in this one-stop delivery system" (U.S. Department of Education, 2005). While many educational programs work outside of the federal program, those that work within it are eligible for federal funding. Thus, the role of reading and adult basic instruction becomes part of the transition from welfare to work.

The primary function of education in this context is to remove people from the welfare roles; it has nothing to do with empowerment or other 'higher' goals of education. However, it is a necessary component of welfare reform. Welfare dependence is an undesirable condition, but the educational opportunities for welfare recipients do not last long enough to help them become proficient readers; thus, the students, rather than being empowered by being able to participate in the world of readers, are simply rushed through a system that teaches them to read just enough to fill out forms and read simple directions in order to function as a low-wage worker.

Dale Lipschultz (personal communication, 2007), the president of the National Coalition for Literacy and Literacy Officer for the Office of Literacy and Outreach Services of the ALA, said that research on libraries and literacy programs have shown that the ideal situation is for libraries to work as partners in literacy programs, rather than as providers. She cited the work of John Comings, who wrote that many libraries do not

have the capacity to provide direct instruction and teaching. They can be more effective in building partnerships and sharing resources. However, there is often a disconnect between ABE providers and libraries. While libraries are the perfect partner, they are often taken for granted. When I spoke with Lipschultz, she said that the ALA was lobbying to have libraries written into the Welfare-to-Work legislation as partners or providers of literacy programs. When I asked her about the possible problems of partnering Welfare-to-Work literacy agencies with libraries, she responded that librarians need to be aware of the reality of the situation. Rather than trying to fight existing legislation, they need to be prepared to work with providers. She said that while terms related to humanism and empowerment are not unimportant, the reality of the situation is that the service model has to reflect political realities. She did not see a problem in using federal funds for library literacy programs.

However, literacy educators and librarians who are aligned with the left tend to see problems with libraries working within a governmental framework of literacy. For instance, McCook and Barber (2002) said that:

> The implementation of programs for adult learners through libraries funded with government monies may…create a feeling of dissonance for librarians as demands for workforce accountability conflict with the librarians' traditional focus on the humanistic and transformative aspects of adult education. (p. 66)

They say that the governmental definitions of literacy are not aligned with true empowerment which reading can bring to a person. This is the aspect of reading which this research aims to uncover.

Politics, Welfare, and Adult Basic Education

Within welfare politics today there are three themes that are especially resonant in the rhetoric: privatization, partnerships, and accountability. Welfare reform began in the early 1980's under Reagan, and was restructured with zealous conviction under Clinton's Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (or PRWORA), which was "a comprehensive bipartisan welfare reform plan that will dramatically change the nation's welfare system into one that requires work in exchange for time-limited assistance" (Department of Health and Human Services, 2007). The new laws were an attempt to dismantle a 'dysfunctional' welfare state and to produce a more efficient, accountable government. This new system was called 'welfare-to-work', and basic education was designated as one of the activities that count towards meeting work goals. Partnerships and private enterprises can engage in publicly funded programs as Welfare-to-Work (WTW) providers. They are held accountable by the number of people that they are able to place in jobs. That is, this is a numbers-based accountability system; it does not account for quality of jobs or if the people are able to make enough money or have benefits to survive. The goal is to remove them from the public welfare roles, and place their welfare in the hands of private employers.

Privatization and lack of sentiment for the public good have contributed to a diminished public support for programs that are designed to help the poor. Welfare programs since the 1980's have privileged the language of fiscal and moral conservatism. ABE programs are only one facet; social programs, in general, have suffered. As a parallel to other social programs, Lo (1998) wrote in regards to the Health Care crisis that

> The grounds of discussion shifted from societal, collective concerns toward the
> economic self-interest of individuals, or of one's self and immediate family. It

would end in the triumph of privileged conservatism over the vestiges of the welfare state (p. 234).

The crisis that Lo described is one fueled by privatization. Critics of privatization of public goods and services say that privatization propagates inequalities; as the wealthy remove their support from the public coffers, there is less to distribute to the poor. This is in opposition to the democracy described by Raber, in which public entities are controlled by what is best for the public, rather than private interests. Public facilities like schools, public health, and libraries suffer under the model of privatization. Logan and Molotch (1987) cite a common justification of allowing such inequalities to exist in terms of 'public-choice.' According to this model,

> The politics of place is about whose interests government will serve…the real differences between jurisdictions—between good schools and lousy ones, smooth streets and rutted ones, well-connected neighbors or powerless ones— are intercorrelated and determined primarily by social class. The public choice model trivializes the inequalities that develop among places by treating these inequalities as differences in taste (p. 42).

Certainly there are differences in taste between the rich and the poor, but such a model should not justify schools or libraries suffering from a lack of funding. Indeed, the racial lines for a city often are the determining factors between who gets the good schools and who gets the lousy schools. The black neighborhoods are more often poor, have fewer amenities, a lower tax base, and worse schools (Kozol, 1992). They often contain larger percentages of people who are or were on welfare. The racial elements of welfare reform are undeniable.

The welfare-to-work (WTW) system, rather than eliminating racial problems, actually reinforces old systems of poverty. Perhaps if WTW was included in a system of

restructuring the funding mechanisms for social and educational projects which granted

true equality, it could encourage equality. However, as it stands, it forces people who

have been excluded from many opportunities beginning at birth into low-wage and

demeaning jobs. As Omi and Winant (1994) pointed out, programs such as WTW, are

often racially driven; the language that enabled welfare reduction was articulated in such

a way to drive popular support for the programs, but was actually cloaking racial

oppression: "A racial project is simultaneously an interpretation, representation, or

explanation of racial dynamics, and an effort to reorganize and redistribute resources

along particular racial lines" (p. 56).

Educational methods and funding distribution have been a source of much

struggle since the Constitution makes no guarantees of a free public education. This has

largely left the states free to interpret and execute public education goals. Some of the

solutions that have been utilized in an attempt to equalize schooling were bussing and

vouchers, both attempts to solve funding issues by removing students (either in a merit-

based system, as has been proposed by some for the voucher program, or randomly, as in

busing) from their own hostile environments rather than fixing the detrimental school

environments.

The result of failings in the educational system is that students are pushed through

a system that is unresponsive to their needs. Daniels and Gillespie (2005) point out that

more young people are enrolling in adult literacy programs: "the overall number of youth

ages 16 to 24 has grown…(due to, among other reasons,) youth dropping out of school

(or being "pushed" out) as a result of new high school exit test requirements and more

demanding school accountability guidelines" (p. 2). The teachers are forced to work

within a system that doesn't give them the resources or the ability to use their own wits and judgment to help failing students. Additionally, a mechanized curriculum which conforms to dominant cultural biases leaves students who don't fit that dominant model incorrectly labeled as failures. Furthermore, an outcomes-based accountability system forces teachers to graduate students who cannot read well. These students are predominantly from lower socio-economic areas. Forced into low-wage jobs, they are unable to adequately provide for their family. The cycle of poverty is thus complete, aided by the social services that are guided by a conservative ideology which works on behalf of the wealthy, in order to ensure a continuous population of low-wage workers.

The problems that occur in both public schools and libraries are also often political; many of the biggest problems stem from inadequate and unequal funding and resources. Political boundaries delineate inner-city social struggle and turmoil from the peace and wealth of the suburbs. Clegg (1989) calls this 'political bias', which, as he explains,

> calls into question the very notion of a community. Those who are excluded from a given public sphere may not bother even to attend to its issues, particularly when their own suburban space is so much safer, cleaner, wealthier and more comfortable than the decaying inner city (p. 78).

Federal linkages between schools and libraries, in discourse and in funding structures, provide evidence of the political and economic ties between the two. For instance, the E-rate program is a federal technology program which uses poverty, as defined by percentage of recipients of free lunches in schools, as the basis for determining whether libraries are eligible for technology discounts. Libraries that are located in districts with few children, therefore, would be ineligible for the E-rate

program, regardless of the overall poverty rates. Much of the rhetoric surrounding ICT (Information and Communication Technologies) lumps schools and libraries together. The Clinton-Gore administration designated libraries and Community Technology Centers, along with schools, as 'bridges' in the Digital Divide.

Today, schools and libraries often work together in order to provide resources for school-age students; teachers instruct students to get their resources from the public library, and administrators meet to ensure that they are not duplicating database subscriptions. Some libraries offer after-school help for latchkey kids. Many libraries have collections and/or programs for low-literacy adults and ESL students. State-run preschool programs use library space and resources to support their programs. Libraries strive to create programming and collections to enrich the intellectual life and support the informational needs of citizens from cradle to grave—supporting ABE programming is therefore a natural, though often unexplored, role of the public library.

The preceding section explained the historical connections between privatization, poverty, low social status, and low literacy rates. It was intended to provide a basis for studying the literacy students' experiences with the educational system, and to explain why their inclusion in the community reading program was a way to bring them into mainstream society, and hopefully, to greater political power. The next section will explain what reading and literacy mean in the context of this study.

Why reading?

This study was based on literacy students and reading. Literacy (being *able* to read) and reading itself are two different subjects. While literacy is required in order to read, the act of reading is more complex. In phenomenological terms, reading is a

process by which one engages in an act of a transcendental nature through engagement with a text. Poulet, as quoted in Librach (1982) said that "Reading…is the act in which the subjective principle which I call *I*, is modified in such a way that I no longer have the right, strictly speaking, to consider it as my I" (p. 78). It is a surrender of self. It requires not only comprehension, but a suspension of reality.

Literacy, on the other hand, is the ability to decipher the code of written words, a precursor to reading. It is a functional ability, but it has profound social and political implications. Therefore, it is useful to look literacy and reading as separate issues. This section will focus on why it is politically and socially important for people to be able to read. Chapter 4, findings from the study, will focus more on the liberating or transformative aspects of reading, or higher-level connections with a text.

Literacy is difficult to define because it is a contextual ability. Today, it is commonly defined by the ability to do what one needs to do on a daily basis in regards to reading, writing, and basic math skills. Definitions of literacy will be explained in Chapter 2. In my personal experience as a literacy tutor, I have worked with three students who graduated from high school but who considered themselves to be illiterate, which illustrates the fact that literacy cannot be defined by having completed a certain grade level in school. One student could easily read most words, but was unable to spell or recall what she had read. Her brief, failed attempt at a community college convinced her to return to school to relearn basic reading skills. She is representative of a demographic that was pushed through an unresponsive schooling system, such as that which was explained above. She explained that her teachers did not have time to work with her individually even when she asked for help. She suspected that she had a

33

learning disability, but said that there was nobody who was willing work with her at school.

Personal experiences and exposure to standard uses of the language determine how people interpret questions on tests and what words they are able to use and understand. Users of nonstandard English are at a disadvantage in standardized testing situations. They also may not enjoy reading texts that do not reflect their experiences of reality, which can be a determinant factor in how well they do in school. The language used in coursework and testing in public schools provides evidence of another way that the dominant culture maintains control over education; it is a form of indoctrination.

Control has a negative connotation, but the reality is that the ability to communicate effectively using the dominant language enhances the ability to participate in public discourse. Adult literacy education should be culturally affirming while providing opportunities to expand the life-world of the poor. Hofstetter et. al. (1999) pointed out that higher-level reading habits correspond to greater political awareness and involvement. They say that by learning how to read students are not only able to gain better employment but they also become more socially powerful. They said that "knowledge is the key to establishing and maintaining power relationships. Furthermore…literacy is a key, possibly the key, to acquisition of knowledge" (p. 59). Schooling, public libraries, and literacy education have the potential to work together to produce citizens who are able to solve problems and are able to be engaged in the decisions which affect his or her life. Literacy is, therefore, the means to participate in society, but it is not the same as reading. Reading is a higher-level activity which depends upon literacy.

The public library in the life of the city; or, the politics of place

This section will discuss the debate about the increasing privatization of public space. These ideas illuminate concepts of how libraries are working to combat social exclusion. This section is drawn from the literature regarding subjects of social exclusion and libraries, and is not meant to reflect the findings of this research. These concepts, however, are important to consider because they add to an understanding of the problems that a library might face when attempting to instigate literacy or reading programs for the socially excluded.

A public library can truly be a fine 'draw' for a city, but taxpayers question its worth if it has a constant stream of undesirable patrons coming through its doors. However, the library is often one of the few public indoor spaces left in many cities. It is a safe place, it is warm in the winter and cool in the summer, it has comfortable chairs and plenty of books to read to pass the time. Libraries are often an administrative unit of the city, though; in order to obtain funding, they must prove their worth as a desirable investment. Trustees need to present it as a 'draw' for the city planners involved in the politics of growth. Thus libraries are essentially in a Catch-22 situation: while their ethics might dictate a policy of equality, they are at the mercy of providing a nice place for the middle class (i.e., tax-paying voters) to visit with their children.

There are a couple of ways that libraries might face such a situation: they can either construct policies that make it hard for the poor to enter the library, or they can use more subtle tactics, developing a library which reflects the tastes of the middle class, in order to dictate their clientele. While the latter solution will not take care of the 'homeless problem' (i.e., libraries being used as a safe place to go during the day), it can

35

be used to make it a less friendly environment for the socially excluded. By failing to offer sufficient services or materials for them, the poor will not come back. Circulation statistics (what people check out) will reflect the status quo. Some critics say that outreach services exclude the poor from main branches because it can keep the poor patrons from visiting the library; however, this point is highly debatable.

Public libraries, like school systems, usually rely upon taxes for funding. Libraries are not, however, a mandated service like the public schools, so they must prove their worth in order to maintain funding. This has increasingly been difficult as the Internet has taken the place of the reference desk for the computer owners. According to veteran librarian Susan Currie, the 'death of the library' has been predicted and mulled over since 1988, when the Internet came on the scene (Aksamentova, 2006, para. 3). Libraries are often the only free public computing centers in a city. Since much information (including government information) is only available online, it is vitally important to maintain public funding for internet services.

The public library's worth as a public *space* (along with other public places, such as the public square) has diminished in the face of the new conservatism. Taxation to fund collective projects under the scheme of 'the commodification of everything' is increasingly suspect. Zillah Eisenstein's (1998) analysis of the demise of the welfare state can be applied to the tragedy of disappearing public fora as well: "I see important shifts to the right – away from liberal democracy's promise of equality of opportunity an individual freedom of choice, which have always only been a symbolic of capital's possibility – toward a privatized rhetoric which narrows expectation" (p. 258). Under

36

such a system, schools and libraries again are must prove their worth in terms that can be explained by economic measures of capital.

As libraries are forced to become increasingly sensitive to the wishes of their taxpayer base, people who do not pay taxes (i.e., 'drains on the system') are advertently or inadvertently denied services. Some tactics that libraries have used to keep poor people out include policies which allow the libraries to:

- Ask patrons to leave who have offensive body odors

- Limit the amount of bags with which patrons can enter the library

- Require a permanent address in order to obtain a library card

- Require fees for services, such as internet access and reference services

While those may seem only tangentially related to library services for adult new readers, the poor are obviously the target of such rules, and non-reading adults are usually poor. They lack access to basic services and often live 'on the edge'. Berman (2006) said that at the Kansas City Public Library's "trendy" new main branch, a security officer hands out brochures on "customer behavior expectations": a compilation of 33 rules "intended to thin the new library's down-and-out ranks" (para. 11). Berman said that "officials also are proposing a 'compassion campus' near shelters to keep homeless people away from downtown's new library and upscale condominiums and loft apartments" (para. 8). Rules that specifically target the homeless are intimidating to those who have been homeless or have been victims of discrimination based on their low socioeconomic status. Moreover, the public library is an indicator of a trend that is increasingly plaguing all public places; that is, the erosion of public spaces to private, or socially equalizing forces to their market-based, exclusive brother.

By following this line of reasoning, we can see that the public library's funding is tied to politics. Librarians are bound to work within the political system. Inadvertently, they might be a part of exclusionary and racist tactics that are seen in other parts of the political system. While the public library is based upon tenets supporting equality and democracy, it can only truly be so if it stands up for the poor and provides services that are often in opposition to policies of monetary growth; it has to recognize that all good is not quantifiable. Librarians, then, must engage in practices of resistance in order to accommodate the needs of new readers. Visible and obvious, well run programs that are designed to help the functionally illiterate are an important step towards making the library a friendly place for the new adult reader. Reaching out by joining services with which the new readers already use, including social, educational, and religious organizations, is the best way to make these connections.

Summary, and Looking Forward

This chapter has focused on the history and theories of literacy and education, especially in the context of the public library, which is the knowledge base that informed the research. This research investigated community reading programs as a means to draw a variety of people into the library to engage in meaningful social discourse. Librarians might have to actively recruit nontraditional library users in order to hear their voices. New readers, especially, might need special encouragement to participate. One way might be to encourage a literacy class to use part of their class time to take part in the events. Reading the same book as the rest of the community gives the students valuable practice in the social aspects of reading, it expands their vocabularies, and thus their world view. Taking part in events, especially book talks, gives them the opportunity to

hear readers talk about their various literary interpretations. It gives them a chance to be a part of a community of readers, and thus take part in the culture from which they have been excluded. It is, therefore, a step in alleviating the problem of social exclusion.

Chapter 2 further reviews literature about the subjects of social exclusion, literacy, and participatory and transformative adult education, with a focus on how the public library fits into those subjects. Chapter 3 will explain the methodology used in the research. Chapter 4 will discuss the findings, and Chapter 5 draws conclusions and makes recommendations based on the findings. Findings and recommendations are drawn from the voices and actions of the participants in the research.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

There is little published research that has been conducted concerning city-wide reading programs. However, it is a burgeoning topic of interest. In fall of 2007, there was a conference titled "Contemporary Cultures of Reading" conducted by *Beyond the Book*, a United Kingdom "three year interdisciplinary research project funded primarily by the Arts and Humanities Council." The objectives of *Beyond the Book*, as described on its website, are

> to determine why and how people come together to share reading through a
> comparative study of selected mass reading events such as "Canada Reads,"
> "Richard and Judy's Book Club," and "One Book, One Community"
> programmes, including, but not limited to, "One Book, One Chicago" and
> "Liverpool Reads" (About Us, para. 1).

The research of this study asks similar questions to those described by the researchers of *Beyond the Book*, including "whether this contemporary version of shared reading fosters new reading practices and even whether it is capable of initiating social change." Some of the specific presentations at the conference which seem particularly compelling and applicable for my research were "Community Glue: Why Reading Aloud Holds Us Together" by Jane Davis; "What Can a Book Do Behind Bars?" By Jenny Hartley and Sara Turvey; "Literature for All of Us: a community activist group in Chicago working with vulnerable teens" by LaCoya Katoe and Rebecca Brown; "Evaluating community group reading: Feel better with a book? Then prove it …"by Kate McDonnell; and "Defining "discussibility": Book

groups and the elusive good book group book" by Joan Bessman Taylor. These compelling titles, however, are not yet published.

Because of the lack of *published* material, in this chapter I will analyze how the literature of each of these fields describes and creates the concepts of reading, community participation, and adult low literacy. This research came from a convergence of interests in literacy, participatory and transformative adult education, and libraries' role in alleviating social exclusion. A later interest in the role of reading related to these subjects added another element of phenomenology. The role of reading will, therefore, be considered on a personal and intersubjective level, in addition to the emancipatory or political realms. The One Book phenomenon seeks to provide social change through dialogue, but whether it has the capability to incorporate socially excluded groups is yet unknown. The diverse disciplines which inform this research are influential in the interpretation of the value of reading and civic participation, and their applications will determine how an adult education or library program which seeks to tackle social exclusion will be run.

Social Exclusion

Fielding and Fielding (1986) said that "The challenge is to recognize that either micro-sociological or macro-sociological work bears within it indirect reference to the existence of the other, so that, in maintaining one level of analysis, one also demonstrates that the other is an integral aspect to the phenomenon" (p. 20 – 21). This research seeks to explain the experiences of the literacy students' participation in the community reading program in order to explore the feelings of those students as they took their new literacy skills from the 'safe haven' of the literacy classroom into the public sphere. One Book

programs explicitly seek to cross social boundaries in order to bring all community members into a common discussion. The process of integration, however, involves complex issues which must be viewed through multiple lenses in order to find out if it can actually work.

The adult new readers in this project are representative of socially excluded groups; social isolation and exclusion are both products of and causes of illiteracy. Dave Muddiman (2000) summed up the theory of social exclusion:

> [it] relates not simply to a lack of material resources, but also to matters like inadequate social participation, lack of cultural and educational capital, inadequate access to services and lack of power. In other words, the idea of social exclusion attempts to capture the complexity of powerlessness in modern society (p. 2).

Muddiman was the project head for the "Public Library Policy and Social Exclusion" project at Leeds Metropolitan University (2000), created "to identify ways in which public libraries might contribute to a socially 'inclusive' information society" (School of Information Management Research Activities, 2000). The term 'social exclusion' is used primarily in the U.K. and E.U., and library researchers there are actively seeking ways to alleviate the problems identified under the social exclusion framework. While it is a term primarily used in European policy making, the concepts are directly transferable to United States' social system. The Social Exclusion Task Force (Cabinet Office, 2007) describes social exclusion as multiple, cyclical social problems, such as:

> unemployment, discrimination, poor skills, low incomes, poor housing, high crime, ill health and family breakdown…[It] can happen as a result of problems that face one person in their life. But it can also start from birth. Being born into

poverty or to parents with low skills still has a major influence on future life chances (What do we mean by social exclusion? Para. 1).

The ability to read is an extremely important factor in participating in public and civic life. As an extreme example, by requiring proof of literacy, voting officials were, until the Civil Rights Era, able to legally prevent minorities from voting. Slaves weren't allowed to learn to read, and then Jim Crow laws prohibited equal schooling. Kozol (1991) claimed that the educational system continued to enforce class and race divisions. He contrasted low literacy rates among low-income African Americans and Hispanic Americans with high literacy rates among the privileged as evidence. He emphasized multiple reasons for disparity, such as the higher tax rates (and better schools) in wealthy areas and high rates of industrial pollution, which contribute to learning problems, in the poor areas. These ideas, combined, are similar to the concepts presented by proponents of the theory of social exclusion. It points to systemic problems which require systemic, comprehensive solutions.

Not only the poor are affected by their illiteracy; Nauratil (1985) explained that illiteracy affects everyone: "Illiteracy undeniably does function as a social inhibitor, excluding millions of American from sharing in the intellectual life of their society. All of us are the poorer for this segregation" (p. 80). Illiteracy, or low literacy, keeps citizens from participating in the public commons. When significant portions of any demographic group is excluded from the 'marketplace if ideas', everyone is poorer. Libraries have been cited as a mitigating factor in this exclusion because they are, ideally, places where everyone, regardless of societal position, can enjoy equal access to materials.

The postindustrial age, unfortunately, has challenged this ideal version of the

public library as private interests increasingly determine its future (Williamson, 2000).

During this shift, libraries had to find new ways to market their services, which are

increasingly geared toward attracting the patronage of the middle class. Nauratil (1985)

explains that politics of marketing to the middle class in libraries:

> The conservatives maintain that targeting the middle class as the primary market
> and providing a mix consisting of traditional services enhanced by user-pay
> information technology will result in the most favorable cost-benefit ration for
> the library. This "supply side" position, in keeping with prevailing trends in the
> political and economic arenas, is inward-looking and reactive...In contrast, the
> progressive strategy calls for targeting…potential users. It is a statement of faith
> in a library mission that goes beyond propitiation and compromise (p. 16).

The progressive librarian defined by Nauratil is a librarian who looks outside

of the library in order to find potential users and who actively seeks to solve social

problems. Progressives often must confront multiple hindrances in provisions of

equitable service, from the foundations of the postindustrial economy to local and

national politics. Progressives would assert that literacy itself is a public good; when

everyone reads, everyone benefits. However, divisions in the educational system

and disparities between social classes' demonstrations of proficiencies in literacy

show that there is not enough of a commitment to closing these gaps in the practice

of education. Recent attempts to close the gap, such as No Child Left Behind, have

been called a mask for a conservative agenda to remove funds from the public

coffers (Saltman, 2007) in favor of private, or fee-based, public services.

Progressive librarianship dictates that practitioners must find ways to cross the

divides that the capitalist system has created. John Pateman (1999) said that "There is an

intrinsic link between social exclusion and social class…social exclusion is endemic to

capitalism, and the class system pervades every aspect of society, including library

usage" (p. 26). In other words, knowledge is power, and systems are created to maintain

this power for the powerful. The marginalized are kept from those societal goods which

were created to educate and inform. Sheared, McCabe, and Umeki (2000) said that

marginalization and oppression are often used interchangeably in describing the

disenfranchised:

> Both of these terms reflect the loss of control and power over one's economic,
> social, and historical realities…it is the act of being in the margins while
> someone else (teachers/educators, program administrators/managers, and policy
> makers/legislators) is in the center (p. 168).

Sheared (1992, as quoted in Sheared, McCabe, and Umeki, p. 169) described the impact

of marginalization on students entering literacy programs as a result of welfare reform

initiatives:

- Marginality co-opts or obfuscates individuality. People give up that which is
  unique to whom they are and take on the characteristics of the dominant
  other.
- Appropriate resources cannot be given to that which does not have meaning
  or does not exist.
- Without resources a voice in the decisions that are made, marginalized
  people's needs and concerns will not be entered into the discourse of change.
- Marginalization excludes people's knowledge and understandings
- The historical uniqueness of the individual is forfeited in favor of a larger
  good (p. 73)

The language and experiences of the marginalized (or oppressed) must be acknowledged

as meaningful in order to create systems that work for them. Otherwise, they will

continue to feel as if they are not part of the system, and that they don't have control over

their lives.

Definitions of literacy

Governmental research and action concerning adult illiteracy has largely focused on work-readiness; it views non-readers as an economic liability and a public problem because they represent failures in the educational system. Some educational researchers outside of the political sphere focus on the psychological or social effects of reading. Critical theorists discuss the need for adult education to bring the voices of the oppressed to the political table. Library researchers utilize such theories, but they also bring along their own needs, including institutional preservation and promotion. Library practitioners seem to be more closely aligned with governmental agendas, which might be because they usually receive funding and approval from governmental sources and taxpayers. Less closely studied by library practitioners, but crucial to this research, is literature concerning marginality and power in adult education and society.

Illiteracy as a source of problems

The 2003 National Assessment of Adult Literacy (NAAL), conducted by the United States Department of Education, estimated that fourteen percent of adults are functionally illiterate, defined as "unable to read job applications, bus schedules, labels on the drugs they take" (NAAL, 2003). The NAAL's functional definition of literacy was adopted by the ALA Committee on Literacy: "[Literacy is defined as] the ability to use…printed and written information to function in society, to achieve one's goals, and to develop one's knowledge and potential" (ALA Committee on Literacy, 2005). This definition focuses on personal empowerment within the context of the everyday lived worlds of adults. The fact that the ALA adopted this definition of literacy reflects the dichotomy that is faced by librarians who want to help the poor; they must both work

within a governmental framework and satisfy a political call for accountability while satisfying their own educational belief in literacy as a means for transformation and empowerment.

The NAAL categories of literacy levels are as follows:

- below basic--no more than the most simple and concrete literacy skills;

- basic--skills necessary to perform simple and everyday literacy activities;

- intermediate--skills necessary to perform moderately challenging literacy activities; and

- proficient--skills necessary to perform more complex and challenging literacy activities. (Kutner et. al, 2007, p. 4).

Literacy rates among African Americans and Hispanic Americans reflect a larger societal problem of racial and social inequity that is present in schooling, access to health care and other social services. Learning disabilities (LD) are also a factor in illiteracy; Berger (2007) said that many (up to eighty percent) of the adults at the below basic level have a learning disability which was "often…either undiagnosed or improperly treated" during their education. Many graduated from school, either in a traditional program or with an Individual Education Plan (IEP) degree, which is not accepted by most colleges or the military. Overcrowded schools in economically depressed areas are less likely to have the means to diagnose learning problems (Kozol, 1991).

Undiagnosed learning problems can cause problems throughout life. The percentage of adult literacy students with LD is debated; Vogel (1998) has found estimates ranging for LD among adult literacy students ranging from twenty-five to eighty percent. The adult literacy classroom, however, might not necessarily work on

specific learning problems. It is recommended that classroom instruction for adults be

standardized. Vogel said that "establishing the presence of a learning disability in adults

who are already burdened with unemployment/underemployment, financial insecurity,

and significant limitations in literacy skills" (p. 19) is yet another burden on the student.

John Strucker (2006), Lecturer in Education and Research Associate at the

National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy (NCSALL) at the Harvard

Graduate School of Education, discussed the racial imbalances shown by the NAAL.

These are consistent with imbalances in the school system described by Kozol (1991).

Strucker's description confirmed that inequalities in school districts lead to greater

discrepancies in literacy rates of adults:

> we have an adult black, Hispanic, white achievement gap that's very similar to
> the one we have with children and I think that as a society, we are starting to do
> a good job of looking at that among children and trying to figure out… But we
> have to do a similar thing I think with adult education… you are much more
> likely, a factor of almost threefold to be in below basic level if you are Hispanic,
> and the factor of almost twofold more likely to be in the below basic level if you
> are African American or black (p. 8).

In August of 2006, Sandra Baxter, Director of the National Institute for Literacy,

talked about Americans with the lowest levels of literacy during a webcast entitled

"Adults with Basic and Below Basic Literacy Levels: Findings from the NAAL and

Implications for Practice.". She began by referencing President Bush's State of the

Union Address from January of 2006, announcing the American Competitiveness

Initiative (ACI). She said "the initiative is designed to encourage American innovation

and strengthen our nation's ability to compete in the global economy… We will talk

about what it means for basic skills instruction and what it means too for workforce

development program" (para. 3). Under such a model, justification for reading programs and the worth of reading is relegated to the creation of a nation of workers who can contribute to the growth of America as a competitor in the global marketplace. Thus, one model of literacy is centered upon economic production. This represents the dominating political theme in the educational sector.

The current political climate under the Welfare-to-Work system (enacted in 1998 as the Workforce Investment Act, or WIA) has extended the commodification of the low-income worker through many means, including the systems which were developed to help him or her. Adult Education programs which receive federal funding under the WIA were integrated into a streamlined system of 'one stop shops'. The U.S. Department of Education (2005) says that "Entities that carry out activities assisted under the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act are mandatory partners in this one-stop delivery system" (Adult Education and Family Literacy Act of 1998, para. 1). While many educational programs work outside of the federal program, only those that work within it are eligible for federal funding. In this context reading and adult basic instruction become synonymous with welfare to work.

The low-literate pose problems for people who try to provide services for the public, such as librarians, city planners, and health providers. The particular problem which low literacy poses for any given interest group will influence the language that the group uses to define literacy. Likewise, dominant political ideologies can be explored through rhetoric which is used to convey the source of the problem. The politics of privatization have framed illiteracy and other social problems as a product of a failed

public policy and the welfare state (Carnoy, 2000; Lo, 1998). Shannon (1989) contended that

> American reading programs are organized to produce students with verifiable levels of reading competence in order to assuage the concerns of the public, who expect graduates to be productive citizens, and business, which needs workers who can follow written directions…and legislators…have passed laws and developed policies of testing…to ensure that schools are accountable for the funds they receive (p. 110).

Adult literacy programs are under similar surveillance; they must prove that they are accountable for the funds that they receive by documenting student progress. As many school teachers will attest since the enactment of No Child Left Behind, the requirement of proving progress undermines the educational process (Lewis, 2007). Welfare reform, notably, undermines the seriousness of literacy and education when it forces the poor to take full-time jobs before they are able to fully function as literate adults (Shaw et.al, 2006).

Literacy is one of the primary instructional goals of schooling, but the idea of literacy is actually very difficult to define. Padak and Bardine (2004) pointed out that "in the early twentieth century…people were considered literate if they had completed a certain grade in school or could sign their name. These definitions don't work in today's complex society" (p. 126). They emphasized that reading is a contextual experience; "what it means to be literate depends to a large extent on the situation in which an adult operates" (p. 126). They also emphasized the role of engagement with a text as a motivating factor for making adults want to read—authentic learning doesn't come from decoding; it comes from "connecting to the world that exists beyond the classroom" (p. 127). This definition is holistic and subjective. They meant that literacy is having the

50

ability to do what one needs to do with printed material: to understand it well enough to get what one needs out of it, and to be able to communicate effectively with the written word. Lyman (1977) described literacy as a continuum ranging from total illiteracy through literacy, defined as the ability to understand virtually all written materials. The 2003 National Assessment of Adult Literacy (NAAL) report categorized different types of literacy: "prose literacy," meaning the ability to extract meaning from long strings of text; "document literacy," meaning the ability to fill out forms and other documents, and "quantitative literacy," or math skills for daily living. Literacy means being unhindered in life by an inability to use any form of print material. This functional definition is similar to that used by Lyman, but it also analyzed areas of strengths are weaknesses.

There are other difficulties in assessment because of extraneous factors. McCook and Barber (2002) pointed out the difficulties of assessing literacy due to the multiple approaches and theoretical frameworks, "based on whether the literacy initiative is for adults, families, reading readiness, or second-language acquisition" (p. 68) Learning disabilities add complications to defining literacy, because they can make specific processes in learning difficult where others are fully functional. Defining literacy and assessing it, then, are both impossible under one simple rubric.

Transformative Education: Problems and Opportunities

Hofstetter, Sticht and Hofstetter (1999) said that students who have not succeeded in school are often poorly equipped to participate in a democratic society. They concluded that "higher levels of knowledge of mainstream culture and politics in the United states are associated with achieving and exercising power regardless of background" (p. 58), and that literacy is the key to acquisition of knowledge. While this

theory might shed hope on obtaining power through literacy, Shannon (1988), explained

that many schools, especially in low-income areas, fail to teach children how to read for

enjoyment because of the political necessity of raising test scores. The lack of

engagement with texts makes school drudgery. Prior experiences with the educational

system have not fostered a sense of self-confidence in the students; they often feel their

opinions and experiences are not valued. They also do not have the tools that are needed

for effective communication through reading and writing. Schugurensky (2002) said that

the ideal situation for learning follows the Habermasian ideal speech situation:

"discourse, or human communication, must involve freedom, tolerance, equality,

education, and democratic participation in order to achieve ideal conditions of learning"

(p. 64). The students need to feel valued and equal in order to participate fully. When

students take part in their own education and those of their peers, they may be able to

relearn the processes of education in ways that create meaning in their own lives. In

other words, they become the proponents of their own education, liberated from the

bondage of oppression (Freire, 1970). Proponents of transformative education believe

that educational experiences can improve the lives of students by widening their world

view (Martin, 2007).

In truth, though, being literate also takes a different form; it means having the

ability to learn by reading and to communicate through writing. Higher levels of literacy

enable transcendent learning experiences in which the reader is able to expand his or her

world view by seeing the world through another person's eyes. This was what Gioia

meant when he said that it was painful to imagine an America where only a few people

enjoy reading. He purported that reading connects people and is "an indispensable part

of what makes us fully human" (NEA, 2006). This human-ness is an ability to connect

with others outside of one's immediate world. History began with the written word, and

because humans today rely primarily upon the written word (rather than the spoken word)

as a means to communicate stories and history, a person who doesn't read is limited to

the immediately available world. Reading is, therefore, not only necessary for

participation in the political world; it is also an act which can bring pleasure. This facet

is rarely discussed by literacy advocates in the political realm; their focus is on work

readiness, while the idea of reading for pleasure is largely restricted to people who are

competent readers.

Gioia was speaking as Chairman of the National Endowment for the Arts, the

sponsor of The Big Read, which is an initiative designed to "bring the transformative

power of literature into the lives of its citizens." This research asked whether it is likely

that people who are enrolled in a literacy class will attend literacy events which have the

potential to 'make us fully human' and dispel loneliness, two of the stated goals of the

Big Read. Can literacy students fully participate in such events? Schugurensky (2002)

pointed out that transformative education is more likely to take place among healthy,

happy adults:

> A genuine reflective discourse is more likely to take place if certain conditions
> are present. These conditions relate closely to Habermas' ideal speech situations
> mentioned earlier as well as basic feelings of solidarity, empathy, trust, and
> safety among participants…hungry, homeless, desperate, sick, or frightened
> adults are les likely to be able to participate effectively in discourse to help them
> better understand the meaning of their own experiences (p. 66).

Schugurensky's analysis is apt; while a community reading program is not an explicitly

political event (such as Schurgerensky was describing), it requires a set of tools that these

students haven't yet mastered. The participants shouldn't feel as if they are on the outside, and 'book talk' is not a strong point for new readers. However, it is a skill which they are cultivating in the classroom. If the students are able to enjoy the time that they spend in the classroom, and if they feel safe and valued, they will be more likely to develop the skills needed to engage in reflective, transformative education.

There are many reasons that adult literacy students attend class. Perhaps the most common reason is to obtain the skills that they need to get a better job. The students in this study did express a desire for social mobility through their education. Blau (1977) explained some of the difficulties that the poor experience in the pursuit of social mobility, which might be mitigated by a program such as One Book. Blau's language is perhaps more theoretical than the popular policy term 'social exclusion', yet both maintain that people without means are systemically excluded from the goods and services which enable them to get ahead. Blau wrote that personal differences make integration into a social scene difficult:

> Both heterogeneity and inequality create barriers to social intercourse, on the assumption that common group membership and proximate status promote social associations. This assumption implies that the greater the differentiation of either kind, the more extensive are the barriers to sociable intercourse, although more extensive barriers are not necessarily stronger barriers… Differentiation implies barriers to face-to-face associations among the various parts in the social structure, and integration is defined in terms of the face-to-face association on the ingroup bonds established in the direct associations among persons in the same group (p. 10).

The students' differences—that is, their low literacy and low economic status—are thus barriers to the participation which could alleviate their social isolation, making social mobility very difficult.

Barriers aside, Schugurensky (2002) expanded upon the role that transformative learning plays in a participatory democracy: "Transformative learning, by developing individuals' competencies for engaging in critical yet respectful dialogue with others, nurtures the necessary subjective conditions for a genuine participatory democracy" (p. 66) He continued: "transformative learning can improve the quality of citizens' participation in democratic institutions, and at the same time democratic participation itself creates powerful opportunities for self-transformation" (p. 67). Literacy is a step in this direction, then; and participation in public democratic institutions is another step in the process towards self-transformation.

Literacy also gives a person the means to communicate effectively, enabling participation in public discourse. However, the powerful have an interest in preventing this, as discourse control equals political power (Foucault, 1972). The ideal adult literacy education program for social transformation should be culturally affirming and provide opportunities to expand the life-world of the poor. It should utilize language that legitimizes the students' own cultural capital, not just that of the dominant society. Giroux and Aronowitz (1993) explained that "the language of curriculum is both historical and contingent. Theories of curriculum have emerged from past struggles and are often heavily weighted in favor of those who have power, authority and institutional legitimation" (p. 36). This view is aligned with the findings of Hofstetter et. al. (1999) which reported that knowledge of dominant culture enhances political power.

Other views of schooling focus on critical issues, though they were not written in the same terms. For instance, Dewey (1916) said that schooling, public libraries, and literacy education should produce citizens who are able to solve problems. He

emphasized education as a service to the state. Freire (1970) said that education should

produce people who are able to be dialogically engaged in the decisions which affect

their lives (Freire, 1970). Freire's mission was education for empowerment. Under the

framework of participatory education, power is placed in the hands of the students.

In the context of participatory education, the role of the educator changes from the

source of knowledge to the facilitator of knowledge exchange, and the students

themselves become educators. Discussing literature in a group setting gives students

validation that their own literary interpretations are meaningful and valued. Freire (1970)

said that if education is to empower students they must engage in participatory dialogue,

and that through education and dialogue they will become free and 'more human':

> The oppressed, having internalized the image of the oppressor and adopted his
> guidelines, are fearful of freedom. Freedom would require them to eject this
> image and replace it with autonomy and responsibility. Freedom is acquired by
> conquest, not by gift. It must be pursued constantly and responsibly. Freedom
> is not an ideal located outside of man; nor is it an idea which becomes myth. It
> is rather the indispensable condition for the quest for human completion (p. 31).

Freire wrote about participatory education as a means to give a voice to the

oppressed as a precursor to revolution. While his theories don't always translate neatly to

the context of present-day American Adult Education as his work was with rural South

American peasantry, certain elements ring true. His idea of human completion, above,

refers to freedom; but it is freedom which is acquired through education. Freire believed

that teachers must be fully prepared to embrace the cause of the poor. This study would

refer to the South American peasants as the socially excluded. The literacy teacher

would relate to the students as an equal, giving them power. The students must feel

accepted for who he is are rather than what the teacher wants him to become.

56

Given the preceding theoretical considerations, where does the public library fit in? Critical library theorists such as Michael Harris (1973) and Dee Garrison (1979) wrote about the library as a means of social control, contrasted with Jesse Shera's (1965) and Sidney Ditzion's (1947) praise of the democratic beginnings of the library. This argument has been explored in depth by a number of scholars since Garrison, but it indicated a fundamental shift in thinking about the goals of cultural institutes. The critical angle says that rather than using the library to promote (only) the traditional literary canon and maintain the status quo, equal value should be given to the needs of and experiences of the marginalized. Studying the argument can help libraries plan programs for non-traditional clientele in order to call attention to the need for respect of multiple viewpoints and cultures. One Book events often do just this: they bring books of the marginalized, or books concerning ethical and moral questions, to the forefront of a community-wide discussion. The possibilities for social inclusion, then, are obvious, but whether these ideals can come to fruition is not yet known.

Education for Empowerment

Critical social theorists maintain that the powerful always benefit from the status quo, and thus they will fight any true change in the balance of power. The concept of de-marginalization of the poor through education is that it should provide them with the power to control their lives by giving them a voice in politics and in public life. When Foucault (1972) asked:

> Who is speaking? Who among the totality of speaking individuals, is accorded to right to use this sort of language? Who is qualified to do so? Who derives form it its own special quality, his prestige, and from whom, in return, does he receive if not the assurance, at least the presumption that what is says is true? (p. 56)

he was asking whose voice is to be heard, whose discourse counts and is legitimized by society. Securing one's place in the social hierarchy should then be as simple as gaining some modicum of control over the discourse. Neoliberal policies remove the responsibility of poverty reduction (and all that entails) from the public sphere to the private, further distancing the poor from public discourse. Political discourse concerning ABE and the placement of ABE programs within the educational system serve to keep it out of the center of discourse; it is often relegated to the outskirts of the educational system, financially and substantively. George Demetrion (2005) said that "Questions on how knowledge is constructed through relationships of power are critical to any contemporary discussion on conflicting views of the public purposes and definitions of adult literacy education" (p. 2). The displacement of the programs mirror the life situations of those whom they are meant to help.

If, indeed, literacy and knowledge are the primary indicators in power, bringing the issue to the forefront is a policy of resistance. It is ammunition against the dominant culture of capitalism and of the politics of place which displace the powerless, and conceiving of the library as a center for empowerment is a first step in breaking the cycle of illiteracy. As Mayo (2000) summarized, Garnham and Bourdieu's assessment of education for empowerment illustrates some of the hopes and limitations that libraries might encounter in fighting social inequalities. Their fundamental difference accentuates a need for library collections which do not simply reproduce the status quo perpetuated by the capitalist system.

Libraries continually struggle to find the best way to meet the needs of new adult readers. One of the repeated themes in library literature for this population is *partnership* (Crowther and Trott, 2004). By bringing emergent adult readers into the library for learning, the library becomes a place to go for information and recreation. However, most libraries aren't equipped to provide direct literacy services (Zweizig, Robbins, and Johnson 1988). Lipschultz (personal communication, 2007) said that research on libraries and literacy programs has shown that the ideal situation is for libraries to work as partners in literacy programs. She said that that librarians need to be aware of the realities presented by politics in relation to literacy education; rather than trying to fight existing legislation, they need to be prepared to work with providers. Educational reformers on the political left tend to define literacy in terms of empowerment and transformation.

John Vincent (1999) said that in the UK, "lifelong learning and basic skills initiatives could, and should, have an impact on the role of public libraries. However, changes relating to both staff and stock may affect their ability to carry out this role" (p. 43). Economic pressures don't equate to better literacy services. Vincent continued: "Public libraries are urged to form partnerships with organizations involved in basic skills work" (p. 43). Collection development is insufficient because the libraries have to find out how to get the new readers in to the library.

Weibel (1992) wrote about her experience of bringing adult new readers into the library. She recalled that when she began teaching adult new readers, she was vexed by the inadequacies of the boring texts in the classroom. She thought that what the students needed was a text that they could connect to, that would make a difference in the way that

they think and work. She decided to explore the local public library in order to find

engaging books for new readers:

> What adult literacy students read is of paramount importance, and learning to read requires more than just mastering a set of skills…Reading is a means of acquiring information we need, of learning about our past and preparing for our future, of escaping everyday life into imaginary worlds, of thinking about and changing the way we live our lives (p. 4).

Unfortunately, in the new world order the argument for literacy as a tool for

empowerment might be moot. As quoted in Mayo (2000), Garnham pointed out a

contradiction regarding empowerment in general by evaluating two theories. He said that

"empowerment will not mean much…unless it is accompanied by a massive shift in the

control of economic resources" (p. 33). In other words, we can teach adults to read, they

can become proficient and able to vote and make good decisions in their lives, but we

will not make an impact on the quality of their lives unless they are given economic

means to improve their lives. The ideal of the man of letters as immune from the needs

of the flesh is, unfortunately, outdated. Bourdieu (in Mayo, 2000) offered a more hopeful

assessment the role of the educator, concerning the role of culture in political economy.

He said that "individuals are located in the context of existing practices and meaning in

class society…the role of education is important as a mechanism for distributing cultural

capital" (p. 33). Librarians, then, who work with and research their role in the public

sphere, should consider their role to be social scientists. By using such a model, they can

"produce knowledge which can assist human agents in unveiling the ways in which social

and cultural inequality is reproduced and legitimated with a view to developing more

effective changes" (Mayo, 2000, p. 33). The library itself is a social actor. Garnham and

Bourdieu demonstrate some of the hopes and limitations of libraries in fighting social

inequalities. Their fundamental difference accentuates the need for library collections

which do not simply reproduce the status quo offered under the capitalist system.

Partnerships

Librarians often serve on important task forces for literacy; this means that they are

recognized as an important resource for literacy. Kathleen de la Pena McCook (2002)

pointed out that, at the National Literacy Summit (2000),

> lines were blurred along the literacy-education-lifelong-learning continuum.
> Librarians were well represented… and were identified as stakeholders along
> with adult educators, language and literacy providers; federal, state, and local
> human services agencies and elected officials; businesses; unions; education
> providers; and correctional institutions (p. 67).

Many libraries choose to support adult literacy education through partnerships with the

agencies listed by McCook. One difficulty in forming alliances between education, adult

education, libraries, and welfare-to-work program administrators for ABE is that these

groups have competing sets of ideologies, framed by discourse that is non-

interchangeable but increasingly blurry.   One group has the target of readying adults for

entering the workforce by targeting functional literacy; the other side is literacy for

empowerment, or education for social transformation, in order to engage adults in

dialogue so that they can challenge the sources of their own oppression (Mayo, 2000).

Welfare-to-work program administrators are generally free from this ideological problem

because they work under a federally stated mandate. However, the practitioners of ABE

within the programs often feel the pinch of time constraints and the hypocrisy of turning

their students out to the work world when they are only minimally literate.

An accountability system in education is disempowering for both the students and the teachers. Patrick Shannon (1989) wrote that "Schools are not factories; the do not produce tangible commodities…The success or failure of a factory is easy to determine by a quick look at the color of the ink in its ledger" (p. 76). This problem has only increased since the implementation of No Child Left Behind (NCLB). Children who do not acquire necessary literacy skills in school go on to become adults who do not read well. Literacy is a skill that is honed by use and practice; avoidance of the skill leads to deterioration or atrophy.

There are many problems, then, with communication of means and goals of adult education within libraries: first of all, there is a problem of accountability. Libraries must show that their materials are circulating, or they are weeded from the collection. They are accountable to taxpayers, and often don't vie for the attention poor. Secondly, there is a problem of the language of adult education. Framed within the context of welfare-to-work (as it has necessarily been since the passage of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996, or PRWORA), it lies outside of the realm of libraries and falls into the hands of one-stop shops meant to change people from welfare recipients to workers. It makes sense for libraries to secure the funds for adult education because libraries support lifelong learning. Federal funds should not be sought, however, if they come with strings attached.

Johnson, Robbins and Zweizig pointed out that an issue in literacy education is that the new reader enrolled in an ABE program is constantly evaluated in order to satisfy accountability measures. Libraries don't evaluate learning. This divergence demonstrates that libraries must be very careful when they identify their goals and

partners. Mission statements should reflect equity and service to all, and action plans should be inclusive and creative in order to ensure successful outcomes. Hayden (2004) said that "The commitment to inclusive service delivery means involvement of the entire community and all community stakeholders" (p. ix). However, the library must choose compatible partners to meet goals of inclusiveness.

In that vein, the library should understand the institutional and situational needs of partners in order to work with them effectively. It should also be aware of its own policies, and then change policies that are incongruent with the social goals that the librarians want to achieve. Lampman (1998) said,

> Think systems—who's determining your library's policies? Work as a citizen,
> to assure people know how library policies are determined, how people are
> elected or appointed to library boards, what channels people need to use in order
> to affect policies (p. 122).

Confronting Exclusion in the Library

"From Outreach to Equity" (2004) and "Poor People and Library Services" (1998) are two publications which describe programs run by library services which target non-traditional library clientele, including new readers. Dotson and Bonitch (1998) say that there is a real connection between libraries and the poor; libraries give access to resources that they cannot get elsewhere. They help people overcome economic and social barriers. The key problem that they identify is reaching the non-traditional user.

The concept of the 'free library' has been repeated since the inception of the modern public library. According to the Enoch Pratt Free Library of Baltimore's website (2008), its founder gave an endowment to the City saying that "My library, shall be for all, rich and poor without distinction of race or color, who, when properly accredited, can

take out the books if they will handle them carefully and return them." The PLA repeated

this theme in 1982: "Public libraries freely offer access to their collections and services to

all members of the community without regard to race, citizenship, age, education level,

economic status, or any other qualification or condition" (Nauratil, 1985, p. 15). The

ALA continued in 1993: "The library's essential mission must remain the first

consideration for librarians and governing bodies faced with economic pressures and

competition for funding…The ALA opposed the charging of user fees from the provision

of information by all libraries and information services that receive their major support

from public funds" (ALA, Economic Barriers to Information Access, p. 1). The goal is to

remove barriers such as class and race from access to reading materials. However, many

activist librarians insist that such proclamations don't go far enough in ensuring truly

equal access.

Advocates of the Poor People's Policy (ALA, Policy Manual 61) say that as a

social institution, libraries should actually have polices of reverse discrimination in order

to counter the effects of years of oppression; some of the steps suggested are obvious,

such as canceling fines; others are less so, such as providing transportation for library

board members who can't afford it and collecting food for the food bank. The idea,

though, is to work as a profession towards a more equitable world. We are doing this

because we house books and materials which have the potential to expand the life-worlds

of the poor and provide power to the powerless.

Adult education, or lifelong learning, is a specific way that libraries can and do

serve the poor. There is a long history of public library support for adult education. The

method that the library uses to reach new adult readers is based on such factors as library

management attitudes towards the poor and overall community support for literacy services. Libraries support literacy in a number of ways. Johnson, Robbins and Zweizig's 1986 study (published 1990) was funded by the U.S. Department of Education. It examined public, public school, community college, academic, state institutional and state libraries' roles as a partner in adult literacy. This study identified three general categories for support (p. 8):

- Collecting literacy materials, such as "print and audiovisual materials for adult new learners, for new speakers of English, and for tutors or instructors";

- Providing literacy instruction: "recruiting and placing volunteer tutors and students; may occur jointly with another literacy provider…Another role is in raising staff awareness of the literacy problem."

- Providing literacy support services, including "cooperative efforts, such as jointly publicizing area literacy services, participating in literacy coalitions, referrals, and advocating literacy. This role also includes providing facilities for literacy activities."

They point out that public library involvement in adult literacy education varies greatly. Many libraries simply provide appropriate materials; others incorporate literacy education in their strategic planning, and others participate in literacy activities through multi-agency literacy coalitions. There is a history of literacy education in public libraries, "traced back to the beginning of public libraries in the 1850's" (p. 1). Their study of library involvement of literacy listed a number of community variables which influence the degree to which the library is involved in ABE programming. One

important finding was that "libraries involved in literacy are often located in communities with non-library literacy education activities" (p. 4). While this point may seem minor, it means that the city's involvement in literacy initiatives trickles down to the library. In other words, nationwide institutional goals, such as those voiced by ALA, are not actually as important as community decisions in determining to what extent the library becomes involved in literacy initiatives.

Summary

Community-wide reading projects were not envisioned as programs to benefit adult literacy students. That is, they do not address everyday functional literacy. However, they are reading initiatives: they are intended to bring people back to literature. Both the act of reading and the discussions which accompany it are intended to foster civic life and create a sense of community among the entirety of an adult population. The literature cited reinforces the idea that these adults should be brought into the discussion because they are learning a social practice which benefits everyone. The literature also discussed the difficulties that libraries might encounter when trying to work with outside groups, which has been identified as the best way to get non-users into the library. The difficulties lie in maintaining a sense of purpose which isn't compromised by the needs of outside groups while gaining the support of those groups. A community reading project has the potential to bridge gaps between social groups, but it has to be relevant and meet their needs in order to attract them. New adult readers might not have their needs met by the book itself, but the goal of being part of a community of readers meets two goals: reading and community. Outreach to the new readers might be one way to bridge social divides.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This research is a phenomenological study of the experiences of adult new readers in a community reading program. Because the subject of this study is a shared experience, it is particularly apt for phenomenological methods. Patton (2002) said that phenomenological "approaches share…a focus on exploring how human beings make sense of experience and transform experience into consciousness, both individually and as shared meaning" (p. 104). Interviews, observations, and documents all reveal how people make sense of their world by seeking direct input from the subjects of inquiry. Phenomenology has been described as a rigorous science based on logical conclusions. The logic involves forming categories based upon the inter-subjective experience between the scholar and the data. Bernet et. al. explain how subjective data, conceived by Husserl as the only basis for formation of reality, is the basis for the objective conceptions of truth:

> Objectivity, our world in its entirety, has in the transcendental-phenomenological contemplation of consciousness only the sense of an intentional correlate of subjects reciprocally and intentionally implied in one another. Another world, unrelated to our subjectivity and intersubjectivity, as no sense for us whatsoever. Objectivity is itself a correlative achievement of the communalized transcendental consciousness (p. 75).

In the case of document analysis, the logic is formed by establishing categories relating to the function of the document and the entity to which it is associated. Categorization of the data is an intuitional act which aims to form universal concepts, or

truth. By intuitively examining combinations of the data, one forms a view of the whole. The phenomenological sense-making is formed from the subjective experiences of experiencing, recalling, and evaluating. Sanders (1982) said that despite a lack of standard procedure for phenomenological research, there are "certain commonalities [which] guide the researcher. All methods begin by examining individual conscious experiences (phenomena)" (p. 354), move through an analysis of the intersubjective meanings and analyze a restructuring of consciousness. The researcher then reviews the experience. Meaning is made by examining multiple viewpoints and synthesizing them to form ideas based upon subjective and intersubjective experiences and reviewing of those experiences.

This study utilized three methods of data collection: interviews, participant observations, and document analysis. Interviews were, by far, the most important aspect of the data because this research sought to uncover individual perceptions of an experience. However, the other two methods add breadth to the study by adding another dimension, and giving a counterpoint to interpretation of the interviews. This was especially true in the case of the new readers, because their own experiences with reading were so limited that the interview data was scant regarding their personal insights on the act of reading, and also on participation in a community event. The interviews were more revealing in regards to other personal information, however, especially in regards to their goals and past troubles with schooling and socialization.

Fielding and Fielding (1986) said that "The essence of the triangulation rationale is the fallibility of any single measure as a representation of social phenomena and psychological constructs" (p. 29). The researcher cannot understand the world through

observation alone, and it is impossible to be in multiple places at the same time. The

study of a complex social event benefits from a variety of viewpoints. Previously

collected documents are especially valuable because they existed prior to and separate

from the researcher's involvement with the topic. While they are subject to the

researcher's analysis, they are not actually collected by the researcher, if they are viewed

as a collection. The goal of utilizing multiple methods is to demonstrate validity through

the process of triangulation and to add breadth to the findings. Fielding and Fielding

(1986) said that "the term "triangulation" derives from surveying. Knowing a single

landmark only locates one somewhere along a line in a direction from the landmark,

whereas with two landmarks one can take bearings on both and locate oneself at their

intersection" (p. 23). This analogy is apt because it describes the process of validating

findings from one method with another.

Patton (2002) did say that while the goal of triangulation is to demonstrate

validity of the findings, triangulation does not always point towards the same answers.

When multiple methods are used, different data sets will emerge. The data adds breadth

and depth to an understanding of a complex social phenomenon. Because this research

sought to build a theory of individuals' responses to a community reading program, it

looked to representatives of identified stakeholders: the library, readers, and teachers. A

three-pronged approach allows a holistic exploration of the subject surrounding

participatory education, community involvement, and the purposes for and outcomes of

community reading programs. Additional insights were drawn from a historical analysis

of the roles of libraries and educational systems for adults in order to give the project

societal context, or a theoretical basis. Qualitative data was utilized because this research

69

is a description of lived experience; it seeks the personal reflections and perceptions of participants in order to produce data.

This research aimed to build a theory based upon the phenomena which are observed and recorded. For the purposes of this study, "data" were limited to that which was produced as a result of analyzing observations and interviews. There are inherent biases in any research, but by triangulating the data by using multiple types of evidence, claims can be constructed which are grounded in evidence and theory. According to Patton (2002),

> by using a combination of observations, interviewing, and document analysis, the fieldworker is able to use different data sources to validate and cross-check findings. Each type and source of data has strengths and weaknesses. Using a combination of data types – triangulation - increases validity (p. 306).

The phenomenological approach is particularly apt for describing the experiences of individuals involved in an institutionally affiliated program, such as a community reading program. Sanders explained, "When…one understands consciousness as awareness of what accounts for managerial excellence or a description of organizational myths, cultures, and symbols, then the possibilities of phenomenology as an organizational research methodology begin to emerge" (p. 353). The One Book phenomenon is an example of a reading practice described by Pawley (2002). She explains that we can uncover the meaning, or significance, of the act of reading by examining a specific reading practice during a specific time period. The meaning of the reading practice is then, viewed through multiple methods and lenses.

The concept of the community reading program is examined through multiple subjectivities, including those of its founders and sponsors, participants, and the new

readers. These multiple subjectivities form the gestalt, or entire picture; as they are compared for inter-subjective relations, a universal concept emerges. The aim to uncover the meaning of the phenomenon is the intentionality of the researcher: "Intentionality refers to the total meaning of the object, which is always more than what is given in the perception of a single profile or perspective" (Sanders, 1986, p. 354). Accordingly, the following section will review the three types of data by examining the methods used in the research. Chapter 4 will include findings from the interview transcripts, observations, and documents, and will look toward connections: first between each type of data on its own, then intermethodologically, in order to form logical conclusions about the meaning of the event from multiple perspectives.

Research Questions

The central questions of this research were:

- How do new adult readers describe their participation with One Book?

- How do program instrumentalists conceive of a community reading program?

- Could participation in community reading programs help widely diverse people feel more comfortable in a literary setting?

- What is the essential nature of a community reading experience?

- What is the essential experience of reading a book for new readers?

- What do the various represented program participants want to read in a community reading program, and why?

A Note on Confidentiality

Confidentiality posed a problem with this research because it was difficult to describe conversations about the book without revealing the book's title. Because One

Book programs are city-wide events, revealing the title of the book would have made identification of key interview participants easier. Instead of describing the conversations directly, therefore, they were compared between each other for structure and depth. Names of all of the interview participants have been changed. In the same vein, in order to maintain confidentiality I was only able to indirectly describe observations. Descriptions would have been richer had privacy not been an issue, but I wanted to maintain strict confidentiality because I wanted the interview participants to be able to speak freely.

Interviews (Key, see Appendix A)

A total of thirteen interviews were conducted with:

- Two book clubs participants

- Two members of the public who participated in the community reading program

- Four members of the adult literacy classroom who read the book

- The teacher in the adult literacy classroom (two interviews)

- One high school teacher whose class participated in the program, and

- Four program instrumentalists who were responsible for at least one element of the program (this included two book talk leaders and two librarians).

Four interviews were conducted which included two people. Two interviews were with married couples who participated in the program together (two as instrumentalists, two as readers). The two librarians were interviewed together because they have worked on One Book events since the project's inception. During one interview with the literacy teacher, her son sat in and contributed to the conversation. Therefore, a total of sixteen people

were interviewed during the course of the thirteen interviews. In addition, three interviews were conducted as a pilot study.

Conducting an open-ended interview is a bit like performing improvisational jazz with people on the street. When you approach another person, you might know him casually or intimately or not at all. You do not know his musical style, or even if he really knows how to play. He might be reserved and only know how to play certain tunes with written music, or he might be wild and cacophonous and not know how to play well with another person.

These interviews ran the gamut: there were interviews with prominent public figures who were reserved and knew what they wanted to convey. When I tried to steer them in a direction that explored motivations or underlying feelings, the interviews sometimes became awkward and fell flat, as if I had played a sour note and they did not know what to do with it. On the other end of the spectrum, the adult new readers did not generally talk well about literature, but they did convey past experiences which yielded a rich tapestry of their motivations and feelings. If I tried to steer them back to the research questions, it did not work well; they had some limitations. Likewise, interviews with past acquaintances were more harmonious. They knew more about the research and about me as a conversationalist, so we could explore the research topics together and concepts in depth and produce results that were more obviously meaningful.

Beyond explaining the improvisational nature of the dynamics of the open interview, there is another reason for this extended metaphor. Open interviewing is more of an art than a skill which can be learned academically, and it is something which needs to be developed over a period of years in order to perfect it. It can be uncomfortable and

awkward for even a good conversationalist to talk to strangers or acquaintances about feelings and motivations. Concrete questions are not so difficult; those are akin to asking the respondent to fill in the blank. Questions about abstract notions, if communicated well and if both parties understand the notion are also not as problematic. However, asking people to open up and tell stories about their personal feelings can feel awkward, or even threatening to the participant.

Such awkward moments as described above are equally true for the public figure as for the adult new reader. Certain questions can upset an assumed balance of power. Judith Butler (1990) said that "it becomes impossible to separate out 'gender' from the political and cultural intersections in which it is invariable produced and maintained" (p. 3). The same can be said for other labels, especially those which 'mark' a person as different. Institutions, such as the educational system, also label people by defining participants' roles within the system: teacher to student, between students, and between teachers and administrators. Students are assessed and labeled so that teachers know how to teach and relate to them, or (ideally) how to adapt the curriculum to fit their needs.

Narratives are produced under a particular set of circumstances which influence the story based on what the author thinks is relevant to the needs of the person to whom he is talking (Holstein and Gubrium, 1995). Therefore, the narrative is not only a product of the setting or circumstances; it is located at a particular intersection, involving such elements as power, perception of audience, and presentation of self (Gubrium and Holstein 2001). The interview conducted within an institutional setting (such as the school or in the context of social work) is informed and shaped by this intersection. The self presented in such a context is likely to be what is expected; the self as problematic is

likely to be highlighted. Likewise, an interview conducted in a respondent's home is likely to have a different tone—it might focus on domesticity, and shifting to events that are, for instance, work-related, might require a shift in thinking that is difficult for the respondent.

For this research, all of the literacy students, their teacher, librarians and other program participants were invited for interviews. This was a selective invitation, extended to people who were involved in the program in some way that was beneficial to this project. People who were instrumentally involved in both the One Book program (including librarians, advisory board members, and some panelists for One Book discussions) and the literacy classes were asked to talk about their experiences with the aspect of the program with which they were involved. Unfortunately, only four students, who were the primary interest in this project, were willing to be interviewed. One student was not interested in talking with me, and three of the students who began reading the book had dropped out of the program before the class completed the book. This is not unusual for adult literacy students; they often have many obligations outside of class that interrupt their studies periodically. Classroom observations indicated that many of the students were somewhat reticent to talk about themselves. This was especially apparent when they worked on assignments that required them to write about their own opinion or interpretation of an event or reading in class.

Pilot Project

This research was preceded by a pilot project which aimed to uncover motivations for enrolling in a literacy program, and in order to learn about the lives of the students and the classroom environment in which they learn. One reason for this was to gain

some background knowledge of the problems that the students were facing; Holstein and

Gubrium (1995) pointed out that:

> sensitivity to the context underscores the need for the interviewer to be at least minimally aware of the cultural and ethnographic background within which interviews are embedded. Interviewers are often cautioned that they must 'know the local setting to ask good questions and interpret the meaning of answers.' Combining ethnographic background information with interviews "reveals the local *whats* of experience (p. 45).

The pilot project with the literacy students revealed a common emergent theme which

emphasized the importance of learning disabilities in the students' presentation of self.

The students clearly identified themselves with the institutional terms with which they

have been labeled. They discussed the role of their early educational experiences in

forming a conception of themselves which was deficient or flawed. Repeated testing has

given them a gauge to conceive of their own progress. The findings regarding learning

disabilities were spontaneously produced by the interviewees, and as such they were the

most important finding from the pilot study because they were not defined by the

research agenda, but by the participants. Despite the spontaneity of the discussions

regarding the students' disabilities, the theme could have emerged as a result of the

situational intersection of the interviews. The interviews were conducted while the

students were in the classroom setting, and the classroom is a place that is reserved to

work on a specific problem. As such, the interviewees could have been constructing a

picture of their past which identifies their problems as central to their lives, whereas in

other situations the problem is minimized. Studies have shown that many adult literacy

students have learning disabilities (LD). The students in this classroom are not tested,

and they are all taught similarly.

The Narrative Interview

Interviews with all participants were treated and analyzed as narratives. Each narrative was viewed as a presentation of the self, in the context of the auspices of the interview. Linde (1993) explains the narrative's role in the creation of self:

> Narrative is among the most important social resources for creating and maintaining personal identity. Narrative is a significant resource for creating our internal, private sense of self and is all the more a major resource for conveying that self to and negotiating that self with others (p. 98).

Open-ended questions which leave room for personal interpretation can open up room for defining the self and weaving stories that reveal connections of which the participant is unaware. However, the participant has to be somewhat reflective in order to tap into this method, and the interviewer must be skilled in order to encourage him or her to find and recount the stories. Holstein and Gubrium (2000) explain that "Constructions of the self are conditioned by working senses of what we should be at particular times and places…Inventiveness and diversity are always tamed by the social arrangements within which selves are considered and produced" (p. 3). The primary investigative tool for coding interview material was through narrative linkages. This is the idea that "coherent, meaningful configurations emerge through patterned narrative linkages. We refer to these patterns as horizons of meaning…Horizons and linkages are mutually constitutive, reflexively relating patterns to their constituent parts and connections" (Holstein and Gubrium, 1995, p. 58). The linkages in the new readers' lives were apparent: they continuously turned to life as a struggle, with the idea that the literacy class was a step in the directions toward meeting their educational and career goals.

By using the techniques presented by Holstein and Gubrium (1995), the

situational location of the interview is treated as part of the data:

> Viewing the respondent as narrator, the active approach features a subject
> possessing a fund or stock of knowledge that is simultaneously substantive,
> reflexive, and emergent…that which relevantly comprises the respondent's
> stock of knowledge depends on how parties to the interview construe and
> manage their representative roles in relation to what is being asked about and the
> answers being conveyed (p. 30).

The interviewer and the subject both acknowledge their distinct roles in creating

the narrative, and the interviewer asks the subject to create knowledge during the process

of the interview. The subject, then, is treated as an evolving self who occurs in the

context of the interview (Gubrium and Holstein, 1997).

Literacy Students

Interviews with the literacy students focused on feelings surrounding participation

in the One Book program. They began with some general questions about their thoughts

about the book, and finally delved into more problematic and complex ideas, such as past

educational experiences and civic involvement. Because of the nature of the open, or

'active' interview, the questions were not always directly asked, but might have been

hinted at or skipped, according to what had been previously discussed during the

interview.

Librarians

Librarians were interviewed in order to gain an insider's voiced perception of the

program. The two main librarians who work with the program were interviewed

together. While more personal information might be gained during a one-on-one

interview, small group interviews can be very conducive for the production of

meaningful data. The two librarians interviewed for this research confirmed what each

other said, and also played off each other continually to remind each other of events and

spark additional insights. It was similar to interviewing a 'team'; they have worked

together closely on this project for years. The atmosphere of the interview was also

probably more relaxed than it might have been otherwise because they were able to

confirm their opinions about issues which we discussed. The librarians were asked

questions regarding program planning and advertising (or outreach), the purposes of the

program, and how they think new readers might be drawn into the library.

Teachers

Two teachers were interviewed. One was the teacher in the literacy class, who

served as a voice for literacy education and for reading in the context of the adult literacy

class. She also gave guarded insights into the social disconnectedness of the students,

and ways that she believes that literacy can alleviate this problem. The second teacher

was an English teacher in a writing class from a local high school. Her students read the

book and discussed it in class as a work of contemporary fiction, but the primary draw for

reading it was that the students were able to hear the author talk and to participate in

reading it as part of the community. While the book contained elements which might

have been inappropriate in some educational contexts, she said that because the students

were seniors in high school, there was no problem with using it in class. The questions

that were asked of the high school teacher centered on how she utilized the text in the

classroom. Both teachers discussed issues of social connections which the students made

because of the program.

Other readers

I asked other people who participated in the program similar questions about the book as the new readers, and also utilized them as a source for knowledge about other reading groups. For instance, they were asked how they felt about the book, their social involvement, and their education. Other questions centered on the purposes of their own reading group and other reading groups that they have been involved with. All of the readers had read the community reading book, and had either attended library programs or book talks with a reading group.

Use of the Interviews

Program involvement was explored through narrative linkages in the individual interviews and between the interviews in order to find out if the subjects use similar ideas to express their feelings toward program participation. Narrative linkages are similarities in description that connect stories; they are threads that run between stories that show connections in human experience. By using the narrative as a vehicle for exploration, the intentions of the program coordinators can be compared to those of the participants. The experiences of traditional and non-traditional library users who participated in the same program could thus be analyzed: what words did they choose to describe themselves? Did they describe themselves as insiders or outsiders? Did they describe their experiences with the text similarly, and if not, what were the differences?

Observations

Library events which were a part of the program took place throughout the three-county library service area, though all events which were studied in this research took place in the city in which the main library is located. The events were dispersed throughout the city center area, including such venues as the library, a coffee shop, a

college auditorium, and a civic building. A total of twelve observations were recorded at One Book events.

Observations were conducted at the library events and on location at the book groups.   The book groups in the study included an adult literacy class (four recorded observations), an educational forum at a church, and a reading club at one of the members' homes. The researcher acted as a participant observer at all events. All of the One Book events were open to the public. I was invited to attend the two comparison book groups. Other participants were made at least vaguely aware of my interest in the community reading program when the group was small enough that such an introduction was needed in order to alleviate the conspicuousness posed by my note-taking.

Analyses of the reading group discussions loosely utilized Rosenblatt's reader response theory and Wolfgang Iser's "Phenomenology of Reading." I utilized Rosenblatt by looking for various interpretations of the text which came up during the course of the discussion and how people reacted to alternative explanations. According to Rosenblatt (first published in 1938), each individual brings a biography of lived experiences to reading that affects meanings assigned to texts. Discussion of these meanings may reveal similarities and differences in the multiple interpretations, creating ground for sharing and discovery. Rosenblatt said that "The classroom situation and the relationship with the teacher should create a feeling of security. He should be made to feel that his own response to books, even though it may not resemble the standard critical comments, is worth expressing" (p. 64). She acknowledged the role of the educator in creating meaning for the student: "the instructor's function is…to help students realize that the most important thing is what literature means to them and does for them" (p. 64). The

teacher in this literacy classroom sought to bring the students' lives into an understanding of the text, in order to help the students find relevancy between the book and the students' lives. The discussions regarding the book were analyzed in both library-sponsored events and in the classroom.

Iser (1978), Librach (1982), and Costello (2006) wrote about the phenomenology of reading. The basis for their conversation is the connection that a reader makes with a text; this connection is a visceral union between the text and the reader. Costello points out that literary criticism prevents full union where neither the text nor the reader dominates; the literary critic remains above the text. This explanation is useful for comparing the students' experiences to that of other, more experienced readers in both the public (library) and the private (book club) events. While it is impossible to know exactly what each reader experienced during the act of reading, the public display of their interpretation is both an act and a manifestation of consciousness which should be taken at face value in order to form a picture of their relationship with the novel.

Heap (1991) explained that a conversation cannot be taken out of context; it is a reflexive action, taking into account the "interactive relation between two or more things as these things are experienced" (p. 110). For instance, in this study, the social order of the literacy classroom is very different from that of a private individual's home, and from a public event in the library. The conversations about literature, therefore, were different, influenced by not only the relationships and knowledge of the participants but also the context of the conversations. In the following sections, each context will be explained as a basis for understanding the resultant conversations regarding the work of literature.

The Literacy Classroom

The literacy classroom was located within an adult education setting. It was in an old high school building which also houses the 'alternative' high school in the city, for students of high school age who have had trouble staying in a traditional high school for various reasons. While the two programs share a building, they do not overlap.

The students are demographically heterogeneous—there are both men and women, and during the course of this research many ethnic groups were represented. The class usually has between 2 and 6 students. The students who most often came to class during the time in which this research was conducted were between the ages of 25 and 45, but all of the students who actively participated in the One Book program were in their mid-thirties to mid-forties. However, all of the students who agreed to be interviewed were in their mid-forties and Caucasian; one was female and the other three were males. Some students came more often than others; their work schedules and lack of reliable transportation sometimes conflicted with class time. The students spent part of the time working on individual assignments, often with either their teacher or a tutor, and part of the time working as a group. The group work was generally writing or spelling exercises. The students' reading abilities ranged from about a first grade level to above a sixth grade level. While they are supposed to transition into another class if they test at above a fifth grade reading level, some were not yet ready in math, spelling, or reading comprehension to move into another class.

The Public Library

The public library in the study was located at a busy intersection near the town center. It was essentially at a crossroads between one of the most and one of the least economically advantaged sections of town. Observations at the public library took place

in meeting rooms, though one event was an outdoor musical event located in the library's front courtyard. All events were open to the public and did not require participants to sign up in advance. Most of the events were led by community members.

Observational Parameters

Patton's (2002) 'Dimensions Showing Fieldwork Variations' provided the framework for a description of the observations:

1. Role of the observer: Is the observer a full participant or an onlooker in the setting?

There were two settings for the observations: the literacy classroom and the One Book events. I took the role of participant observer. I was a tutor in the literacy classroom and a member of the public at the One Book events. The tutors in the literacy classroom are not exactly teachers, because the teacher is in the classroom on a daily basis, and the teacher is responsible for testing. The teacher has a more profound relationship with the students. I did help the students read and write, and I also had conversations with them about everyday life. The students don't seem to regard tutors as the 'teacher'; tutors are not responsible for giving tests or assignments. I recorded very few notes during classroom observations; thoughts about the session were recorded afterwards. Taking notes during most classed would have hindered my ability to act as a tutor, and it would have presented as barrier for camaraderie with the students. However, I did take notes during the 'book talk' because the students knew that this was the focus of my study.

On the other hand, observations in the One Book settings were recorded as meticulously as possible. The meetings occurred in public settings, so this posed no problems. The notes were transcribed after the event. However, in addition to taking

notes, I also participated in the discussions. Sometimes people asked why I was taking

notes, and I shared my project with them, to the degree that seemsed appropriate. I only

told a few people that I was working with an adult literacy group because I did not want

to reveal the students' status should they recognize me with the students at a later event.

2. Insider versus outsider perspective: Is the emic (insider) perspective or etic (outsider)

perspective dominant?

    The observations were written with a balance of perspectives, with

acknowledgement that I was not an ABE student or instrumental in the One Book

program. Patton explained the insider/outsider challenge of the ethnographic researcher:

> A participant observer shares as intimately as possible in the life and activities
> of the setting under study in order to develop an insider's view of what is
> happening, the emic perspective…the challenge is to combine participation and
> observation so as to become capable of understanding the setting as an insider
> while describing it to and for outsiders. (p. 268).

I did find that it was difficult to take notes and participate at the same time; the note-

taking was sometimes a barrier to participation. However, it was also crucial in order to

remember the conversations that occurred. Phenomenological studies examine that space

between the observed and the observer, being the students, the book club participants, or

the librarians, and the researcher. This makes the act of describing participation in an

event possible without attempting to be what one is not; it "requires methodologically,

carefully, and thoroughly capturing and describing how people experience some

phenomenon" (Patton, p. 104).

3. Who conducts the inquiry--solo researchers, teams of professionals, or people in the

setting being studied?

I conducted and analyzed the observations, although I sought interpretation of the events from the literacy teacher, the students, and other interview participants. The interviews were treated as collaborative efforts, by utilizing the active interview approach, which recognizes that the interviewer and the participant work together in order to create meaning. This approach gave more balance to the perspective, as well, by letting the interview participant take the interview to places which he feels are important in his own life. The interviews, then, provided insight into the observations and a historical foundation of the events which I, alone, could not have found.

4. Disclosure of the observer's role to others: Full disclosure (overt) or covert (no disclosure)?

During the observations at public events, this research was presented to most people as a project about public participation, civic involvement, and One Book programs. There were a few people to whom I revealed the entire agenda, including the literacy teacher and the instrumentalists of the One Book program when I received their permission to observe the events and solicit for interviews. During interviews with the students, I told them that I was particularly interested in their responses because they are literacy students. I did not reveal the entirety of the research agenda to the students in the classroom, for several reasons: I wanted to maintain a sense of trust in the classroom, as I was not only a researcher, but also a tutor; and I did not want to make the students feel as if they must perform in a certain way. There was no deception involved, however.

5. Duration of observations and fieldwork: Short, single observation, or long-term, multiple observations?

Observations at One Book events took place over a time span of five weeks. Weekly (and sometimes more frequent) classroom observations took place over a period of six months. However, field notes were only recorded after four sessions, during the time that the students were reading or discussing the book. The classroom tutoring sessions occured weekly for a period of six months. This gave me time to learn about the students in such a way that the interviews would be meaningful, and to find out about the classroom atmosphere.

6. Focus of observations: Single element (narrow), or broad (holistic)?

In an attempt to capture as wide a picture as possible concerning the One Book program, the observations were as holistic as possible, recognizing that my perception is limited to those things which I noticed. Observations of events include as complete a description as possible of the setting and the talk which occurs before and during the event. Additional comments about the events were sought from other people who participated in the interviews.

Document Analysis

Documents were copied at the library in order to find out what type of information the library collected regarding the program. The spectrum of documents included such items as letters, memos, expenses, lists of contacts, patron recommendations, and newspaper clippings regarding either the program or related events or stories. These documents indicate difficulties and successes of the program, public and internal perceptions of the program, and future directions for the program. The collection, as a whole, illustrated what role these documents played to librarians as stakeholders in the program. However, the library also kept notes from patrons regarding their perceptions

of the program, which were useful in determining what community members want to read for a community reading project. The documents span a period of seven years. Each year's documents were contained in one folder, and each folder was approximately each about two to three inches thick. Not all documents were copied; there was a lot of repetition from year to year regarding committees and lists of contacts. This, in itself, was significant because it demonstrated that the program is becoming institutionalized.

The library collected information related to programming, including the number of participants at each program, statistics on borrowing and web usage related to the One Book program. Because the program was based on community input, emails and written notes were kept about such topics as book recommendations and complaints. The community input was indicative of the development of a common reading culture. The library also had retained documentation of all budgetary issues and meeting agendas and minutes. They kept track of letters and other communications with outside groups, including requests for advertising and collaboration, and other support mechanisms.

Newspapers and public bulletins which had reported about the One-Read program or related topics were also collected by the library. The library collected many newspaper articles which discuss the books, related topics, and community dialogue about the books and programs.

The documents were analyzed according to what the library collected and what the items say as a collection. In order to analyze the documents, I read through them and determined what the purpose of the document was: who wrote it and who it was intended to serve. From this, I was able to find five thematic divisions among the data. The categories were:

- Publications and communications of groups or people outside of the library

- Internal communications

- Library promotional products for One Book

- Elements of and suggestions for community-wide reading choices

- Communication and emails about outside groups or other people with whom the library is working.

Each document fell into at least one category, but some fell into more than one; categories also overlapped. For instance, internal communications also might have been about outside groups, or promotional materials might have been published by an outside group. These ambiguities demonstrate the complexity of the One Book program.

Summary

The final step in analyzing data was looking at what each type of data means in order to form a whole picture, or a gestalt. Each type of data is treated as a piece of a puzzle in order to define the meaning of this particular reading event for its various participants. Another way to view this is as Holstein and Gubrium (1995) termed 'horizons of meaning'. These are "coherent, meaningful configurations emerge through patterned narrative linkages" (p. 58). This might be more accurate than gestalt because there is not necessarily one truth, but several truths, for different stakeholders in any situation. While we can gather them together in order to form one truth, there are still different aspects of this truth which cannot be glossed over in an attempt to see a whole picture; there are fragments which do not necessarily fit the puzzle. The narrative, in the context of multiple methods, is composed of the 'voices' of participants as they are

presented; in this case, through interviews, actions, and documents. This is the gestalt

sought by the phenomenological methodology.

CHAPTER 4: DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

An overview of the findings

This research was based upon three types of data collection. Multiple perspectives were sought for each type of data. This multiplicity worked well with the phenomenological framework, as the various viewpoints and data collection techniques formed a coherent picture of the community reading program. The methods employed lent themselves to compelling conclusions, but not explicitly the internal validity sought through a strict interpretation of triangulation.

Triangulation is a theoretically beguiling concept, yet in practice it is more elusive when searching for emergent data. There was scant evidence which neatly triangulated between the three data sets collecting during interviews, observations, and document analysis. Some questions were touched on by all three methods (especially 'what makes a good book for a community reading program'), but other questions could only be answered by the interviews or a combination of two methods. There was less clear-cut division between documents, because the documents often fell into multiple categories, and categories often overlapped. This seemingly untidy categorization of answers is unavoidable; it is impossible to impose a strict structure upon human thoughts, recollection of events, and relations. The documents, being a representation of such relations, are no exception to this rule.

Despite the difficulty of tidy categorization, it was possible to find a subtle gestalt which forms from the divergent points. Spurling (1977) described the difficulty as

ambivalence: "Ambivalence, then is not ambiguity; in fact it is a refusal of ambiguity, a failure to recognize interplay, shading and transition between concepts for phenomena. Ambiguity is not a manifestation of rigidity but rather of flexibility and maturity" (p. 137). The contradictions and divergences that occur in the data are representative of the complexity of human experiences and relations that make up the social world.

There was little evidence from observations which supports the central research hypothesis--that participation in city-wide reading programs encourages community involvement and interaction among people who might not otherwise cross paths, and is beneficial to the socially excluded. Observations, instead, provided insight into the nature of social aspects of reading and interpretive communities, and evidence of who attends the different types of reading events which were in the study. Interactions prior to and after the event were observed for social patterns and networking. Some people attended events with a friend or group, while others attended alone. The people who came alone, though, usually knew others, and those who didn't seemed to hang around the edges of the group.

Interviews and documents did support the central hypothesis. Returning to the idea of 'horizons of meaning', one of the central ideas of the new readers' narratives was a change that occurred in their lives when they decided to attend classes. They all viewed their education as a step toward self-improvement and confidence. The act of reading, for these students, is different from other program attendees because reading is much more difficult for them. Reading itself, especially that transcendent reading described by Librach (1982), requires practice. The students probably would not have picked up this book and participated in the program if it were not for their class's involvement.

However, they all said that they enjoyed reading the book and taking part in the events. Most of the students recognized that they were not comfortable speaking up at the events, but they did enjoy hearing what other people had to say about the book. The students indicated that group reading has helped them enjoy the act of reading. All of the interview participants implied that the community reading program was an engaging cultural experience.

In the following sections I will explain findings from each of the types of data, interrelating the data along the way. A discussion of the emergent themes and the 'gestalt' which is sought through phenomenology, will occur in Chapter 5.

Interviews

The four interviews with the literacy students confirmed the findings from my pilot project, which indicated that the students enrolled in the literacy class had negative experiences in their past education, and that the literacy class was a step for them towards making amends with their past. They had little to say about their personal experiences of literature or why they enjoyed reading, but they did all say that they enjoyed reading as a group project. It enabled them to finish a book, which in itself was a large step. As an aside, some other book group participants expressed the same idea as one of the reasons for participating in a reading group: the books chosen for book groups generally push them to read something that is different from their usual reading choices.

All of the students said that they enjoyed taking part in the One Book project, and one of them specifically said that participating in it was an important step for her, personally, because she was able to read what the rest of the community was reading.

Due to health problems she wasn't able to attend any of the One Book events this year, but last year she did, and she even spoke up at one event.

Other people who participated in the community reading project used it as a tool for making new friends and as a means to engage in a cultural experience. It was a way to get out and meet new people with a built-in agenda that was fun and enlightening. This idea overlaps with the reasons why they might engage in other book groups—they are used to explore issues which are easier to discuss in the context of literature. The difference with the community reading event is that it is an explicitly public event with an open invitation. People who do not describe themselves as particularly social, or who might not want to be involved in a long-term book group, might be more inclined to participate in a public event centered on reading. A public reading event does not require the formation of long-lasting social ties, yet it enables the participants to engage in meaningful conversations. For instance, one young mother who went to a book discussion revealed that she was so happy to get out and 'do something like this' because she was normally too busy with her small children and her photography business to take time to meet other people away from other parents of small children, in which small children are the topic of conversation. This idea echoes what one informant for a book clubs said, that most book clubs' members are women who are of retirement age. She said that most women just do not have time for book clubs until they are of a certain age, with children and home and work to take care of. There is privilege, then, in joining a book club; it denotes that the person has a certain amount of leisure time. An attraction to the public book events, then, might be that they do not require formal ties or long-term commitment.

Purposes for Participation

There are many different reasons that people might cite as the purposes of a community reading program. The librarians listed some predictable reasons for creating the program, which were similar to the reasons cited in the literature regarding the reasons for such programs. I asked them about the original idea behind the program, and if their conception of the program had changed over the years. Sara (L2) responded:

L2: We wanted a program that would provide people a way of coming together as a community to discuss a good book. And when we first started it our idea was that people at work would talk about it, 'are you reading the One Book book', and that they would talk about the program as well as talk about the book. People in social situations, people at the grocery store, that type of thing.

The idea of running into people around the community in mundane situations—like the grocery store or the mall—and discussing the book--was reinforced by Ann (P2) in another interview:

P2: I was at something this afternoon, and they were talking about [the book], and one woman had attended our session and had contributed quite a bit. The other woman said 'oh, she had really liked the book and her book club had discussed it…I've had lots of people come up to me and talk to me about the book. I think that people come up to [Douglas] and talk about more significant things, but you know, it's—and especially as One Book has become more a part of the community, you know, people will say, 'have you read the book?'—I do not know that there are any significant discussions…but at least people are—I mean, they're talking about it.

One purpose that many readers cited was that One Book was a way to screen books—to find the best books to read. They said that if that many people thought it was a good book, then it must be, and so they would read it—it had a 'stamp of approval' (R4):

R4: …it's a good book review process, too—you always get a good book, so that's got to attract a lot of people, that's the good housekeeping seal of approval, so it may be isolated to that book, but it certainly encourages people to read that. And I do not know, every one of them that this book club has had is, I think, extremely good…

Babette (R2) said that she didn't want to feel left out—she didn't read last year's

selection, and everyone was talking about it except her. This year she wasn't going to do

that again. In the following excerpt, Walt (R4) cites one educational value of the

program—it sets a good example for children and others to appreciate reading as a

community. This was echoed by Douglas and Ann (the program leaders) to whom Walt

refers; they like to set an example of reading, and to be a part of a program that puts

reading first. Walt also mentioned the lure of electronic media as a problem in creating a

culture of reading among children, similar to that cited by the NEA study *Reading at*

Risk:

R4: As a former principal, I like to see [prominent citizens] and other people making a
big deal out of reading. It's…kids need to be encouraged, especially with Game-Boys
and everything else…that's just, that creates a role model for a whole lot of people, and it
gives school personnel a reason to bring people into it, and they can point to community
leaders and say, 'see what they're doing?' So, I appreciate what [Douglas] and [Ann] do
by leading that effort.

Ann (P2) and Douglas (P1) brought up the idea that One Book programs encourage

interaction because when people carry around the same book they have an immediate

point of departure for conversations. They echoed the sentiment of Walt (R4) regarding

the effect of seeing adults engaged in literacy activities on children's perception of the

importance of reading. They also touched on the idea of One Book mitigating social

isolation:

P1: I expect a lot of people who go to the One Book programs for one picked this book
because of it, they might very well not have read it at all. Some of them might not have
read any book except getting ready for One Book, and a lot of them never would have
discussed the book with anyone. A lot of people read books and go to the next book and
while it is helpful to them, maybe affects them, they probably do not talk to other people

about it much. But with One Book, it's, like everyone's a member of a book club. And so I think it has a pretty significant impact.

I: On, sort of bringing the community together?

P2: Well, on encouraging reading, too, one of the things that I like about it is seeing all of these people carrying the book around.

P1: Yeah,

P2: And I think that is a real model for our youngsters. And I think it's good for them to see that adults think reading is that important, it's important enough that they will read this book and talk about it…

The program leaders, who were very active citizens, and the librarians, cited the importance of people coming together to talk. However, the program leaders also mentioned that there are many other ways for people to become involved, which might be more appropriate for people who aren't necessarily interested in books and reading. They seemed to think that reading is extremely important, but certainly not more so than other community activities.

Why Read?

Fundamental to this study is a question: why read? There has to be a desire to pick up a book; there is a transaction that takes place between a reader and that which he is reading that fulfills some need. Interviews with readers began with some general questions about the One Book selection, which asked the participants to reflect upon their feelings regarding the book. Next they were asked about what they generally like to read. Iser's (1978) idea that the reader must be a participant in the act of reading is central to the idea that was produced by the interview participants:

> The reader's enjoyment begins when he himself becomes productive, i.e., when the text allows him to bring his own faculties into play. There are, of course, limits to the reader's willingness to participate…boredom and overstrain represent the two poles of tolerance, and in either case the reader is likely to opt out of the game (p. 108).

There were some similarities between the literacy students' answers and advanced readers' answers, and some differences, although most of the data which was gathered concerning the literacy students' interaction with the text was only available through observations. The interviews were less productive for any data regarding their perception of the book, and more productive for data concerning their lives. The research indicates that this might be because most of the students are not yet comfortable talking about literature or their experience with literature. Interviews with the advanced readers were very successful in regards to their purposes of reading. They enjoyed talking about books, their perceptions of the literature experience, and One Book. For the most part, talking about literature took the students out of their comfort zone, and the advanced readers into their comfort zone.

Some of the similarities between all of the readers in this research were that they enjoyed a surprise, or unpredictability. They like to learn something when they're reading. However, they do not like too many shifts (such as temporal or point-of-view) because the shifts cause them to do too much work. In this passage, Babette (R2) was comparing the difficulty she had listening to another book with the One Book selection. She said that she likes to listen to books on CD because she travels a lot.

R2: It was a hard book to listen to because it jumped about a bit, I had a really hard time getting to know those people.
I: Well, this book jumped around a bit too.
R2: Yeah, but I could stay with it…you didn't have any doubt where you were. You knew. You know, and I have trouble. I want to know where I am in time and place.

Most readers want the story to be plausible. Many said that they like to be able to connect the book to their lives—through the characters and the situations. The

community One Book contained shifts in point-of-view and in time; the literacy students

had a harder time with the shifts than the advanced readers did. All of the readers said

that they want something that is going to hold their attention and provide interest and

enjoyment. The following extracts illustrate some of the main ideas that readers

expressed regarding what they look for in a book:

R1: I like a lot of different kinds of books, so I want something that's going to hold my attention, preferably from the first page. If I have to spend too long to get into it, then I won't read it. But I like all kinds of books. I do not usually pick up the type of book that we do in the book club; that's one reason why I like doing it, because I tend to read more like James Patterson, or more the murder mystery, or this type of thing.

R2: Um, I was drawn into it right away…um, usually if I'm not drawn into a book right away than I can't finish it. So I was really happy that it got my attention immediately. It probably got my attention early on because of the nursing home setting, and I didn't realize that was part of the setting when I decided to read it, and that's because I spend a lot of time in nursing homes, so that really grabbed by attention.

T1: I think that a story…if it's a fictional book, then the story has to be plausible, even if it is unrealistic, even if it's something that is way out there, as long as it is plausible and it flows, is easy to read, I think easy to read is very important.

R3: I loved [the main character]. He just pulled my heartstrings. Plus my mother's in a nursing home right now. So, I think that my heart was in that nursing home with him, the struggle to maintain who you are in that environment.

R2: Um, first thing is that it draws me into the story pretty quickly, because as I said before if it does not I'll put it down pretty quickly. I have a stack of about 5 books beside my bed all the time that I started but I probably won't finish because they're really not that good--they might be, but they didn't draw me in. And for me, it has to be very visual, I want to be able to see the characters, I want to be able to see what's happening. I mean, for me it has to be. I'm just that kind of a reader.

R5: I'm really a big fan of books with a moral or ethical question that is asked. Science fiction tends to ask those, fairy tales, fantasy, and kind of those genres that kind of dissect us away from maybe what we accept as reality and focus on maybe an ethical or moral question. Character development is a must, and I really appreciate my favorite books, the hero is always—has their dark side, is not a beautiful hero, they've done bad things.

In the following passage, the literacy teacher described some of the things that she looks for in a book when she is selecting a book for her literacy students. She said that she likes to have a book that is easy to listen to, that is poetic. The desire for poetics, however, was not expressed by all of the participants, either for reading or hearing.

T1: I look for something that I think is high interest, that I think might be a little difficult for them, maybe pushes them a little bit in learning new vocabulary words, and I have tried to get my students to try to read independently and silently, but they do not seem to do that. They either want to listen to me read, or they want to read aloud. So I do pick books that I think do not have a really difficult vocabulary, things that I think they're going to understand, fairly easy reads.

This passage shows that not all listeners, however, want to hear poetic prose:

R2: Anyway, I listed to that one and I liked it okay, and then I listened to another one that I didn't like at all. It was too poetic, it wasn't good for hearing.

In this passage, the literacy teacher notes that she wants a different book to read in private versus in public for various reasons. She talked previously about the desire for a book which is poetic for reading aloud, possibly because it is more fun for her to read out loud, not necessarily for the listener. It can be very tiring to read a book out loud.

T1: Setting is very important, too, I like to read a book that is set in a place that I'd like to be in. I think being able to transplant myself into the book, maybe it has to be something I can connect with. Maybe that's so vague that it's a good answer or not, but one thing I've been reading about is what makes the difference between a good book and one that you can read out loud, or one that might be good for a community reading project, or a book group. And with a book group you want a different type of book from what you might want for just sitting around and reading on vacation, because it has to be something that has a lot of different points in it.

While Iser stressed the importance of literary games to engage the reader and pique his imagination and intellect, it is difficult to imagine that all readers would equally enjoy literary games. While 'a great' book might use literary games in order to capture the

imagination of the reader, those same literary games might provide stumbling blocks to the new reader. If the text is too difficult, or if it contains difficult concepts, he might get lost or otherwise lose interest. The toleration that a reader has for such elements as a complex plot and poetics probably is also influenced by where and how he is reading the book; see the above contrast between the two participants regarding the use of poetic language. The literacy teacher in this study read the book out loud to her students; the other listened to it in the car while driving. The text must be appropriate for the reader's mood and temperament, and abilities.

This is a limit to using 'great books' in the literacy classroom education; one prerequisite to understanding a text is that the text must be appropriate for the reader. When it is read out loud in class the students have a chance to discuss the meanings. This discussion of small details, however, can take away not only enjoyment, but also flow of the text. The text is meant to be taken as a whole; it flows in and out of time, looking ahead and backward; Iser (1978) said:

> every moment of reading is a dialectic of protention and retention, conveying a future horizon yet to be occupied, along with a past (and continually fading) horizon already filled; the wandering viewpoint carries its passage through both at the same time…successful communication must ultimately depend on the reader's creative activity. (p. 112)

When the reader is lacking this creative activity, enjoyment is lost. The relationship, or intersubjectivity, between the text and the reader is lost because he is unable to create the connections between the past and the future of the text. Likewise, there should be an intersubjectivity between the book and the reader's own conception of self. In the following extracts, we can see that the readers' description of this

intersubjectivity, when I asked the participants to describe what makes a good book.

There are several main categories that the users describe: it must be believable (in other

words, it needs to connect to reality in some way), and it has to hold the readers'

attention. In the following excerpt, the teacher described these qualities:

T1: So a lot of the description in that story—I think it was very good for them to read that story because they were able to visualize what was going on in the story; it was very descriptive. But for [last year's book], to compare the two, one was very current, in the news, in their own lives they probably know people who are immigrants, maybe illegal immigrants, and maybe they can relate to the main characters. Whereas, I'm not sure they could really relate or see themselves as the main character in this book.

In the following passage, one of the students described a connection that she made

between a book and her own life experiences. In this passage, she was describing

speaking up at one of the events from the previous year. She felt the confidence to speak

up because she had connected with the feelings of isolation which the book described,

and which the speaker was addressing. The connection which she made is significant

because the book was about immigrants' experiences of isolation, and she had transferred

this to her own isolation caused by her wheelchair. She had made a jump from thinking

directly about the book, or literal interpretation, to a figurative interpretation. This was

aided by attending community reading event, when she heard a speaker talking about

issues of marginality in relation to the text.

S1: That was really interesting because it wasn't only people in the class, it was people in the community. And one thing I really identified with him when he said, have you ever been in a room and you still feel like you're invisible—like nobody sees you, and you have something you want to say, want to express, and it's like nobody sees you, it's like you're not there, it's like, you want to say, "I've got something to say!" and they look over you as if you're not there? That stuck out.
T1: And as I recall, you did have something to say.
S1: I did!
…

S1: It's because they were different. It's like with me, when people first look at me, they do not look at me as a person, they look at me as a person in a chair. It's like, I'm different. I stand out. They look at the chair first and the person second. And I think that's how the migrants must have felt, because it's like if you come from a different country, if you've been taught different things, and you're not a part of…you're in a different place where people do things differently,
I: And they've got the language barrier, too.
S1: I think that's how the migrants in the book felt.

This book, then, was personally useful for her individually and as a book club selection: it enabled her to see herself in a new light and to connect with others.

What should reading groups read?

For personal reading, we can see that there was an element needed of intersubjective interplay between the reader and the text.   Book club selections, however, might call for additional qualities. The readers in this research said that there needs to be more 'substance' or 'meat' for discussion. Taylor (2007) called this quality 'discussability'; it is a quality of a book that is engaging to a particular group of readers. Reading groups are not all the same, and a group composed of new adult readers is definitely not the same as a reading group composed of retired school teachers, or one whose purpose is something other than discussing books. In the following extract, Paige (R1) discussed the difference between what she likes to read on her own versus what she thinks makes a good selection for her book club:

R1: Oh, I want something…where there are lots of different aspects of it to get into. Like I said, I really enjoy James Patterson, but on the whole, I do not think that is anything you could ever really discuss at a book club. You have to come up with good questions, and things to discuss about it. I guess I would say something with more substance, but I do not know that that is the right word.
I: Yeah, because you do not want to just go in there and say, 'that was nice'.
R1: Yeah, and in [this novel], you know, you got into the nursing home discussion, you got into the treatment of animals, you got into the mistreatment of people, you know, so, and plus, it was very educational about the background of the circus. So you had a lot of different things you could discuss with this book.

103

In this extract, one of the librarians, Dana, (L1) talked about 'discussability' as one of the

qualifications for One Book selections:

L1: Another element is it has to be an engaging book so that people do not say, 'oh this is
a wonderful book, but I have other things to do' and put the book down. Another thing is
that it must have discussable points. It could be a very entertaining book, and then people
would sit around and say, 'oh wasn't that wonderful.' It's great if some people do not
like it, that's another way to discuss it.

There were multiple aspects for book clubs which were described by the readers in this

research. One was mostly social, with the book providing an intellectually engaging

excuse for a girls' night. One was described as mostly spiritual. The social book clubs

are formed around a group of friends, while more educational or spiritual book clubs

might be formed around an idea. Babette (R2) has been a member of two book clubs in

the past. In the following extract she described one of these book clubs:

R2: [it was] more social. But it was also intended to be spiritually enriching…it was
related to church, but kind of loosely related to church. We – it was a group of people
who began to meet during the Lenten season. And we were studying baptism. Um, and
them when it was over – what we were studying was the baptismal covenant. And when
it was over – we did it all through Lent, and we didn't want to stop getting together, so
we started getting together in people's homes.

Because it was a spiritual group, they read books with religious themes.

Paige (R1) described her current book club as 'more social than educational, but

really both'; the women all met at work, and one of the good things about the book club

is that it gives them something to talk about at work. She said that they are always

talking about interesting aspects of the book and asking each other where they are in it.

She said that the book club gives her an extra push to get through some more literary

books than she might choose to read on her own. When I asked her how she would

describe her book club, she replied:

R1: [It's] very relaxed. (Laughter). It's the girls from work, and we enjoy visiting, we get off the subject more than we're on, we do not have a set—we do not do it once a month or anything. We—I think we're on our third book, we started in the spring or something like that, so it's very relaxed, and we really enjoy reading, so it's kind of fun to get together and stuff like that.

She said that they do not have any set agenda for choosing a book; they are all readers,

and one will hear about a book from somewhere and they'll decide to read it.

Abelard, the literacy teacher's son, discussed one of the book clubs that he helped

start. It was located at a book store, and he describes its members as 'a bunch of high

school dropouts' who came together over reading. The common reading experience

provided an intellectual space:

R5: Um, I started a book club several years ago, whenever I was running the book store, actually, it was a bunch of high school dropouts that just started kickin' it at the bookstore, and we just started reading—just common books—it really seemed like the really successful books that we would start reading and everyone would tear through, it would really be conversation, it seemed like it was ones that had a lot of questions.

He described some of the books that they read:

R5: Most of what we read were older books; we read Kurt Vonnegut, we read Orwell, we read Brave New World, but, yeah, we really went through all the Classics, we read Joyce, which was one of the better discussions
I: That's tough…
R5: We didn't read Ulysses, we read the Dubliners, but we broke the Dubliners up between three meetings, and those were some of the best discussions, which was a little odd. I was surprised that those were gonna be quite as inspiring as they were, but all the books, I don't know…I think that my love for science fiction really started to grow at that point because really any sort of book that had any sort of moral/ethical issue in it, leads to lots of discussion.

The purpose of Abelard's book club was to provide intellectually engaging discussions.

It was mostly composed of young men who had some time of their hands. Because they

were 'a bunch of high school dropouts', they probably found the conversations that they

were able to have as a book club more intellectually stimulating than school. As Abelard

indicated, they were using the book club as a space for moral and ethical growth and for social activity. It was a place where they were able to explore culture on their own terms, with like-minded friends.

New Readers' Construction of Self through Literacy

Dee, (S1) one of the new readers, brought up an interesting point: a good book should be unpredictable. She also said that she likes the book to remove her from her physical constraints; she compared reading to watching a ballet. She said that she likes to read Westerns because she likes to learn how people lived in the Old West. Dee was a paraplegic with some palsies and is confined to a wheelchair. She lived in a nursing home, so imagining doing ballet or living as a pioneer woman must very liberating. In the following excerpt she discussed the experience of reading as transcendental. She seemed to revel in being able to talk about her literature experiences, which is to be contrasted with the other students' apparent discomfort when discussing literature:

S1: …it takes me from where I am now to the story in the book, or I can be watching a movie, I'm so involved in the book or the movie that I do not think about where I'm at, or that I'm disabled or that I can't do this, or I can't do that…you know, it's like when I watch…different styles of dance, like ballet, it's like, in my mind, I'm doing that. You know? I'm not here, it's not here, it's not now, it's like, in my mind, I'm the one on the floor. So…
I: Yeah…
S1: And books have that way of taking you from where you are, right now, into a totally different time, a totally different period, and you're out of yourself for the time that you're reading the book. You know, you're a person in the book, and the more you read, the more you want to know about that time period, it's just awesome. It takes you somewhere else besides in the present.

Dee was the only new reader who described reading as liberating, which is interesting. Her almost constant physical discomfort makes reading in class extremely difficult; she tires easily when reading out loud, and usually prefers to simply listen. She tests at about

a second grade level. However, it is apparent from her description of the act of reading

that she is sometimes able to read at above a second grade level. Perhaps she actually

listened to the books; I didn't want to press her on this issue because she is identifying

herself as a reader.

One of the common themes among the students was that they all expressed joy

and gratitude for the help they have received through the literacy program. In the

following extract, Terrence (S4) equates reading with 'normalcy'. He did not enjoy

talking about the book. During class, he couldn't remember what had occurred during

the previous day's reading, but he did enjoy listening to the story. He said that he really

does enjoy being able to read. Literacy made him feel like a 'normal' person because he

was able to pick up a book or a magazine at the doctor's office:

S4: Since I started coming to the Adult Center, I have enjoyed reading more. Before I
started coming here, I could care less about reading. You know, reading just wasn't
something I would sit down and do like a normal person would do every day on their
spare time.
I: And now you do.
S4: Yes, now I will pick up a book and read it, read for a while, even if I go to a doctor's
office, they have magazines laying out, I will go through the front, every one of the
magazines, and I will sit there and read maybe 2 or 3 pages of the article until the doctor
calls me back. And now I really enjoy reading.
I: What about talking about books?
S4: I'm not very good in that part of…I do not know, I've always been kind of shy. And
you know, I do not like talking to a lot of people.

When I asked him about participating in the One Book program, he said that it did help

him to be less shy, but he immediately returned to his school and family experiences.

This shift often happened during interviews; if I brought up a book or asked a specific

question about the book, the students would return to their past lives, explaining why they

are in a literacy class or why they didn't succeed in school. In the following extract, I

asked Terrence if he thought that going to One Book events might help him feel more

comfortable in social situations. He responded by recalling being made fun of in school

for his low performance, which he contrasted with the help that he has received in the

literacy classroom:

I: Do you think that programs like this, having all of these different types of people—help
people feel more comfortable in talking to a wider range of people? That's one of the
goals of the program, is to bridge gaps between people.
S4: Yeah, you know, it helps me. I used to get…well, when I was going to school, I
would just sit back, wouldn't, I would listen but wouldn't participate, wouldn't give them
my opinion on anything. That's just how, during that time, I guess I could just care less
about the darn book. And just wanted to move on.
I: Yeah, wanted to be having fun, not in the classroom. Yeah, I remember those days.
S4: And, but now, and I guess it also kind of helps having a teacher that really
understands. When I was going to school I took seven different classes, and all seven of
them, I maybe had one teacher that would really sit down and work with me one-on-one,
you know, really help me, like on a math problem, and the rest of them said, just do the
best you can. And to me, I do not think that's right.
I: No, it's not.
S4: And they are there to help. Help the students achieve their goals. And there was one
time, I can even remember, when I was living in the foster home, I, there was a bunch of
kids at school would make fun of me because I was slow learning, would call me dummy,
stupid…

The reason that I asked the students about their perception of the program as a social

event is because low literacy is often cited as a cause of social isolation. Negative school

experiences were recalled by all of the students. They often connected humiliating peer

and educational experiences with shyness and a lack of positive social opportunities.

Telyn, the literacy teacher, does not ask the students about their lives beyond what is

necessary for program planning, but the classroom is a place where the students can talk

to each other and to Telyn. They will often casually talk amongst themselves and to

Telyn about their lives. It is inevitable that she would pick up on some of their day-to-

day experiences, and she admitted that the students are, for the most part, somewhat

socially isolated:

I: Do you think that—do your students ever talk to you about being active in other community or other social events?
T1: No, in fact, they're probably not. They're generally isolated from the community. I have one student who is politically active and he belongs to a political organization, is very active. Other than that, no, I think that they may go to work, I think that one student volunteers, he does not go to work, I have another few students who work, but generally it is work, and home. There generally are not planned activities outside of home. I have one student that had never been to a restaurant until we took her.

In the following excerpt Dee, the student who so reveled in the transcendental literature

experience, recalled the dim days of her schooling. She contrasted her experiences as an

adult in the literacy classroom (being accepted) with her demeaning childhood

experiences:

S1: And almost every classroom experience I've had I've been singled out as being different, not being accepted for who I was, not because of the disability, but because I was slower, I didn't pick up on things as fast as other students. And I felt like I was always being singled out for that, like there was something wrong with me. You know, if you do not want to be like she is, you need to do 'this, this, this, and this.' Otherwise you'll be where she is for the rest of your life. And that's one of the things I admire about Telyn still to this day, is she does not come across as that kind of person. She treats you as an equal and not every classroom environment is like that—you get pointed at and stared at if you're the least bit different.

It would be nice to think that taking the new readers to the library would help them to

overcome some of their social isolation and their reading difficulties, but they often have

problems getting to the library because of time or practical constraints. In the following

excerpt Tim (S3), explained that he does not go to the library often because he is so busy.

He, also, turns back to his past (perceived) failures in school, and why he is in school

again:

S3: I do not go to the library that much because I'm busy and working, working two jobs, and going to school here…

I: That would keep you busy.

S3: Yeah, maybe some day I will go to the library, if I have free time.

I: Do you have much time to read outside of class?

S3: Well, right now I'm still working on reading, and writing, so that's what I'm doing right now. I'm happy about that, I'm glad I go to school here because back in…back around the '80's, I was going to school out there (unintell.) and I ain't learned nothing out there, I ain't never learned to read or write, or nothing, so what I did, I said, well, I know I'm too old, but I decided I'm going to go to school, I'm going to go to night class.

This finding repeated the most prominent theme from the pilot study: all of the students connected their current situation to learning or mental problems. Caleb (S2) was the only student from my pilot study who completed the One Book reading; the other two had dropped out of the literacy program before they finished the book. During the pilot study, one student said that during her later school years she suspected that she had a learning disability, though her teachers didn't help her and she was never formally diagnosed. Caleb (S2) had an early experience with leukemia; he said that the doctors used experimental therapies, and they told his mother that he'd probably be 'slow' later. He started out in public school, and then went to a "Christian school" that focused on discipline and self-motivated learning. He later dropped out of school because of a series of problems which began when his girlfriend got in a fight which led to his getting 'tired of going to school,' which caused them to decide to leave school together. The other student in the pilot project said that she dropped out of school so that she could work after she became pregnant in the ninth grade. She didn't recall many memories of school, but she was later diagnosed as paranoid schizophrenic, which she is now controlling with medications. Most of the students wanted to get a better job by getting their General

Education Diploma, but they had to become more skilled readers before they could enter

the GED classroom.

Bringing the two concepts together: Adult Literacy and One Book

The appropriateness of One Book for new readers can be judged through the lenses of all

of the stakeholders: the readers, the librarians, and the students. However, it is

ultimately the students who will make the decision to join in similar programs again, so

listening to their views is crucial in order to either continue with this program or rethink

its application. The following excerpt is Sara's (L2) response when I asked the librarians

whether One Book is an appropriate or useful program for adult new readers. She said

that she thinks that conceptually it is a good idea because one of the program goals is to

select books that are not too difficult.

L2: I hadn't really thought about it that much, to be honest. But when you bring it up, I think that our goals certainly would be something that would fit. To have a book that is accessible, because if you are a new reader, a thousand page book certainly is not going to be accessible. So when you do have a book that is accessible, I think that certainly would fit in with new readers. And then to me, the programs are what really makes it a special program, rather than just reading the book and then discussing it among yourselves. I mean, I think that's a start, but then when you start coming to the programs, and you learn so much about all of the different subjects of that book, then I think that is something that would be really enhancing to a new reader.

The mature readers also pointed out that they, also, often like to read books that aren't

necessarily too difficult. While they want to learn something, they do not want to strain

themselves; they often use reading to relax. The books chosen for One Book aren't easy,

but they also aren't extremely dense.

Sara (L2) also pointed out that the most important aspect of One Book is the

programming; it's what makes it stand out from other reading programs. As Dee (S1)

said, above, that is what makes it especially intriguing or the new reader: they are able to

see how other people interpret the book. The other new readers said that they enjoyed

learning about the subject matter, whether or not they connected it with the book. If the

new readers choose to participate then others have the opportunity to see their views, as

well. In the following two passages Dee described the importance of the One Book event

and literacy in her life. At the same time, she confirmed Iser's description of the writer's

need to leave room for interpretation and curiosity in order to engage the reader:

S1: And I can't imagine how much I would be missing if I had not become a part of the
One Book program. Because if I were to sit and try to read a book before I started in
Telyn's class I would just get frustrated because there was so much I couldn't read. But I
wanted to read, I wanted to understand the book, I wanted to see what happened at the
end of the book. But trying to do that on my own was just—I would get so frustrated and
so angry that I would put the book down and I wouldn't want to pick it up again. But
since I started the One Book program, with Telyn, we get to the end of a book and I can't
wait to get to the next book. You know, the more I read, and the more I learn, the more I
want to know, the more I want to learn.
I: Is it easier for you to read silently or to read out loud?
S1: It's easier for me to read silently, but I enjoy reading as a group rather than
individually. Often, I seem to get more out of it, I enjoy it more if we do it as a group. I
feel like I miss out on a lot if it's alone.
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S1: That was another one that fascinated me. Because I didn't know how it was going to
end. It's like, every book in the One Book program is unpredictable. And that makes
you want to read, to find out, how does that turn out? And you know, the more you read,
you know, I like reading in a group, and I hate putting the book down, I really want to go
on to the next sentence, to the next paragraph, but I know that I get more out of it as a
group, in a group setting than I do trying to read it on my own.
J: And why do you think that is? Is it because you talk about it with other people?
D: Everybody has a different take on it. They see things in it that I wouldn't have seen
by myself on my own, and it's nice to be a part of something where everyone has their
own opinion about it, everybody expresses their own opinion about it, and they see it in a
different way than I would have seen it if I'd have picked it up and you know, gotten it at
the library and just read it on my own. You know that's what I like about the open
forums where people from Telyn's class and people from the community—you know,
everybody has something to say about the book that you wouldn't have thought of if you
hadn't of participated in the group.

Iser said that "our selections' (that make up our gestalt or our entire conception of the

meaning of reading) tend first to be guided by those parts of the experience that still seem

familiar" (p. 126). Familiarity is made up of both what we've learned in the story and

what we know from life experiences. In the following excerpt, I asked the literacy

teacher to describe what she would change in the reading program if she could do

anything at all. She brought this back to the idea that it is often difficult for the students

to connect the ideas in a book with their own experiences. People can either make

subjective connections with actual lived experiences or with reading experiences, but if

they have neither it is difficult for them to connect the reading to anything; it's foreign.

When Telyn (T1) discussed the lack of experiences in her students' lives, she said that

this will be a stumbling block in the students' understanding of literature:

T1: I think that one thing I find in common with my students, is a lot of them do not have
a lot of world experience. Like I said, I think a lot of them are isolated, usually, and I
can't say that for sure, but of the students that do talk to me, that is the impression I
usually get. Um, I would say, taking them places to experience things, because when
you're reading a book that is an experience in itself. Your vocabulary is limited, you're
going to struggle with vocabulary. So when you're reading a book and you have all of
these words that you do not know, you're not familiar with, chances are there's not a lot
of exposure.
I: You do not have a lot of experience.
T1: Right, you do not have a lot of exposure to different things in your life, and I think
the more exposure you have to different things, you know, the wider your horizons are,
the more you'll understand. And if you're already having a difficult time reading, then
that would be one less obstacle to learning the skills to understand what it is you're
reading. I think that would be a big thing, just going places and experiencing things. Not
just…there's a lot of things I can do in the classroom, but that's probably a big thing I
could do outside of the classroom. And I do some of that, but…I do not think that any of
my students have been to an art museum, let's see…a zoo, probably haven't even been to
a zoo, there are just a billion places that they could go…

Telyn described an ideal reading situation in which the students' understanding of the

text is supplemented by actual life experiences in order to give the students a real-life

113

connection with the text. Therefore, the students could have a subjective connection with the text. The book group would then provide an opportunity to discuss the subjective findings with peers.

Book groups provide an opportunity for social connections. Whether these connections are possible through the One Book program for the adult new readers was not determined through observations. One of my interviews was with a high school teacher who used the One Book selection in her writing class. The high school teacher, Lacy (T2), did say that One Book participation probably helped the students feel more accepted in the general community. High school students generally want to fit in, and the One Book event was a way for them to fit in with the greater community. The events, especially the author-talk, supported her classroom curriculum and goals and it also made the book more relevant to the students. She said that using a book which the community was reading was a great experience for her and for her students. Many of the students' parents also read the book, which gave the students and parents an opportunity to discuss the issues in the book. She explained the social connections which were encouraged by participation as follows:

T2: It was one of the most engaging experiences teaching a book that I've ever had. And part of it was the book…I mean, you had the fact that the author was coming and everything, and being part of the community read, but also it was more engaging to teach than a lot of the books that I've taught.
I: So, did your students, do your students generally participate in a lot of outside events that might be similar to One Book? Have you ever had them talk to you about being involved in civic affairs?
T2: None of them…of course, I teach a World Studies class, and the only other time I've ever heard the students talk about taking advantage of community-offered things was, sometimes we'll have speakers come and talk about what's happening in the Middle East, and that fit nicely with what we were studying; we offered it as extra credit, and we had a lot of kids take advantage of it and come back, like, wow. But unfortunately, one reason I chose this, as an English teacher, there's almost nothing to get them excited about the

relevance about it except the community One Book. And so to make it more real, a more real part of their life, was to choose this book.

Not only did the high school students have the opportunity to connect with the community, but the programming also was beneficial to the students because they want to be writers. They were able to see that an established writer sometimes also has writer's block, and how she creates a space in her life for writing (which was a point which Telyn also discussed in regards to the literacy students). Lacy said that the author talk was extremely valuable for the students because they need reassurance that they can also write:

T2: Yes, we went to the author speaker and it was extra credit, and probably about a fourth of my kids went. Um…and they found that it supported what we did in class, the things we focused on, luckily, and the kids just found it fascinating. A lot of them want to be writers, and so one reason why I chose the book is because she was coming, and I think it helps kids to see, you know, that this is a normal person who came from a normal town, not that different from me, and she became a writer.

Can Community Reading Projects Alleviate Social Isolation?

Librarians like to think that library use can decrease social isolation; the library is a common space where people from all walks of life can come together—it's the Habermasian Public Sphere, or a sort of Third Place described by Ray Oldenburg. Oldenburg points out that third places provide space for *talk* – "they have been parent to other forms of community affiliation and association that eventually coexist with them" (p. 72). He says that free assembly is the parent of formal associations, and that people who learn to socialize create habits of association. Socializing widens tunnel vision – it enables people to see the world through the eyes of other people. In turn, it creates better citizens. Many people do not use the library, though, for a number of reasons; they might have all of the books and social outlets that they need, or they might not have time. In

115

the following excerpt, I asked Babette (R2) whether she might use the library more after

participating in the One Book project. She truly hadn't gone to the library for years. She

said that she has simply been too busy and she has an abundance of reading material in

her house already:

M: Well, I haven't gone for years, because I just haven't. I haven't been going for books because I do not need books. We have enough books, if I want to find a book I just have to go in the basement.

However, she happened to go to the library for an event and realized how many books on

CD they have. At that point, she realized that the library had something to offer her. She

said that since then she has been going to the library regularly to check out books on CD.

Dana (L1) said that she has anecdotal evidence that One Book participation increases

library use:

D1: I mean, we've had a lot of people new to the community, and will say to us, oh, we're new to Columbia, and we saw this and thought it would be a good way to get involved with the community and the library. We do know that we have a lot of people who have met each other through One-Read and continue to see each other, whether they see each other again—we've had both things happen, where we see people making an arrangement to have coffee together, or they meet every year at One-Read programs and connect again.

One important aspect of this research is whether participation in a community reading

project can relieve social isolation. The library, as described above, was discovered, or

rediscovered, by people because it met a need: in one case, a reading/material need; and

in the other case, a social need. As Telyn (T1) mentioned, she would describe most of

her students as very isolated. One of the ideas mentioned above is that simply carrying

the book is a starting point for conversations. People who are reading the same book

116

have an obvious connection. If many strangers are carrying the same book around, there

is the potential for multiple spontaneous social interactions. Despite this potential, there

were some problems with its application in regards to the literacy students and other

people who participated in One Book events. The first problem was illustrated by

Douglas (P1), in that they must feel welcome to discuss it. While Douglas said that

everyone generally contributes, there were some people who didn't, and the literacy

students probably wouldn't have spoken up if they had gone:

P1: Well, giving people who are socially isolated, if they're willing to do it, the
opportunity to break that isolation for at least a little while…they can go to this, they
know that if they've read the book then they've done what everybody else has done, even
more than what some of the people who are there have done, and I hope that they all feel
welcome to discuss. I get the feeling in the discussions we've led that people, by the time
they're over, almost everybody has said something.

There were several people that showed up to the One Book discussions who did not

participate, though; they stayed on the edges. One was a young man described by Sara:

L2: There was one fellow—this sort of mysterious guy I would keep seeing and he
would never sign up…but he would show up at these different places.

        The other problem was brought up by Telyn (the literacy teacher), by a couple of

the students, and through observations. The students left the book in the classroom,

although they were free to take it with them. The situation described above regarding

spontaneous interactions can only occur when the book or participation in the program is

obvious. Carrying the book around isn't the only way to say, "I'm participating"; Gail

(T3), who is a teacher and a librarian, said that she usually wears a button advertising the

program during the program's month. Telyn bought each student a copy of the book, and

she encouraged them to take them home to practice reading. However, the students

preferred reading the book in class, although they had reportedly carried other books around with them which they were reading out loud in class. None of the students had a good explanation for why they didn't carry it around, but classroom observations indicated that it might have been because the book was quite difficult for them to read on their own.

Observations

Observations were conducted within four distinct spheres: the literacy classroom, One Book events, one book club, and one adult forum in a church. All of the observations took place between August and October of 2007. The book club and the adult forum were both discussing the One Book selection; these were used in comparison with the literacy classroom as a book discussion event, and also as 'controls groups'. The book group was representative of many other book groups which attend the One Book events, composed of a group of women. None of the women from this group, however, attended public events. Both of the groups were composed of experienced readers. I took notes during both of the events in order to examine similarities and differences between the conversations conducted in those groups with the conversations in the literacy classroom.

The One Book public events took place over five weeks, during September and early October of 2007. They were located in several different meeting rooms of the library, at a coffee shop, a civic building, and in a large auditorium. The location of the event was very influential to its 'feel'; most of the library events took place in meeting halls without tables. The book club, classroom, and forum all had tables. Food and

drinks and comfortable seating seemed to have a mellowing effect on the conversations.

One surprising similarity between many of the conversations was the extent to which they utilized the book-group discussion questions at the back of the book. Many books are now published with reading group guides, owing to the popularity of book groups. The conversations at the book club, the church forum, and the literacy classroom all relied on the questions to some extent. Many of the book talks located at the library also made use of the questions.

Demographics

I took notes on demographics at most of the events, in order to find out who attends the One Book events. I was able to take notes on sexes of participants, but ages were determined by pure speculation. Most of the events were dominated by middle-to late-middle aged Caucasian women, although all of the events had at least one person who did not fit that description—either a man or a young person. Some men who attended were there with a female companion. Events which took place during the day attracted fewer men. Approximately twenty-five percent of all the attendees for all of the events were men, although one event had no men and one event had forty-three percent men. The event which attracted forty-three percent was a presentation of archives related to the book from the state historical society. It was an evening event and involved almost no audience participation. The event with no men (except the speaker) was about the treatment of animals by a local veterinarian.

Ethnographic field notes indicated that there is less participation in most of the One Book events than the librarians might hope for. This may be a result of the book that was chosen, or it might simply reflect who is able or inclined to attend such events. As

one interview participant and the librarians said, participation in reading clubs largely reflects the population of readers; that is, people who have the time to do so. It is largely a leisure pursuit.

The literacy students attended two events. The first was a forum which took place at the library, and the second was the author's talk at an auditorium. The forum was composed of a panel of five women who were connected with the book's topics in various ways: two worked with animals, one had worked in the circus, and two were experts on the elderly. They each presented their work and their interpretations of some of the events of the book. The interesting aspect of this for the students was that each panelist picked up on a different aspect of the book. Interviews with the students indicated that they enjoyed the event. One of the students was fairly animated during the event. He smiled a lot and seemed to genuinely enjoy listening to the speakers. He got to the event before the other students, and I sat with him. He talked to me several times during the event. The other students all seemed to be very reserved. They all sat together at the back of the room.

The author talk was the final event of the season, and it was very well attended despite a torrential downpour. Many people went to the event in groups. There were groups of high school and college students sitting in the back of the audience. The author was highly entertaining and personable; the audience was very attentive and laughed at numerous points throughout her talk. She described her writing process to the audience, which the literacy class discussed afterwards. Telyn emphasized to the students that writing is not easy for anyone, and the students seemed amused that even famous writers struggle to put words on paper at times, just as they do during their writing exercises.

One Book events are social occasions. As such, they come with a set of norms which those attending are expected to understand. However, there are many different types of events that are offered—some were small and intimate, while others were large. It should be expected, based on the excerpts above, that the students might doubt their knowledge of the rules for the more intimate social occasions, and they would probably be justified in that doubt. People who attend the more intimate events are expected to participate; interviews with the facilitators Douglas (P1) and Ann (P2) and librarians indicated that they thought that most people did contribute to the conversations, and they expected them to contribute. During the more intimate book talks the facilitator made sure that everyone had a chance to talk. However, the events which the students attended were entirely appropriate for the students to attend without expressing their opinions because they were large. While many audience members asked questions and talked about the book, there was no expectation that everyone would contribute to the conversation. There simply would not have been enough time. Alternatively, there were events that required no audience participation, such as radio programs. Music events also provide a space for people to gather without having to know how to talk about literature. Despite the lack of direct participation, such events can encourage conversation and deepen an individual's appreciation for the book. Providing 'remote' events such as radio programs, then, can be a way for the library to reach people who cannot or do not want to attend more traditional library programming, while promoting the book and participation in the One Book program. Unfortunately, none of the students took part in any programs outside of those which the class attended; they said that they didn't listen to

radio programs. Perhaps listening to the radio program might have been a good classroom activity, but this option was not explored.

Knowing the expected norms for participation at any book talk is one social norm; another is following social rules. Kai Erikson emphasized the importance of knowledge of norms: "the only material found in a society for marking boundaries is the behavior of its members – or rather, the networks of interaction which link these members together in regular social relations" (p. 10). One common social rule of modern society is knowing how and when to use cell phones. The reason this specific rule is discussed here is because it is an example of knowing social rules. At the panel discussion one of the panelists' cell phones rang loudly, and much to everyone's surprise, she answered it and had a short conversation. Perhaps even more surprisingly, it happened again. There were looks of shock and surprise that went around the room, along with some loud 'tut- tuts'. This lapse of judgment seemed to influence people's opinion of the speaker—several people shook their heads, and one person who was sitting next to me exclaimed "I can't believe she answered that!" I, personally, tried to excuse it because of her job, but in reality she could have easily taken care of this problem in a more professional manner. I later thought about this when I was reading my field notes, which read 'all of the panelists would have been described as professional, with the exception of 'X'.' This breach of etiquette showed a lack of knowledge (or regard for) norms, and as such, indicated that she was an outsider.

Book groups

Book group observation notes also were compared. The three book groups were quite different in terms of setting, attendees, and conversations. The setting for the

literacy classroom has been previously described, but in comparison with the other groups, it could also be called 'cramped.' The classroom has two tables with chairs, a futon, and three computers. The students usually sit around the tables, but during reading or book discussion they usually pull their chairs around in a circle. The attendees for this book group were the students who had read the book. There were no other students in the room on this particular evening.

The conversation was led by the teacher (Telyn). Three of the students had finished the book, but one hadn't; this was one of the difficulties of discussing the book in class—not all of the students were at the same place in the book because their schedules were not the same. Unfortunately, there is little to say about the conversation. The teacher led the conversation by pulling a few questions from the back of the book (book group discussion questions). There was some indication that the students thought that they should have a correct answer. For instance, Telyn tried to jog the students' memories regarding a crucial point in the story. Tim (S3) said the correct answer and said 'very good,' laughed, and congratulated himself much in the way that a classroom teacher might congratulate a child. Additionally, the students had little to talk about in terms of the book's themes.

The teacher of literature in the adult literacy classroom has obstacles and opportunities. It may take years to undo damage done by schooling which was dominated by testing, but because the students are new readers, they may be amenable to learning certain skills for the first time. When the teacher encourages the students to speak up and respond to the text, she is following the form of literature appreciation discussed by Rosenblatt (1995, first published 1938). She is setting the scene for

spontaneity, and giving the students the opportunity to speak up and say what spoke to

them in the text. Rosenblatt explained: "a teacher of literature may have a powerful and

beneficial influence…Once the unobstructed impact between reader and text has been

made possible, extraordinary opportunities for read educational process are open to the

teacher." She continued:

> The study of literature should give the student the form of emotional release that
> all art offers and, at the same time, without strain or pressure, should help him
> gain ever more complex satisfactions from literature. A spontaneous response
> should be the first step toward increasingly mature primary reactions" (p. 71).

Shannon (1989) explained the relationship between testing-based reading

programs and student and teacher satisfaction. He said that "the rationalization of

reading instruction has a destructive impact on teachers, students, and literacy as it

reduced each to the status of objects to be manipulated in efforts to find the right formula

for higher test scores and greater confidence among the taxpaying public" (p. 114). By

giving the students in the literacy classroom the chance to experience literature as art and

to engage with the text, the teacher was showing them an alternate definition of reading:

reading not for the sake of practicing reading, but for the sake of enjoyment. In this

classroom the teacher does use some standardized reading materials, but incorporating

literature into the classroom is a way to introduce reading for pleasure.

During the book talk in the classroom, the students displayed only a superficial

connection with the text. Rather than connecting specific events to the book's themes,

one student (Tim, S3) who spoke up talked about two very specific events in the novel

which were tangentially related to the book's themes. One was a recollection that the

protagonist in the story was forced to take medicine (which he repeated to me during our

interview). Perhaps this was one of the elements of the book to which he connected—it

was one of the two events which he recalled. Significantly, that particular setting was

part of one of the themes of the book which other readers discussed: it was an example of

the indignities of old age and inhumane treatment of the elderly. Tim did not discuss that

theme explicitly, but his recollections of the book showed some sympathy with the

protagonist. This was especially apparent when he connected the protagonist's situation

with his elderly grandmother's in the nursing home. The second event which he recalled

didn't seem to be entirely clear either in his mind or his explanation. His expression of

the connections with the text was fairly superficial, however, as were the expressions by

the rest of the literacy class, especially compared to the other book discussion groups.

This might be an indication that the book was too difficult for him and the others in the

class. Another way to look at their superficial connections with the text might have been

that they did not yet understand that they were free to discuss and interpret the text as

they wished.

The second book discussion group, the educational forum, was located in a church

meeting room. One of the librarians (Dana, L1) was a church member, and she was the

host and leader of the forum. All of the participants sat around a table. One attendee told

me that this is a fairly informal group; although some people try to go each week, it is by

no means a static group. All congregation members were invited to attend, and they go to

the forums that interest them. The participants were heterogeneous—there were some

older people and some young people; one young mother brought her baby. Most of the

attendees had read the book.   The conversation centered around moral and ethical issues,

especially in regards to humane treatment of the elderly. One of the topics of

conversation was the purpose of the One Book program, which gave the librarian leading the discussion a chance to explain it to people who were not familiar with it.

The third book group discussion was located at one of the book club members' houses. The women who attended were all educated, around mid-life, and fairly well-off. They did not attend any library events as a group, and the participant whom I interviewed was not aware that any others had attended public events. Their conversation was also guided by the questions in the back of the book. They did discuss each of the questions, although they dismissed a couple of them as very simplistic. They had a good grasp of literary terms, as three of them had been teachers. Their conversation was dominated more by their own lives than the book; the book seemed to provide a window into their own lives, concerns, and experiences.

The third book discussion group's conversation centered on their own lives, which was different from the literacy students and the church forum. It showed that the readers were using the book as a starting point for conversations with friends. The book gave them a common ground for discussion. While their conversation drifted to their own lives, it was guided by the themes of the book. However, the conversation did center on a similar theme to that of the second book group, the adult forum, which was the humane treatment of the elderly. The women discussed their aging or recently deceased parents, and speculated about their own future. The book's themes gave them grounds to discuss the indignities of aging which they hope to avoid.

Both the book group and the church adult forum picked up on and discussed the main themes of the book, which were very similar to those discussed at many of the library events. However, the tone of the meetings was entirely different. The group of

126

friends in the private book club ate lunch, sat outside, and talked about their lives. The church forum focused on the book itself. The formality of the church forum was similar to that of the literacy classroom, and contrasted with the private book club.

This brings up the purposes of the book choices for One Book projects. Many libraries do deliberately choose books which meet a set of goals, and one of them is to 'give people something to talk about'. The book selection did meet the goal of providing ground for discussion, because it encouraged discussion of moral and ethical treatment of both animals and the elderly. It gave people conversations to have regarding their family and nursing homes. In this sense, it brought people together. The new readers didn't necessarily have this same experience, because they did not seem to pick up on the themes as much as the other readers. This illustrates the fact that reading is a practice which the new readers are learning. They needed their teacher to talk to them about the meanings of the book, but they did benefit from hearing multiple viewpoints at the One Book events.

Documents

While documents are not generally collected for an outsider, they can help an outsider understand what a program means to an organization. They can expose internal structures, systems, and conflicts of an organization. There are many ways to view a collection of documents. An archivist would preserve the original meaning of the collection by maintaining its original order. This is the concept of 'provenance', that each piece of information is dependent on its context. There is an idea that even seemingly disorganized collections have an internal structure which reflects the way that the documents were used by the collector. When I first began looking through the

documents, I attempted to utilize the concept of provenance, but it proved to be an exercise in futility as I began sorting through the documents. As I read them, I decided that it was more meaningful to organize them by conceptual meanings. The documents seemed to fall naturally into categories based on their purpose. Therefore, within the categories that represent the concepts or purpose of the documents, the documents are still divided by year. The only organization of the collection as it was presented to me which was useful was chronology. There was no other apparent organization.

General Description of the Collection

All of the documents for this study were collected at the library. I had originally planned to collect information about the literacy students' attendance and writing, but several problems emerged as I sought to collect these documents. A brief description of these problems is important because this research is centered on the adult new readers, and no documents were collected from the literacy classroom. The first and most important reason for not collecting students' files is because collecting personal information about the students might have negatively affected the students' levels of trust regarding the literacy program. The available data probably would not have yielded much valuable information regarding the students' performance, either, because this research does not focus on literacy progression over a long period of time. I was familiar with the students' reading abilities and some test scores, but I decided not to reference these scores for this research. Observations provided sufficient information about the students.

Library-collected documents regarding One Book were kept in Dana (L1's) office. She said that she tries to collect everything about the One Book project that she

and Sara (L2) have used to conduct the programming and everything that she receives from other people regarding the programs and events. The documents were organized chronologically, but had no other internal organization. She allowed me to copy everything that I wanted to, which amounted to about 400 pages of documentation. I tried not to make any duplicate copies—for instance, items that were the same from year to year or multiple copies of the same item. Duplicate items included items such as lists of contacts and program guides. Therefore, there were more items from the first few years than subsequent years. There were a total of seven folders, representing the seven years of the program's existence. I looked in the local newspaper in order to compare items that the library had collected to those available from other sources, but there was no significant difference between the two.

It seemed that there was no formal categorization of the files. This is not a criticism of the librarian's categorization, but rather a statement about apparent needs of the librarian in regards to the documents. This apparent lack of internal structure did, however, provide grounds to impose categories on the available data. After looking through the documents for thematic similarities, categorization was imposed by a careful consideration of the purpose of the document to the librarians, or the intersubjective value of the documents. Five categories emerged from the available documents:

1. Publications and communications of groups or people from outside of the library. This category included local and regional newspaper articles, newsletters and email announcements about the programming, and national magazine articles which covered a topic of interest related to the library's programming or author. There were also articles that were tangentially related

to the programming or subject matter, and newspaper coverage of other community reading programs.

2. Internal communications. This included items such as statistics about program attendance and website hits, communications with or about the authors, task force meeting minutes, agendas, and timelines, emails regarding programs, and staff fact sheets which were written so that library staff knows what to tell the public about the programs.

3. Library promotional products. This includes their yearly brochure of program events, discussion guides and publicly disseminated vote counts which determined which book was chosen.

4. Elements of and suggestions for community-wide reading choices. Every year the library asks the public to make suggestions for One Book. The suggestions are collected in the library on paper and online via a form. One question on the form is, "Why would this be a good choice for a community-wide read?" Entries indicate what the readers want to read with their community and why. The library also collects complaints about book selections, which, though scant, are telling regarding the political implications of the One Book program.

5. Communication and emails about outside groups or other people with whom the library is working. This category includes items such as emails, letters, radio scripts, lists of contacts, and service agreements between the library or librarians and other groups.

There was extensive overlap between some categories, and distinctions were not always clear. Some items from category 2 (internal communications) shared common elements

with categories 4 (what makes a good book) and 5 (communications with outside groups). For instance, some communications with the author or the author's publisher were actually with an outside group. Category 3 (library promotional publications) overlapped with category 4 (what makes a good book) because the discussion guides often focus on the 'discussability' of a book. In order to put the items into a category, I tried to discern the primary purpose of the item in regards to the library's understanding of and needs for the program.

Documentary Findings

One of the goals of looking at documents was to find the reasons for the program's existence: how it came to be, and if it had evolved over the years. Program goals were easily extracted from the available documents, which confirmed what the librarians said in the interview. The goals listed in one early document were:

- Get the entire community involved in reading

- Get people in the community talking to each other

- Diverse involvement

- Feeling of inclusiveness – region wide

- Provide a variety of ways for community to participate

- Youth involvement – high schools and colleges

- Generate excitement

- Provide resources for the community book clubs

- Name recognition for the library

There were few changes in goals over the years, with the exception of the now defunct youth involvement.

Because the goal of this research was to tie in adult education with the community reading program, there were two documents which piqued my interest regarding ties with the school system. Evidently, the library had approached the school system to find out if they would like to participate in the program. This could have, potentially, greatly expanded the programming opportunities for the library and speakers, and at the same time, the program could have included many more people, such as children and parents. This potential collaboration could have also represented the diversity of the city for truly community-wide conversations. The school system decided not to be a part of the program, but there were no documents indicating a reason for their decision; it was simply a letter stating that they had decided not to participate. One Book is now specifically called an adult reading program, though individual teachers do sometimes have their classes read the book.

One interview participant, who is a former school principal and politician, said that formal alliances such as the one between the library and the school system can have a chilling effect in programs. He emphasized the importance of allowing the library to continue to own the project rather than formally establish ties with another entity. I asked him if he thought that schools should be a part of the program, and he responded:

R: It does not really make any difference. One of the things that I like about [One Book] is that it's not institutionalized, and what I've found is that institutions really like to own things, and they do not really like to take responsibility for things that someone else owns, and so I like [One Book] because you can just blow right over the red tape and the regulations and if a teacher wants to have 'To Kill a Mockingbird' or [another One Book choice] or something like that as an English assignment or whatever assignment, they can do it. [One Book] gives you just enough structure to try to make that recommendation, to try to bring the community together, and it does not, if the school district made a rule that you have to read this, it would create an immediate resistance and probably some negative feedback towards [One Book]. This way you can join in if you want to, you do not have to join if you do not, and I think that fits Americans a whole lot better.

Despite the difficulties of aligning the library program with the public schools, local colleges and universities were much more accessible. At least two had incoming freshmen read the chosen book one year. The intentions of the program were, therefore, aligned with those of the university: it creates dialogue and community. This goal was more problematic for the public school system.

Communicating with the public

Each year the library creates a 'fact sheet for staff', which is particularly useful because it instructs staff in communicating with the public regarding the book. Communications with the staff are, of course, crucial, because the staff interact with the public. They must understand the program and be able to tell the public what it is about. One emphasis in the fact sheet was on the community's role in book selection: "The library accepted title suggestions from the public at all the service centers and online…A reading panel made up of community members narrowed the list of suggestions down to 10 and read these 10 titles, then selected 2 for the public to vote on in February." Another idea in the fact sheets simply explained what it is:

> One Book is a community-wide reading program modeled after Chicago's successful One Book, One Chicago project. This comprehensive program involves cities, counties, media, schools, and businesses in encouraging adults of all ages to read and talk about one book and participate in thought-provoking discussion and activities….

The fact sheets sum up, to the public, what the library does in the program. The public responds by attending events and recommending books for the selection.

What makes a good book for a community reading program?

Each year the library solicits the public's opinion for book suggestions for One Book. The suggestions are counted and scrutinized by a reading panel. They do have a specific set of criteria for choosing a book: it must be in print, available in a variety of formats, should be accessible (not too hard for the average reader to enjoy), and the author should be available to speak. It should have enough 'meat' or 'discussable points' to generate conversations. They have chosen both fiction (including one science fiction book) and non-fiction. Therefore, there is not a specific type of book that the library is looking for, but rather ideas that will provoke conversations, and which provide interesting points for programming. The selection chosen the year in which this study was conducted, for instance, centered on an older man living in a nursing home and his reflections on circus life, love, and youth during the Great Depression. Programs covered all of these areas. Some themes for programs were circuses operating during the Great Depression, animal training, care of the elderly, and circus music. The variety of programs met the library's goal of generating interest among a diverse population.

The suggestion form for One Book asks the patron to explain why their suggestion would be good for a community-wide read. Some of the books suggested and reasons include:

- *Ender's Game* by Orson Scott Card: "This book is easy to read and while it would appeal to kids, it also has interesting political undertones that will keep adults' attention. Sci-fi that has many human/thoughtful elements. Really makes you think! (plus-first book in a long series, so we can keep on reading and we should read it before the movie comes out in '08.)
- *My name is Asher Lev* by Chaim Potok: "The book is about a boy, Asher, Lev, born with an incredible gift to produce art. It is the story of his struggle to find his identity as he wrestles with his cultural heritage, his families desires for him, and his own inner need to produce art. Potok beautifully portrays the inner life of a child prodigy and the life of a

troubled family in haunting and exquisite detail. It is a brilliant story of human nature and relationships and both the sadness and the hope of life.”

- *How to talk to a Liberal* by Ann Coulter: “It quotes & proves the liberals will & do sell out our country.”
- *Running to the Mountain* by John Katz: “A great study of mid-life and how to handle it. This is about a man, most of our books are made for women.”
- *One Good Turn* by Kate Atkinson: “It would be good for all age groups. It takes place in Scotland, which widens one’s horizon. It has a universal theme.”
- *Three Cups of Tea* by Greg Mortensen: “About Pakistan & Afghanistan—nonfiction. Lots of ways to take programs & discussions.” (2) “One man’s mission to fight terrorism and build nations. Amazing book, inspiring, compels the reader to get involved—if one person can effect such change, what could a group of us accomplish!”
- *The Great Good Place* by Ray Oldenburg: “It recognizes & discusses how & why hair salons, coffee shops, bookstores, barber shops are integral to a community.”

I chose these suggestions for inclusion in this list in order to show the variety of reasons that people might express for a book selection. The reasons provided range from the political to the personally insightful to pure fun. Some of the suggestions show that the writer is thinking of programming and discussion of ideas to pursue with other readers.

The library not only collects suggestions, but also collects complaints about books that have been chosen. Some complaints or suggestions included “Please do not choose another book with a liberal bias…” and “I know that this book was supposed to portray life but I do not believe life should be lived in that manner. I do not want any teenager to read this book and feel that this is the way they should behave.” The complainers seem to recognize that the library is an arbiter of culture, and that the culture that the library is promoting is not one that they believe is right. Luckily for the librarians, they do not have to take the blame, for, as they pointed out, it is the public who actually chooses the

book. In reality the reading panel makes the choice, but the panel is composed of citizens who are not affiliated with the library.

Promoting Reading and Culture: Symbiotic Relationships

Perhaps one of the most interesting findings from the documents was the symbiotic relationship between the library and other cultural institutions. Category 1 included items published by outsiders, such as newspapers and outside groups, regarding One Book programming. The articles were mainly write-ups of events in the community, including author talks. The library also saved publicity that was run through the newspapers. Publicity for events was sometimes linked to an article which went along with the book. For instance, one year the community reading book was *Nickeled and Dimed* by Barbara Ehrenreich. One of the local papers ran stories about the difficulties of the lives of low-wage laborers. That year the library had teamed up with a local relief agency in order to focus on local issues concerning low-wage labor. The newspaper publication about such events worked together to facilitate a community-wide conversation about the working poor in this region. It seems as if the library and newspaper were, therefore, working together to create a dialogue in the community. By doing so, they also promote each other in a symbiotic relationship.

While evidence of these symbiotic relationships is one common thread that runs through the documents, it is especially apparent in categories 2 and 5 (internal communications, and communications with outside groups). Documents regarding program publicity were especially interesting because they show relationships between the library and newspapers, book stores, the chamber of commerce and office of cultural affairs, TV and radio stations, and universities. This demonstrates the ways that the

136

library advertises the program and involves other groups. The idea is that creating a culture of reading and 'getting out and talking about books and issues' is beneficial for many different organizations, including chain and independent bookstores, coffee shops, as well as individual citizens and students. Bookstores often support community reading programs because many people prefer to buy the book rather than check it out from the library. Some programs have been held at local bookstores, and they often advertise the library's programming extensively. The support of the program by the various non-library entities suggests that others see the program as beneficial, either directly or indirectly, to their own cause.

Summary

The advantage of combining the three types of data is that they complemented each other. Interviews gave an historical and personal view of individuals, while documents provided a history of the program, as seen by the librarians who collected the documents. The observations provided another window into the social realm of the events. Together, they gave a more complete picture of the events of the community reading program.

There are two types of phenomenological information which could be discerned from the data. First, there is evidence of readers' connections with literature, or the phenomenology of reading. At least one of the literacy students was able to connect with literature on a deeper level than one would expect from a person who is not a strong reader. The intersubjective experience which she described was aligned with the ultimate goal of reading described by Gioia—a transcendental experience with a text. The other literacy students expressed varying levels of comprehension of and connection with the

text. The second phenomenological type of data is sociological. According to Heap and Roth (1973), "sociologists understand "things" and phenomena in a strictly mundane, and therefore metaphorical manner" (p. 357). The interactions at the reading events—the 'tut-tuts' at the ringing cell phone; the homogeneity of the crowds, all point toward an expectation of normative behavior at the events. They are evidence of an intersubjective consciousness. One Book events are about creation of a common culture, of sharing a similar experience while embracing multiple interpretations of the text.

Some of the research questions were unanswerable from this study, but the evidence that is available indicates that there are reasons to further explore some of the questions. For instance, one research question is whether community reading programs can help alleviate social isolation and support the educational goals of adult literacy classes. If so, should the library encourage literacy groups to participate? One finding of "One Day I Will Make It" (2005) study by Kristen E. Porter, Sondra Cuban, and John P. Cummings at the National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy (NCSALL) at Harvard University was that libraries and literacy groups should join forces in order to combat illiteracy. Libraries are often not equipped to run literacy programs alone, but they have the space and materials to support a literacy programs.   Anecdotal evidence from my study indicates that experienced readers who attend community reading events might come back to the library for other reasons. Additional studies will be needed in order to determine if community reading programs might change the library habits of adult literacy students.

Interviews and documents with the librarians gave evidence of a desire to make the program more inclusive and diverse.   There was also evidence that the librarians

138

sincerely tried to work with many community groups in order to generate interest among diverse people, through advertising, through 'grassroots' networking, and through formal alliances with other cultural institutions. They did seem to feel somewhat frustrated, though, when I asked them if they were able to attract a diverse crowd to events. Another study is called for in order to determine methods that community reading programs might employ in order to diversify programs.

This chapter examined the data for evidence that answers some of the research questions for the study, and ended with some of the questions which remained unanswered. The unanswered questions were often hinted at by the data, which suggests that they are areas for further study. In the next chapter, conclusions will be drawn regarding the involvement of the adult literacy students in the community reading program and their experiences with literature. It ends with recommendations for libraries regarding reading groups and literacy students, and future directions for research.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The phenomenological methodology used in this study provides a means to conceive of the data produced through empirical evidence—the acts and manifestations of conscious acts and speech. This methodology requires 'bracketing' of preexisting knowledge and conceptions about the conceptual problems such as the historical relationship between libraries and new readers, social theory regarding poverty and low literacy, from the collected data. While it is impossible to approach any project with a 'blank slate' of mind, the goal is to look at the data as it exists, and look for connections within the data, rather than trying to make the data fit existing theory. From this, we can decide if the phenomenon which we are studying fits existing theory, or if there is something happening which, as yet, unidentified.

The goal of this research was to find meaning for the particular social event called "One Book" for several representative groups, or stakeholders. The stakeholders, as previously identified, are the library, adult literacy educators, and readers. New readers were compared with confident readers so that the similarities and discrepancies could be revealed: the new readers, in this study, are being treated as individual readers, but their reading group was also compared to other reading groups. There are some questions that cannot be answered in this study, but it does address students' and other readers' perceptions of their involvement. The literacy students' reactions to literature and program involvement should be useful to librarians and adult educators who are planning programs for new adult readers. The goal of this research is to explore the topic, by

developing a new way to talk about both literacy and community reading projects, and to develop theory which will be used in future research.

This dissertation began with an historical overview of the underlying problems faced by adult literacy students in an increasingly privatized or market-driven public sphere. The neo-Marxist criticism of education within the marketplace explains how the current political system dictates the aims of the educational system (and indeed all systems which depend upon the political system for public funds). This framework was useful for understanding the role and placement (or, misplacement) of adult literacy education in society. Federally funded adult literacy classes are presently placed under the welfare-to-work system through the Workforce Investment Act (WIA, 1998). This placement comes with an ideology which serves a political agenda—it was developed as a part of welfare reform, and it requires standardization and accountability in meeting program goals. This placement does meet some needs of the students: it helps them obtain better jobs. However, it doesn't help them to learn to read for pleasure.

Despite the political necessities which determine the funding of the program, the literacy teacher in this study was given substantial latitude to work outside of the system for at least part of the time that the students are in class. Her involvement in the community reading program effectively resisted the current political placement of adult education. The students were able to break away from the drudgery of their textbooks in order to read (or listen to) a more difficult text which was purely for enjoyment, and to help them become 'readers'. The teacher's goal was to let them see themselves as readers. The teacher's intention is to assist the students' transformation from non-reader to reader; it is to change the students' identity or self-perception. The act of becoming

part of a community of readers allowed them to become who they want to be, if only for a brief period of time. They also were able to expand their world view through more difficult fiction than they normally encounter in literacy programs. At least one student articulated astonishment at her personal transformation that had occurred as a result of the literacy program; the other students expressed a desire to become readers, but they said that they still have progress to make in order to become readers.

Involvement with the One Book program was a way to holistically engage the literacy students in the transformational aspects of education which they did not previously encounter in school. One of the goals of schooling is socialization and citizenship—it aims to turns young people into productive citizens by giving them the tools that they need to become productive, and teaching them to use those tools with their peers and teachers. One goal of the One Book phenomenon is to bring people into the public sphere in order to engage in the creation of a common public knowledge, or culture. In this way, education and One Book programs are similar, in that they both increase public involvement and a sense of belonging to a culture.

The goals of education and community reading programs are alike in that they are both tools for socialization and education, in the increasingly fragmented postindustrial world. Bringing the new adult readers into this forum helps them, in the words of their teacher, to "see themselves as part of a community of readers." They were able to see how other people engage in reading, and how they talk about literature. The students were undergoing a period of transformation, driven by a desire to do something that they view as more productive with their lives. Involvement in a program such as One Book was one way to further engage them in this process.

Yet, all of the students who participated in the community reading program were already committed to learning to read for reasons beyond obtaining a job. The students who finished the book had been in the literacy program for a long time; several other students came and went during the time span of the community reading project. They have an internal motivation for reading which One-Read participation expanded.

There might have also been some negative aspects to using the One Book text in the class. One student, who was previously interviewed during my pilot study, dropped out of the literacy class during the time that they were reading the book out loud. The teacher was not sure why, but she suspected that she either wanted a more challenging class, or that she was uncomfortable reading this particular book out loud. During an earlier interview (during my pilot project) she had stressed the importance of Godliness and clean living, and the book had some parts that might have caused her some discomfort, especially when reading aloud in the presence of men. The literacy teacher said that she also might have dropped out of the class because she was a more advanced reader than most of the other students; she did not indicate which one, but the teacher speculated it was either because of the text or her advanced level of literacy.

There were new students who came and went during the time period that this study was being conducted. During the class period when students were participating in the community reading project, the new students might have felt that they weren't a part of the group. The literacy class might not have seemed as open and accepting to those students as the class 'insiders' reported because they were not reading the same book. The irregularity of student attendance was a barrier to finishing the book and to conducting regular reading sessions. These factors point to another problem with

utilizing long books in the literacy classroom: the students must make a commitment if

they are going to finish a book. The sporadic nature of their attendance makes reading a

long book aloud, or holding discussions in class about a book which they have read in

class, incoherent.

Findings

At this point, I will return to the research questions in order to explore findings.

The research questions, as stated in Chapter 1, were:

- How do new adult readers describe their participation with One Book?

- How do program instrumentalists conceive of a community reading
  program?

- Could participation in community reading programs help widely diverse
  people feel more comfortable in a literary setting?

- What is the essential nature of a community reading experience for both
  new and experienced readers?

- What is the essential experience of reading a book for new readers?

- What do the various represented program participants want to read in a
  community reading program, and why?

How do new adult readers describe their participation with One Book?

The meaning of participation for the new readers was quite different from that of

the confident readers, which was apparent through both interviews and observations. The

literacy students had very little experience with reading for enjoyment. While

experienced readers often pointed out that they used the community reading book as a

'seal of approval', the new readers read the book because their teacher bought it for them. They had a difficult time reading it—each time they started reading it, the teacher had to remind them where they were in the book and what had happened during the previous reading session.

At public events, the new readers were shy about participating—their body language was very reserved or even 'stiff,' and they did not talk amongst themselves. They did not seem as if they felt like they fit in at the events, though they later said that they enjoyed them. The more confident readers were more likely to talk to each other—both strangers and friends.

Observations and interviews also indicated that the confident readers also were able to make more connections between the book and the events in their own lives. Literature gives people another lens through which to view their own lives, and the confident readers had developed this lens. They also had more finely developed communication skills to describe their experience of literature. The literacy students did not yet know how to talk about literature.

Despite the literacy students' low skills in communicating about literature, simply being a part of the experience gave them a new way to think about literature. As Dee pointed out, she enjoyed going to the events of the previous year because she was able to see that everyone interpreted the book differently. She also expressed a confidence which the other students lacked—when the conversation was about 'being on the outside,' she was able to speak up. She knew exactly what it was like to be on the outside, and she had the confidence to tell people about it. She demonstrated that the new readers are not always too shy to speak, and that they can make connections between the

literature experience and their own lives. She shares a common trait with the other

literacy students, in that reading is extremely difficult for her. However, she also shows

that not all literacy students are too shy to participate, and that they can experience the

transcendent experience of reading.

One problem encountered in the classroom was communicating about literature.

The students were open to listening to discussions about literature, but when their opinion

or thoughts were sought the students were reserved and rarely spoke up, even within the

confines of this small and accepting group. Members of the other reading groups, or

comparison groups (the book club and the adult forum) spoke freely about the book. In

the public events, participants were expected to contribute to the conversation because

they had shown up. The facilitators called on people who hadn't yet spoken. Various

interpretations were given varying amounts of time and thought and validation, while

others were rejected, but the participants seemed to value the conversation regardless.

In the literacy classroom, true conversations really did not occur; while the

teacher sought their input, the conversations would more accurately be described as

friendly 'one-sided' conversations rather than as an open exchange of ideas. This

illustrates an important advantage of taking the students to fora where they can hear

other, more experienced readers expressing their thoughts. Through listening to other

readers talk about their own interpretations of the text, they can learn that it is okay to

have a different opinion from their teacher, and that there are many valid, but different

opinions regarding literature. They can learn that there are not necessarily right and

wrong answers, as they apparently learned during their previous schooling. Patrick

Shannon (1989) discussed the effect of an outcomes-based education on students, in

which teachers must teach the students how to find the correct answer on a standardized test. This type of teaching produces students who do not explore the validity of multiple perspectives, leaving them to think that there is only one right answer. Attending community reading events allowed the students to see that there is more than one way to interpret a book, as Louise Rosenblatt (1995) discussed.

How do program instrumentalists conceive of a community reading program?

The librarians and other instrumentalists expressed views which were aligned with those of Nancy Pearl and, to a lesser extent, Gioia. They viewed the program as a way to bring people together and, at the same time, promote reading. They wanted the events to be explicitly *public*, or that which the public feels that it owns. The library plays the role of host, rather than teacher; they invite members of public to take part in the programming and to lead talks.

Some of the instrumentalists envisioned their involvement as a civic duty, or a way to encourage civic participation. This was echoed by some other readers, who viewed the program as a way to bridge social divides. Both of these ideas support the idea that they view the community reading programs as a way to increase participation in public life, or the commons. The participants who expressed this goal linked this civic duty to education; they said that by providing a good example, adults could lead children and adolescents to reading and increased public participation.

Gioia (2006) explained that the main goal of the Big Read project is about "pleasure. Not necessarily an easy pleasure, but a deliciously rich and complex one" (Special Messages). Literacy students and experienced readers expressed this idea: they enjoyed the experience of reading the book. The time spent in the literacy classroom

147

with the book was intended for the students' enjoyment—while the act of reading was not always enjoyable for the students, they did enjoy reading in a group, especially following along while the teacher was reading. Even the students who weren't able to voice what they liked about the book said that they enjoyed the experience of reading the book. Therefore, one of the goals of One Book instrumentalists was being met through reading and discussion: it was a pleasurable experience which brought people together to talk. *Could participation in community reading programs help widely diverse people feel more comfortable in a literary setting?*

One of the findings from observations was that there was not much heterogeneity at most of the One Book events. This finding is not in line with one of the explicit goals of the program as it was originally conceived: it was to be inclusive and diverse. The librarians had tried a number of tactics to reach out to diverse groups, but the diversity generally was not there. For instance, they presented the book each year to an Interfaith Council so that churches and synagogues could promote the program in their own congregations. One of the book talks that I attended was at a church, and one was at a private home. The librarians said that they know that many book groups check out the book bags which they create in order to support programming for book groups. However, the book groups don't necessarily go to the public or library events. It is impossible to know how many people read the book alone or with another book group who never attend the public events; the number of actual readers might be more representative of the population than was evident at the public events.

The librarians were aware of the lack of diversity; they said that most of the people who attend One Book events reflect the population identified as 'readers.' The

figures to which they were referring were probably similar to the figures presented in the NEA study (see Chapter 2): mostly white females. Yet, many people read. Not as many people read what the National Endowment for the Arts defines as worthwhile reading, though—that reading which purportedly elevates the soul and is the essence of humanity. Many people read magazines, newspapers, and genre fiction; others read commentary on the Internet. The goals of One Book, then, might be of limited appeal. Not everyone wants to read literary fiction.

Is the goal of diversity in a One Book project too elusive? Perhaps diversity has to be dealt with on a wider basis before it can happen at events such as One Book. The 'culture of reading' which is promoted at such events might seem exclusive to people who do not normally participate in reading events. It does seem apparent that the library will have to make great efforts at outreach if they are to succeed at having events that cater to the interests of the entire population. Despite the discrepancies between the attendees and the population-at-large, the reality is that the events studied at this event were not entirely homogeneous. There were almost always people who attended the events who did not fit in with the majority, and they were not, by any means, shunned. They did often sit away from the crowd, however. The literacy students in this study were representative of one (admittedly diverse) socially excluded group. The fact that the literacy students did participate and enjoy the experience is testament that it *can* bridge social divides. While they did not fully participate, it was a step towards participation, or at least an introduction to participation, for them.

This goal of breaking down boundaries is perhaps the distinguishing factor between community-wide reading events and private book clubs. That is, the community

reads are intended as 'bridging' events, whereas book clubs are often 'bonding' events (see Putnam, 2001). The community reading events, however, have the potential to become more bonding than bridging, or exclusive than inclusive, if there is not a deliberate and sustained effort on the part of the librarians to maintain a public and inclusive atmosphere. One of the ideas brought up by the librarians was that the One Book program is distinguished from other similar events because of the wide variety of programming that they strive to provide. It is this array of programming that attracts a wide audience; people who might not be comfortable talking about literature can still read the book and be a part of the event by going to another type of event, such as an historical program or musical event. The library has also made use of radio programs, which do not draw people into public spaces. Radio programs do have the potential to reach people who might not attend library events, and so they might enhance conversations which occur at work or in passing.

What do the various represented program participants want to read in a community reading program, and why?

Choosing a book for a community-wide reading event can be difficult. In this study, the library gave the public the responsibility of choosing the book each year, to a certain extent. The library kept book suggestions from each year in their documentation, which provided a window into what people want to read, and why they think it would make a good choice for the city. Each year, the librarians collected the suggestions and chose the books which met their criteria for consideration. Qualifications are both practical and judgmental—for instance, books which were considered must be available in a variety of formats, including paperback, and they must not be too difficult (see

Chapter 4 for other qualifications). The library, as stakeholder, wanted a book that is easy to provide to as many people as possible (or, is practical), a book whose author is able to speak to the public, and one which is not too difficult for most people to read. The reading panel, composed of members of the public (rather than the library), went through a winnowing process each year in order narrow the suggestions down. First they chose ten books which they felt met the criteria for the community, they read those, selected two, and finally opened the vote to the public.

The readers who make suggestions to the library for One Book selections aren't limited by practicality, but they do want a book that is discussable. Many readers suggested books which were about political matters on some level. Many people seemed to suggest that the community read about an issue which is important to them. They often mentioned that the book which they were suggesting had many points to talk about. The readers whom I interviewed concurred; they said that their choices for solitary reading were not the same as book club choices—while they might read a fun and easy book for solitary reading, they want something with 'more meat' to talk about in a book discussion environment.

The needs of the literacy students were different from experienced readers. While they were able to participate in the program with the aid of their teacher and tutors, there were some difficulties which they encountered. The book which we read required the reader to shift between time and place settings, which caused some confusion. The experienced readers didn't express any problems with this, but the new readers had a difficult time following the plot. The vocabulary and colloquialisms also presented problems for the readers. It did give them experience in extracting meaning from

context, however. Without the aid of their teacher, though, most of them would not have followed the plot line well enough to have found meaning.

Community-read books are supposed to have wide appeal and reach across traditional societal boundaries in order to attract as wide of a population of readers as possible. They also should give people a lot to talk about—in Pearl's (2006) words, "books that lend themselves to good discussions -- books that raise important questions about moral choices or ethical behavior or the meaning of life." These lofty goals aim to widen participation and belief in a public sphere in which all people have a voice. There are deep implications for this project, because it aims to build public trust and understanding. However, without diversity actually occurring, the goals of expanding the public sphere might be thwarted, as the project becomes a glorified, publicly funded reading club. Most communities have more than one culture, and trying to finding a book which meets the needs of a multicultural society just might not be possible. In fact, divergent cultures might find this idea laughable or even disrespectful.

What is the essential experience of reading a book for new readers? What is the essential nature of a community reading experience for both new and experienced readers?

Some of the most compelling evidence from the data concerned the experience of reading for adult new readers. Dee's expression of transcendence during reading is one example; however, other readers said that it makes them feel 'normal'. Learning how to read represents a life change for the literacy students. Two said that they had carried around books in their backpacks (not the One Book selection, however) so that they could read them on the bus or during their work breaks, which is a public expression of their emergent literacy. One of the themes that came up repeatedly in the course of

interviews with the adult literacy students was that of transformation. They saw their

decision to attend literacy classes as one step in becoming a different person. They were

becoming readers, becoming more capable and self-sufficient. They compared their

being able to read with normalcy, or being like other people.

Martin (2007) compared Eliza Doolittle's transformation from flower girl to lady

to that of Victor, the Wild Boy of Aveyon. For both, it was a transformation from nature

(an unlearned state) to culture. The transformation that the literacy students are

undergoing is similar—they are learning a new culture and a new language when they

become part of the wider community of readers. That is not to say that they are changing

from a more natural state of being to a less natural one, but that they are undergoing a

transformation that involves learning how to communicate with others using the written

language. Learning how to read is not only a practical solution to an imminent problem,

it's also a process of socialization and deep transformation. Like Doolittle and Victor, we

can't expect this transformation to occur overnight. They also said that they are learning

to love learning; all of the students who were interviewed said that they enjoy going to

class and participating. They contrasted this sharply with their former self's rejection of

school and learning. They realized that there is a value in learning which they did not

formally recognize, and perhaps their teacher's interest in exposing them to cultural

events will encourage them to take part in more cultural activities.

Written language is the key to being able to participate in the dominant culture.

By itself, learning to read and write will not enable them to participate, but it is not

possible to participate or gain control over their own lives without knowing how to

effectively use the written language. It is a tool which enables people to become insiders in a world which was previously unavailable to them.

Future directions: where to go now?

This research did effectively answer some of the questions which I originally set out to ask, but there are some equally compelling questions which it could not answer. For instance, there were simply not enough people to determine if One Book programs could potentially increase library use or civic participation, especially among the population I was studying. This research did not indicate that the three literacy students with whom I discussed library usage might go to the library any more than they did before they participated in the program. One Book programs last for a limited time. The experienced reader who indicated that she will go to the library more expressed that she had found out that the library met a previously unknown need: the library has many audio books, which she listens to while traveling for her job. The librarians seemed to think that the program encouraged library use, and it especially might be an effective outreach tool for people who are new to the community as it gives them a way to get to know other people and the library.

One of the literacy students said that he has been going to the library since he started going to literacy classes, and the other two did not have the time to go. They did not think that the One Book participation would affect their library use. A longitudinal study involving many libraries and users might better answer this question by tracking students' reading activities and social activities prior to and after participation in the program. It would be equally interesting to find out if experienced readers go to the library more often following participation in such an event. While the goal of One Book

is not to raise circulation numbers, it would be interesting to see if participation does, in fact, increase library attendance. *Reading at Risk* indicated that readers are more active in their communities and in civic life. Community reading programs, then, should increase both reading and civic involvement.

When conducting research, one should hope that there are enough surprises that new questions arise. Perhaps the most compelling finding was that of Dee's insightful views of reading. Her expression of transcending the physical constraints of her body through reading was astounding because of her relatively low reading abilities. This brings up the questionable validity of standardized testing for literacy. Perhaps she is reading on a higher level that she is able to express when she reads to herself.

There were several questions which arose during the course of this research which were not included in the original research questions, and thus, will be explored in the future. One question is whether there are other models for participatory education which might better serve new adult readers and confident readers at the same time. The One Book projects are great endeavors. Supporting smaller reading groups, or less ambitious, regularly scheduled reading events, might be as effective a means for developing reading habits. Not everyone has the same reading interests. By comparing different types of reading groups at libraries and those run by other cultural institutions, we might be able to form some conclusions about how new readers might best be served through reading groups. This is based on an idea that while creating a shared culture through reading is one ideal, another might be supporting many smaller groups. The ambitious nature of One Book projects might not pay off in the long run for all communities.

Communities have different demographics, as well. Some are extremely homogenous and others are less so. The parameters for choosing a good book will be different based upon the library's conception of the goals of the program. In other words, the meaning of 'being inclusive' might be more challenging for some communities, and might entail more manipulation. By examining attendance at community-wide reading events, from the places and circumstances of events to book selection, a researcher might be able to determine some of the reasons why more socially or economically disadvantaged people do or do not participate, thus opening the doors for their participation.

Another way to view the One Book ideal is through the eyes of minorities who are not necessarily socially disadvantaged, but who do not conform to the majority. When the librarians in this study presented the book to the Interfaith Council, they said that most of the area's churches and synagogues attended, but that no members of, for instance, the mosque or the Korean church attended. These groups are not necessarily disadvantaged in any way, but they are separate. However, the goal of One Book is to reach out to as many people as possible. It seems that an unstated agenda is to promote a common culture. Another study might investigate whether groups which are underrepresented in cultural events feel as if they would like to go, or if it is an exercise in assimilation which they do not want to be part of. Perhaps the library could better meet the needs of smaller, less assimilated groups by providing materials that they choose.

The ambitious goal of One Book projects is ultimately related to helping people realize their fullest potential through interaction with fellow human beings around a

central text. The ideal situation for the adult learner, however, is to have ongoing access to literacy training and materials so that he can continue to develop skills during and after completing a literacy program. While decoding skills are a necessary precursor to a deeper education, literacy is more than a skill set. It is a way to communicate. Understanding passages of reading means being able to see the world from another person's viewpoint. Learning how to develop an understanding of nuances of communication between the reader and the writer takes time and persistence, but it can ultimately be one of life's more satisfactory relationships.

Libraries benefit enormously from programs such as One Book events. The praise which I heard at events for the library is testament to the effectiveness of community reading events as a library public relations tool. Most of the speakers at the events took time to praise the library. Attendance figures for events and website hits for the program have risen each year, and the librarians say that 'getting the word out' about the program has become easier each year. More people understand what the program is about.

Alternate models for participatory education

Some other examples of participatory education which might guide future research are the Clemente Course for the Humanities and the Highlander Folk School. The Clemente Course for the Humanities focuses on introducing adult literacy students to great works of art and is used in urban environments; the Highlander Folk School is a rural Appalachian educational movement for social justice through participatory education. Interestingly, the Clemente Course or the Humanities utilizes the traditional canon, while the Highlander Folk School relies on folk knowledge and grassroots efforts.

157

Both schools claim to empower students; one utilizes assimilation while one relies on resistance to mainstream culture.

Shorris (2000) described the Clemente Course as a means for the poor to gain legitimate power through the humanities. The Clemente courses are a five year program for adult learners which specifically targets economically disadvantaged populations. The courses focus on the traditional humanities curriculum of art and literature in order to bring the poor the same education that the best schools provide to wealthy students. The Clemente courses allow poor students to explore great works of art and literature (the traditional canon) in order to gain legitimate power in society. This is, not surprisingly, similar to the goals of the Big Read expressed by Gioia; it also is aligned to Hofstetter et. al.'s (1999) findings that people who are most familiar with mainstream culture have the most political power. While the Clemente Courses follow a specific schedule, similar courses could conceivably occur in a number of contexts—in a community college or a social action center. Libraries, however, are an ideal location because at the library students are exposed to a wide variety of resources when they attend the courses, and after the course is finished they might return to meet other lifelong learning goals.

The Highlander Center was established in 1932 by Myles Horton and Don West in Grundy County, Tennessee (http://www.highlandercenter.org/a-history.asp). The Center was founded to promote education and empowerment for rural and industrial workers in Appalachia and the South through community and grassroots efforts. Shannon (1989) discussed the value of the program. In his example of one outpost of the Highlander school in South Carolina in 1954, many illiterates were able to connect with literacy as they had never been able to through a standardized curriculum. He said that

158

members of the Highland Folk School "helped poor and working-class people resist not only the rationalization of education, but also resist the rationalization of work through classes for union organizers and rationalization of life through their classes in hill traditions and folkways" (p. 129). The rationalization to which he refers is education guided by a standardized curriculum and exploitation through capitalism. The formation of labor groups and folk resistance are both tools to bring power to these poor people; literacy is provided by equals rather than from above. It seems that the Highlander model might be more appropriate for rural areas and the Clemente courses more so for urban settings because of the socio-political contexts of the environments.

Group literacy projects are another way to increase literacy. Drobner (2001) described the move from individual tutoring to group reading projects as a way to overcome social isolation: "Over the years, we made the transition from individual to small-group tutoring in order to counter the isolation experienced by many of the learners" (p. 31). The library can provide not only information to the new reader about jobs and health care (commonly cited barriers to inclusion for non-readers), but also a place to explore literacy in the broader sense of the word. The adult literacy classroom which was the center of this project is transformed into such a group when the students read a book together. Much of their time is spent on workbook activities, but the time that the students spend reading aloud seemed to break down feelings of social isolation; the students moved their chairs into a circle, laughed, and talked about the words in the book together.

The three programs described above require commitment on the part of the learners. The literacy classroom tends to have sporadic attendance—people come and go

during the class as they are able; they drop out when their lives change, and they come back to the program when they can. Reading a book and learning to discuss it require time and sustained effort, similar to that exerted by school children. While the students who participated in the interviews for this project were committed students, many other students who come to the program are not. Combining the two sets of students would be difficult for both the teacher and the students.

Conclusions

The One Book affiliation was a good experience for the students, but the research does not indicate that this program, by itself, will make a big difference in the lives of the students. It was perhaps more of a worthy diversion for the students, a way to add another element of learning to their classroom experience. It was also a way for them to see themselves, however briefly, as part of a culture of reading. When Dee talked about how wonderful One Book was for her, she also mentioned other books that the class had read together; she seemed to be equating the One Book experience with books that she read with the other students in class. This means that it was the act of reading aloud and discussing literature with the other students and her teacher which was the revelatory experience. She had, in her own mind, been transformed into a reader, and she attributed this transformation to the literacy class and especially the act of reading out loud and discussing books.

Experienced readers expressed satisfaction and interest in the program. They saw One Book as a way to find a good book to read. They were all already educated and knew how to talk about literature, and reading the One Book selection gave them something to talk about with their colleagues at work, with their spouses, and with their friends in their

reading group and in other social situations. While the readers whom I interviewed were

educated, they also said that they enjoyed hearing about others' interpretations of the

book, and they enjoyed programs that the library organized. The programs added to their

knowledge of the text, which increased their appreciation for the book. Listening to the

author talk about the book gave them insight into the research and writing process, which

also deepened their appreciation for the text. Therefore, the goals of One Book were met

with these readers.

The librarians said that they were very happy with the community reading

program. Documentation supported their claims that it was getting easier each year to

advertise the program; their advertisers know about it now, and many community

members know about it and support it. More people participate each year, and they

receive compliments and praise for the program. While they know about controversies

that have occurred at other libraries, they have successfully dodged much overt criticism

because they have let the community 'own' it. The program has thus grown each year

with only praise from published sources.

This research examined one community reading program through the viewpoints

of several different groups of stakeholders, concentrating on the experiences of literacy

students. The goal was to find out if this program could help the students feel as if they

were a part of the larger culture, as if they belonged, and to find out if they could

experience literature in the way that other readers did. My primary finding regarding this

question is that their group reading experiences and program attendance were positive

steps for the students in becoming more proficient readers, and in learning about

literature for the sake of pleasure. They learned that there are multiple interpretations of

a book. It is the hope of the teacher that they will see themselves as part of a community through this experience. The teacher's dedication in helping the students become readers—for pleasure, not only for employment—is crucial in combating the feelings of isolation which Gioia described. This study did not indicate that community reading programs produce more engaged citizens, perhaps because it is an annual, rather than a regular event. However, interviews did indicate that book groups give people important topics to think about and discuss regarding issues in their life which are important. Aiding book groups and providing multiple venues for public participation, then, may bring more people together to read. The community reading project which was studied during this research should be considered a success on multiple levels. It promoted personal enrichment through reading good books; it enhanced the public sphere by encouraging people to come together to talk; and it promoted the library around the central act of reading.

APPENDIX A: LIST OF INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS

Key:

I=Interviewer
R=Reader
L=Librarian
S=Student
T=Teacher
P=Program leader

Interviewer:
I: Jenny, 35, female, married, has one elementary-school aged child.

Readers:
R1: Paige, 60, female, married, with two grown children. She was interviewed as a representative of the private (home) reading group. The interview took place at her house. She works part-time at an upscale women's clothing store.

R2: Babette, 59, female, married, with two grown children. She was interviewed as a representative of the reading / educational group at the church. The interview took place at her house. She works full time for a social service agency.

R3: Penny, 57, female, married, with two grown children. She was at many One-Book events, was a member of a book club. Her book club was not a focus of the interview. She is a retired elementary school counselor.

R4: Walt, 59, male, married, with two grown children. Walt is Penny's husband. He and Penny have read all of the One-Book selections together. He is a former school principal and active citizen.

*R3 and R4 were interviewed together in the living room of their house.

R5: Abelard, 21, single. R5 is the son of T1, and he joined us in a coffeeshop to talk about books. While he didn't actually read the One-Book selection, he talked about books and reading. He is a writer.

Librarians:

Librarians L1 (Dana) and L2 (Sara) were interviewed together in a meeting room at the library. They have worked on the One-Book programs since its inception.

L3: Gale, mid-30's, married, with two small children. She was unable to attend an interview, so she answered the interview questions via email. She is a librarian at a high

school. She has been involved with One-Book for several years and is on the readers' panel.

Literacy Students:

Interviews with the students were conducted in an office of the school which the students attend, with the exception of Dee. Dee was interviewed in her room in the nursing home because she hadn't been well enough to make it to school for several weeks. The literacy students in this study all have attended the literacy classes for at least a year.

S1: Dee, mid-40's, unmarried. Dee lives in a nursing home and is disabled.

S2: Caleb, 35, unmarried. Caleb is currently unemployed.

S3: Tim, mid-40's, unmarried. Tim works at two jobs and owns his home.

S4: Terrence, mid-40's, unmarried. Terrence works as a dishwasher.

Program leaders:

P1: Douglas, late 60's, is a prominent and active city leader.

P2: Ann, late 60's, is the wife of Douglas (P1). She is a retired librarian. They have led, together, a book discussion for One Book since the first year.

* P1 and P2 were interviewed together in their home.

Teachers:

T1: Telyn, mid-40's, married. Telyn is the literacy teacher. She also teaches ESL classes. Interviews with Telyn occurred in the literacy classroom and at a coffeeshop.

T2: Lacy, early 30's, marriage status unknown. She is a high school teacher who used One-Book in her writing class. The interview took place in a workroom at the high school.

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Because of the nature of the interviews, the questions below were simply used as a guideline for discussion. Some questions were not asked, and other questions were raised during the course of conversation.

LIBRARIANS

I am going to ask you some of the same questions that I'm asking some of the students and teachers, and some that are different. If there is any question that you wish not to answer please decline, and also feel free to answer it in any way you'd like.

What types of issues did you consider when you were planning the first One Book?

How has your conception of One Book evolved over the years? What have you done differently?

Have you had a consistent group of readers and participants, or has it changed significantly with each book?

How do you 'get the word out' in order to encourage participation? Who do you contact/advertise with?

I've read that one of the purposes of "One Book" is to bring together different segments of the community to talk about a work of literature. Do many people become involved in the program who don't usually go to the library?

Do you discuss ways to bring different segments of the community into the conversation?

Was there anything involving the "One Book" program that you would have liked to have seen done differently?

What types of programming seem to bring in the widest audience?

Do you think that the programs that are offered are helpful to people who aren't avid readers? Do they have a chance to become involved?

Do you feel that a program like "One Book" helps people become more involved in society?

Have participants ever talked to you about their experiences with the program? If so, can you share some of those, and describe how their comments have affected your decisions regarding programs?

Do you think that One Book develops library use?

What parts of the One Book selection did you especially enjoy or dislike, and why?

Did you read the One-Book selection last year? (if yes): Did you like that book? Which one did you like more, and what did you enjoy or dislike about that one?

Do you feel that your participation was valued by others in the "One Book" program? Were you comfortable talking about the book with others?

Would you like to participate in more community reading programs? If so, why? If not, why?

Was there anything that you would have liked to have seen done differently? Is there anything that would have made the experience more enjoyable for you?

Have you been back to the library outside of the program? If so, what did you go for? If not, do you feel that there are other places that you'd prefer to go to get books, or to find information?

Do you think that programs like this help to bring community members together? What types of programs do you think might bring a wide range of people together?

Do you think that becoming involved in programs like this make you, personally, more comfortable talking to a wide range of people?

Did you think that this was different from other types of educational experiences that you've had? How so?

Speaking of education, can you tell me about what your education was like, growing up?

Was your family supportive of your education? Did they show a lot of interest in school?

Were they what you would consider active in community events or projects?

In conclusion, do you think that your experiences with this program, in general, are helping you to gain confidence in yourself?

Do you think that this will affect your participation in society?

TEACHERS

I am going to ask you some of the same questions that I'm asking the students, and some that are different. If there is any question that you wish not to answer please decline, and also feel free to answer it in any way you'd like.

What parts of the One Book selection did you especially enjoy or dislike, and why?

Did you read the One Book selection last year? (if yes): Did you like that book? Which one did you like more, and what did you enjoy or dislike about that one?

Do you feel that your students' participation was valued by others?

Do you think that they felt that their participation was valued?

Would you like to continue to participate in community reading programs with your classes? If so, why? If not, why?

Was there anything involving the "One Read" program that you would have liked to have seen done differently? Is there anything that would have made the experience more enjoyable for you?

Do you think that programs like this help to bring community members together? What other types of programs do you think might bring a wide range of people together?

Do you think that becoming involved in programs like this make you, personally, more comfortable talking to a wide range of people?

Did you think that this was different from other types of educational experiences that you've had? How so?

Speaking of education, can you tell me about what your education was like, growing up?

Was your family supportive of your education? Did they show a lot of interest in school?

Were they what you would consider active in community events or projects?

In conclusion, do you think that your experiences with this program, in general, are helping you to gain confidence in yourself?

Do you think that this will affect your participation in society?

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