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PEOPLE, PROGRAMS, AND POLITICS: TWO CASE STUDIES
OF ADULT LITERACY CLASSES

by
RITA COLLINS


A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION
in
EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP:
POSTSECONDARY STUDIES

Portland State University
1992


TO THE OFFICE OF GRADUATE STUDIES:


The members of the Committee approve the dissertation of Rita Collins presented
October 7, 1992.


Douglas Robertson, Chair

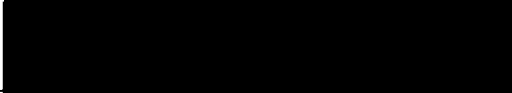

Amy Driscoll


Sorca O'Connor


Alice Jacobson


Hugo Maynard

APPROVED:


Robert B. Everhart, Dean, School of Education


Roy W. Koch, Vice Provost for Graduate Studies and Research

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AN ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION OF Rita Collins for the Doctor of Education
in Educational Leadership: Postsecondary Studies presented October 7, 1992.

Title: People, Programs, and Politics: Two Case Studies of Adult Literacy Classes

APPROVED BY THE MEMBERS OF THE DISSERTATION COMMITTEE:



Douglas Robertson, Chair


Amy Driscoll


Sorca O'Connor


Alice Jacobson


Hugo Maynard

Past research has not sufficiently addressed the question of what types of adult literacy instructional practice are recognized by participants, i.e., students and teachers, as facilitating learning in Adult Basic Education (ABE) classes. The purpose of this study was to describe instructional practices in two urban literacy programs serving low level adult readers, and to identify which practices were effective in meeting student needs. Effectiveness was measured by the ability of students to achieve learning objectives identified by themselves and the teacher, and included attendance patterns and student

participation. Quantitative measures of achievement were not used as criteria since few classes utilized comparable formal assessment instruments.

The process of generating grounded theory developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) provided a suitable methodological framework for this qualitative research design that used an ethnographic approach as the format for the participatory research study. Teachers and students in six ABE classes provided data which were collected using a multi-method plan utilizing interviews, participant observation, and documentary materials.

The study was structured around one primary and four secondary research questions. These questions were designed to address the various aspects of effective instructional practices in ABE classes and began by describing how teachers and students defined literacy skills and student goals, what practices were used in the classrooms, and how students perceived their learning. After this information was gathered, effective practices could be identified using the criteria elicited from teachers and students. Effective practices were found to be an interdependent process that included teacher, students, and goals within the context of the ABE classroom.

The study showed that the effectiveness of discrete instructional practices was dependent on an instructional process that resulted from a teacher's choice of materials and methods accurately reflecting the attributes of students and their educational objectives. Crucial aspects of the teacher's actions were identification of primary objectives, development of basic learning skills, interpersonal communication, and establishment of a supportive environment. For students, an active role within the class that included participation and self-directedness was recognized as contributing to goal achievement. Where this process was observed, there was a greater chance of students remaining in the program, actively participating in their learning, and ultimately achieving learning goals.

CHAPTER I

THE PROBLEM

RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY

In the United States, adult literacy is formally taught through Adult Basic Education (ABE) programs. Although these programs have been in existence since the early 1960s, their success over the years has been questioned. Educators estimate that a student can increase reading achievement by one grade level with one hundred hours of instruction. Yet Boraks (1981) reported that nearly 90% of the students in ABE programs drop out before completing this amount of class time. Harman (1987) estimated that there are 65 million adults in this country who are functionally illiterate, but only 3 million adults were enrolled in ABE programs in 1986 (Chisman, 1990). High attrition rates and poor participation are two of the many problems facing adult literacy education today.

The Adult Education Act of 1964 began federal support for educational programs to serve adults who were functionally illiterate, yet these programs have never achieved a high level of success. Numerous studies document the problems that continue to plague adult literacy classes (Boraks, 1981; Hunter & Harman, 1979; Mezirow, Darkenwald, & Knox, 1975). Problems include materials and methodologies that do not reflect the genuine needs of adult students in literacy classes. More rigorous investigation of effective instructional practices and curriculum is required to better serve learners in ABE programs. Research in adult literacy education has defined sources of academic weakness and reasons for nonparticipation, but there has not been sufficient investigation of effective instructional

practices in adult literacy classes especially at the level of beginning adult readers (Fingeret, 1983; Smith-Burke, 1987).

The purpose of this study is twofold: a) to describe instructional practices in two literacy programs, and b) to identify practices that are effective in meeting students' needs. Using relevant information from adult learning theory and adult literacy research, this study responds to the gaps in current literature and leads to innovative solutions that are applicable in the ABE classroom.

Adult learning theory provides insight into how adults learn and offers techniques to facilitate educational achievement. Adults are continually engaged in acquiring new information by informal means, but for educators it is important to understand the learning process in order to create efficient and effective methods for the adult in a formal setting. Involvement of the adult learner as an active participant is important in adult literacy education, but this aspect of adult learning is often overlooked (Fingeret & Jurmo, 1989; Knowles, 1970). Adults entering literacy programs find themselves treated as school children, or as passive learners. Jurmo (1989) pointed out that "traditionally, literacy students have been handed a prescribed set of topics, materials, and activities that they are expected to master" (p. 27). Adult literacy students need to be recognized as partners in the educational process, and as people whose experiences and orientation to learning are significantly different than children's.

As an ABE teacher, the author is aware of numerous problems facing literacy education practitioners: inadequate information, insufficient training in adult learning theory, and materials and methods which do not serve student needs. Conducting research within the environment of literacy classes and with the collaborative efforts of students and teachers in ABE classes is one way to better define these problems and begin shaping solutions.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Effective methods of adult literacy instruction are inadequately described in the literature. Teachers in literacy programs often do not have materials or instructional models that are designed for adult learners. Literacy students find themselves relegated to a passive role. What are realistic solutions to these problems that are applicable by both students and teachers?

To understand the dimensions of instructional practices in adult literacy education, it is necessary to understand some of the components of the literacy issue. Stuckey (1991) wrote that a theory of literacy is, "a theory of society, of social relationships; and the validity of a theory of literacy derives from the actual lives of the people who make the society " (p. 64).

Examining personal, programmatic and political aspects of adult literacy education will help illuminate our understanding of effective instructional practices. By knowing who the participants are, what forces shape the resources available in literacy programs, and the beliefs and values commonly held about literacy, activities in a literacy class can be more clearly described and understood. The context for adult literacy instruction will determine what types of practices work best.

The People

A glance at the participants in a typical literacy program reveal old people as well as young, people born in the United States and some foreign-born, people who receive welfare payments and others who receive pay checks. Fingeret (1990) concluded that, "adults with low-level skills in print literacy are not a homogeneous group; their experiences, aspirations, and circumstances vary" (p. 41). There is not one discrete group

that can be easily identified as illiterate. Rather the location, the culture, and the economy determine the literacy skills needed or desired by any individual.

Despite the variations in people who enter adult literacy classes, there are commonalities. Rachal (1985) describes adult students during their first classroom encounter as filled with "fears, frustrations, anxieties, expectations, and motivations that can both enhance and frustrate the educational process" (p. 42). They are people who have remained uneducated in a country that promises education to all. They are people who recognize their lack of valued skills. They are people who accept the blame for being illiterate, because they see no one else to blame. Beder (1991) called this "the stigma of illiteracy" (p. 67).

Childers (1975) gives a vivid description of an undereducated person in The Information Poor in America, as someone who:

Does not know which formal channels to tap in order to solve his problems, or what specific programs exist to respond to his needs. . .
Does not see his problems as information needs;
Is not a very active information seeker, even when he does undertake a search;
May lean heavily on formal channels of information if it becomes apparent that the informal channels are inadequate and if his needs are strongly felt;
Is locked into an informal information network that is deficient in the information that is ordinarily available to the rest of society. (p. 42-43)

These students should not be considered inexperienced or lacking values common to other adults. Boraks (1988) points out that "many people who cannot read efficiently function effectively as parents, citizens and workers. Many people who do read efficiently cannot do these things" (p. 70). Some people who cannot read or write well are comfortable with their level of literacy. They see no reason to pursue basic skills in a literacy program. They are satisfied with their ability to function within their community. There are others who are dissatisfied, but perceive barriers to their participation in any educational program. Studies by Beder (1990) and Hayes (1988) documented various

situational and institutional barriers to participation which included childcare, transportation, and scheduling.

Then there are those adults who become dissatisfied with their literacy skills and search for ways to improve these skills in a formal educational setting. A change in their life situation, such as becoming unemployed or a young child starting school, creates a need or desire for different skills. This is the point where many adults with low literacy skills become visible to ABE educators.

Who are the educators who work with these adult students? Mezirow, Darkenwald, and Knox (1975) reported that the majority are women who work part-time in ABE classes, usually with a full-time day job as a public school teacher. Ninety-four percent of adult literacy education teachers are part-time or work as volunteers (Pugsley, 1990). They rarely receive benefits or are paid wages equivalent to other college instructors. In addition, ABE teachers consistently lack the kinds of support that would aid classroom performance (Foster, 1990).

Qualifications and formal training vary greatly among this population (Harman, 1985). Many enter the profession with elementary or secondary school teaching credentials. In-service training is minimal and offered on a "voluntary, nonreimbursable basis by the staff of local adult literacy programs" (Foster, 1990, p. 76). Job demands, lack of career paths, and minimal support from administrators contribute to a high turn over in the field. Mezirow, Darkenwald, and Knox (1975) reported half of the instructors in their study had been teaching ABE for less than two years.

The Programs

ABE classes are available in all states, serving a variety of adults through a mixture of classes, drop-in centers, and tutoring programs. In an extensive study of ABE programs in the United States, Mezirow, Darkenwald, and Knox (1975) documented a vast

array of programs, but found a general lack of coordination and accountability. The published results of this study, Last Gamble on Education, described a situation that consistently failed to provide adequate literacy instruction to adult students.

Within ABE classes there is a wide variety of materials and techniques used, a broad range of teacher experience and formal training, and diversity of students served. Poor attendance, high attrition, and inadequate funding are common problems. Teachers feel unprepared and unsupported (Mezirow, Darkenwald, & Knox, 1975). Beder (1991) reported the "average yearly cost per student in the federal adult literacy program is a paltry \$160" (p. 75).

Traditionally classes are designed to provide students with skills to enable them to obtain a high school equivalency (GED) with a general focus on academic knowledge although this is not the expressed goal of many students who enter these programs (Reder, Walton, & Green, 1979). Workbooks and reading materials reflect a GED emphasis and rarely address the experiences, needs or culture of adult students who enter these types of programs. Workbooks at a high reading level often are written to prepare students to complete a GED diploma and have a flavor of high school textbooks. Lower level materials have graphics and text that are better suited for young children.

A single class commonly serves students over a range of skill levels. For reporting purposes, students are grouped into three categories by reading ability: Level I (grades 0 - 3), Level II (grades 4 - 6), and Level III (grades 7 and up). One ABE class may contain students at all three levels. Classes offered in urban areas are more likely to serve students at similar skill levels because of the large number of students attending any one class. The wide variety of skills and individual student needs in a single classroom, the tendency of many programs to have open registration throughout the term, and the general lack of appropriate materials prevent most ABE programs from achieving a minimal level of

success. Meager funding, inadequate staff, and insufficient research detract further from a literacy program's ability to serve adult learners effectively (Chisman, 1990).

The Politics

The political nature of literacy has been recognized since the written word was invented. Literacy skills have social, economic, and political value. Adult literacy education is more than simply teaching someone to read words. It is providing students with the skills to change themselves and their world. Fingeret (1984) explained that:

literacy education is political; it has the potential to influence the relationship between individuals, groups, and the larger society. It affects the distribution of knowledge and, therefore, the potential use of knowledge as power. It can result in individuals and groups demanding a new status in their society. Even narrowly focused, individually oriented literacy education geared solely to employment can result in increased numbers of adults demanding the right to employment opportunities that have the potential to support their continued growth and development. (p. 47)

The political aspect of adult literacy is diverse. It is reflected in the funding and support structure available to literacy programs at the federal, state and local level. It is reflected in the portion of the general population which is undereducated. It is reflected in the rhetoric political leaders and administrators use to address the problem. And it is reflected in the self-concept of students in literacy classes. To understand the dynamics of adult literacy education within one classroom, it is necessary to recognize the political implications of literacy in the larger community. Levine (1982) describes this as "social practice, the history and character of which necessarily reflect the prevailing political and structural realities" (p. 263).

Literacy education is not an individual activity which only involves the acquisition of discrete skills by a student as provided by a teacher or tutor. Rather it entails the need to recognize social issues, identify community concerns, and utilize the mature experiences of the adult students (Fingeret, 1984; Kazemek, 1988)

These three components: people, programs, and politics shaped the content of this study. Within this context, the results of the research identified effective instructional practices that serve the educational needs of adult literacy students. These practices need to be relevant to the situational and dispositional circumstances of learners and teachers and, within recognized program constraints, maximize the utilization of available resources and foster awareness of the political nature of literacy among participants.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The descriptive case studies of ABE classes at two urban community colleges examined curricula, instructional techniques and materials, attendance patterns, academic achievement, student perceptions, and teachers' philosophies. The primary research question was: What instructional practices are recognized by students and teachers as facilitating learning in adult literacy classes?

Four secondary questions were central to this study:

- How are literacy skills defined in the classes?
- What instructional practices are used to help students succeed in achieving their goals?
- Is there a difference in students' perception of their learning in the classes?
- Which classes are effective in providing adult students with a successful experience in broadening their literacy skills?

To address these questions, the author used participant observation, interviewing, documentary materials, written questionnaires, and a reflexive journal. This combination

of research methods captured the various aspects of adult literacy education as applied in these classes. It allowed for a rigorous investigation using multiple sources of information.

The basic questions for the study and the methods used to collect data are described below in more detail. The qualitative data gathered using interviews and participant observation gave shape to the inquiry which was further defined with an analysis of documents and quantitative data.

Question 1. How are literacy skills defined in the classes?

This question required an examination of the definitions, goals, and assessment used in the ABE classes. In these classes, teachers and students are involved in the acquisition of literacy skills. What are these skills and who names them? Is there reflection or reassessment of student goals throughout the student's participation in the program? What quantitative methods are used to assess students' progress? Are there other methods in place to assess students or to provide indications of their progress?

Question 2. What instructional practices are used to help students succeed in achieving their goals?

Having defined the skills focused on in each class through the first question, the second explored the techniques, methods, and materials used. After a student's goals are defined, what teaching and learning strategies facilitate achievement of these goals? This question allowed for a thorough investigation of the way literacy is understood in both programs and how success is measured. It provided a description of the process students and teachers are involved in within the context of the literacy class.

Question 3. Is there a difference in students' perception of their learning in the classes?

Once the context and process of literacy education in each class is established, a comparative analysis can indicate differences in students' perceptions of learning. Within the scope of this question are considerations of self-directed learning, self-concept, and

generalization of skills. It also allows for consideration of participatory practices within each of the programs.

Question 4. Which classes are effective in providing adult students with a successful experience in broadening their literacy skills?

Students and teachers defined goals and objectives throughout the research process. Using these criteria and other quantitative data, the analysis evaluated effectiveness which was determined by whether students were successful in achieving their learning objectives. Other variables used to describe a class's effectiveness are retention, class participation, and reading achievement.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study was done within the methodological framework developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967). Their strategy was useful in this type of investigation where inductive analysis of similar groups leads to the development of theory. Gathering data in a variety of ways allowed for the construction of relationships and generalizations which were analyzed within the context of the study. The concepts from the analysis were used to identify effective instructional practices. Theories applicable to classroom practice and implications for further research in the area of adult literacy education resulted from the study.

Ethnographic techniques, which allowed the author and participants to work together in identifying crucial issues in literacy education were valuable in this type of research. Smith (1986), in an outline of principles for research, cautioned that only the "participants in an activity can solve their problems or even determine what they are" (p. 58). Both students and teachers in a literacy class are amply qualified to be an integral part of the investigation. Boomer (1987) described research conducted in this manner as a

"deliberate, group or personally owned and conducted, solution-oriented investigation" (p. 8). The questions that began this study were best answered from within the milieu of the literacy classroom, in the voices of students and teachers.

As a teacher-researcher in the field of adult literacy, the author was familiar with these voices. Smith-Burke (1987) recommended in her excellent study of literacy program participants, that a trusting relationship with the researcher is essential in obtaining useful data in this field. The same point has been made by others who recognized the complexities of working with adults in literacy programs (Boraks, 1979; Fingeret, 1984; Neilsen, 1989). The experience the author as an adult educator brought to this study facilitated the collaborative aspect of classroom observation and interviews with students and teachers. The value of ethnographic, school-based research was described by Hitchcock and Hughes (1989) as helping to:

bridge the gap between pure, academic research and the everyday realities of teaching. This approach and the techniques which accompany it are clearly amenable to use by teachers themselves, are best suited to the particular needs of the teacher researcher, and are capable of delivering valid knowledge of school and classroom processes. (p. 35)

LIMITATIONS

The difficulties of conducting adult literacy research are noted in various studies (Boraks, 1981; Darkenwald & Valentine, 1985; Smith-Burke, 1987). The wariness of students and high attrition rates in adult literacy classes often hamper researchers from gathering reliable data. Boraks (1988) claimed there are "few educational contexts as difficult to evaluate" (p. 74). Aware of these general limitations in adult literacy education research, more particular limitations also existed for this study.

As a teacher-researcher, the author taught in one of the programs used in this study. Her familiarity with the procedures and language of adult literacy education facilitated her work with teachers and students in both programs throughout this research project. Her experience in the field and desire to understand effective practices were the impetus for developing the original research questions. Yet this same role presented limitations. Lofland and Lofland (1984) described this situation as having an "insider's advantage" which creates the need to distance oneself in order to ask questions and hear answers.

It is possible to be an "insider" and, with proper awareness, conduct qualitative research that is meaningful in the larger context. Concepts from phenomenological research provided an approach for recognizing personal bias. Husserl (1973) described the process of suspending or "bracketing" any part of the investigated phenomenon which were secondary or transcendent. Stanage (1987) elaborated the idea of bracketing as putting aside any knowledge obtained elsewhere, i.e., outside of the investigation such as subjective views. This is not to imply that the author should attempt to ignore personal values, but to recognize and give account of their impact on the investigation. Lincoln and Guba (1985) believed that:

To the extent to which the inquirer's personal values, the axioms undergirding the guiding substantive theory, the axioms underlying the guiding methodological paradigm, and the values underlying the context are all consistent and reinforcing, inquiry can proceed meaningfully and will produce findings and interpretations that are agreeable from all perspectives. (p. 178)

Two questions may be raised concerning the author conducting research in a class she taught and classes in a separate program. The first questions the possibility of a teacher conducting valid research in her own classroom. The second questions the ability to objectively describe both programs. The first issue has been addressed by other studies conducted in similar situations. This type of research is becoming recognized in the literature as "teacher research" or "action research" (Carr & Kemmis, 1986; Goswami &

Stillman, 1987; Hitchcock & Hughes, 1989). The teacher-researcher who establishes sound procedures of naturalistic inquiry can safeguard against unreliable data collection and analysis (Guba, 1978). During the collection of data, observation, and interviewing in her classroom, the author assumed the singular role of researcher. She removed herself from teaching duties to allow her attention to be focused on the investigation. Other protective strategies used were triangulation and participant review.

The second concern is addressed in a similar way. The desire to do a qualitative study of instructional practices in adult literacy classes was not motivated by any need to substantiate an established theory or to judge one program better than another. The purpose of the study was to identify methods recognized as effective by teachers and students in adult literacy education. This was accomplished by comparing and contrasting methods used in all the classes with a research design that was supportive and inclusive of students and staff in both programs. The aim of the study, done in this manner, was to:

develop theories of educational practice that are rooted in concrete experiences and situations of practitioners and that attempt to confront and resolve the educational problems to which these experiences and situations give rise. (Carr & Kemmis, 1986, p. 118)

The descriptive case studies used qualitative and quantitative data collected from interviews, participant observation, written questionnaires, teacher journals, instructional materials, and class records for attendance, retention, and skill assessment. Assessing reading ability among adult low-level readers is difficult and few assessment instruments are available for this student population (Boraks, 1981). Another limitation for this study was comparing data from classes that used different methods for tracking students' progress. In most classes, no assessment documentation was available.

The limitations inherent in comparing quantitative data on literacy student achievement at two community colleges were part of the rationale for conducting qualitative research in this area of adult education. The opportunity to interview teachers and students

provided the author with data that compensated for the lack of standardized test scores and written records. Descriptions by participants provided information concerning student achievement that were useful in addressing the research questions.

By using multiple research techniques and participatory involvement, the limitations of this type of research were minimized. Biases in the role of the researcher were partially balanced by the richness of the information collected. It was impossible to remove bias, but its existence was accounted for throughout the description of this study (Gitlin, 1990).

SUMMARY

The study was designed to describe the instructional methods and educational settings in adult literacy classes at two urban community colleges. Data were collected from teachers and students in six classes using various methods. The information gathered through this study led to a description of effective instructional practices, making a contribution to the development of theories applicable to adult literacy instruction, and developing criteria useful in evaluating literacy classes.

Freire (1970a) believed "the adult literacy process demands among teachers and students a relationship of authentic dialogue" (p. 212). The design of the study allowed the author, students, and teachers an opportunity to participate in this dialogue with meaningful results. The validity of this type of research design is measured by the degree to which teachers and students are able to "fully participate in the decision making process; examine their beliefs, actions, and the school context; and make changes based on this understanding" (Gitlin, 1990, p. 446).

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The literature review covers three major areas: the development of Adult Basic Education programs, adult literacy, and adult learning. Understanding what has been done in these areas provides a foundation for defining literacy as it is understood in the context of this study and establishes a baseline for describing ABE programs. Finally, it enables the development of criteria for comparing instructional practices in adult literacy classes.

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

How adult literacy is viewed at any time and place will impact the educational practices used, resources that are available, and the research and development that occurs in the field. Freire (1970a) observed that "every educational practice implies a concept of man and the world" (p. 205). How literacy is defined and the practices used in literacy education are an indication of a society's value of literacy.

A significant literacy movement did not begin in the United States until waves of new immigrants arrived in the early 1890s. An attempt to assimilate this population resulted in programs for reading, writing, and English instruction in urban areas. Often classes experienced low attendance and high attrition (Cook, 1977). Results from investigative studies at the time did little to change the instructional practices used. The

purpose of these classes was not to enhance the individual's general knowledge, but to produce better employees and citizens, and to facilitate assimilation of immigrants into the dominant culture. In 1896, literacy was suggested as a requirement for naturalization and passed by Congress in 1917 (Cook, 1977; Knowles, 1977). Verner (1973), in assessing reasons for public interest in literacy, noted that "illiteracy has been the scapegoat for other social ills associated with it, but rather than attack the basic maladjustment of society, illiteracy has been the perennial target" (p. 9).

Throughout the early part of the 20th century, literacy was defined by the U. S. Census Bureau as the ability to sign one's name and read a simple sentence. During national crises, more serious standards were often established for adult literacy skills. Literacy testing was developed during World War I. When Army recruits were assessed to determine basic literacy skills, 25% of the men were unable to write a letter or read a newspaper (Cook, 1977).

The task of signing one's name was no longer accepted as an indication of sufficient literacy skills. A sense of nationalism and the need for an educated military during this period brought a greater focus on the problem of adult illiteracy. The armed forces and local governments increased efforts to raise the level of literacy skills. The Bureau of Education predicted in 1913 that "adult illiteracy in the United States is doomed. A few more years and there will not be a vestige of it left" (as cited in Cook, 1977, p. 21). Unfortunately funding and educational coordination were insufficient to realize this hope.

A National Illiteracy Crusade in 1924, and other federal policies from the same period, did little to address the problem of adult illiteracy. Programs were underfunded and lacked materials and resources. During the Depression, funds from many literacy programs were transferred to other social service agencies. Illiteracy, while not eradicated, once again became a non-issue.

At the beginning of World War II, literacy standards were again raised. The U. S. Census Bureau in 1940, defined a literate person as anyone "14 years of age or older who has completed 5 or more years of school" (as cited in Newman & Beverstock, 1990, p. 33). The Army required a literacy level that was based on years of schooling. These higher standards prevented so many people from entering military service, however, that in June 1943 an order permitted persons to enlist who passed an intelligence test regardless of their literacy skills (Cook, 1977).

After World War II, international concerns about adult literacy created a different definition, couched not in terms of schooling, but dependent on skills which enabled a person to function within his or her community. This definition acknowledged the role of literacy skills within the social context. In 1962, UNESCO defined a functionally literate person as someone who has:

acquired the essential knowledge and skills which enable him to engage in all those activities in which literacy is required for effective functioning of his group and community and whose attainments in reading, writing, and arithmetic make it possible for him to continue these skills toward his own and the community's development. (Hunter & Harman, 1979, p. 14)

For many years, illiteracy was thought of as a deficiency that prevented a person from functioning effectively as a contributing member of the larger society. The new focus of the UNESCO report represented an important change as literacy skills were defined within the context of one's community. Literacy was not a single standard for all citizens, but were those skills deemed necessary within a particular community. Although this definition was not immediately reflected in federal and state legislation, it became evident in the curriculum used by various programs. Efforts were made to write materials that were more representative of adult interests and life skills (Cook, 1977).

The realities of the Cold War, the civil rights movement, and the nation's economy in the 1960s brought adult literacy again to the forefront as an issue. For the first time, federal funding became available for extensive literacy programs. In response to the

realization that many vocational programs could not train adults with low literacy skills, Congress passed an amendment to the Manpower Development and Training Act of 1962 that provided adult basic education. In 1964, the first public law allocating funds for adult literacy passed. The Adult Basic Education program was included as Title IIB under the Economic Opportunity Act. This program was later placed under the U. S. Office of Education with the Adult Education Act of 1966 (Knowles, 1977).

In a 1979 study sponsored by the Ford Foundation, Hunter and Harman defined literacy to include personal competence and:

the possession of skills perceived as necessary by particular persons and groups to fulfill their self-determined objectives as family and community members, citizens, consumers, job-holders, and members of social, religious or other associations of their choosing. (Hunter & Harman, 1979, p. 7)

This definition conceives of literacy in a broader context and recognizes application of literacy skills, but does not provide criteria for exact measurement which is necessary for most government programs. Standardized levels of literacy skills are often required by program administrators and policymakers for funding purposes. Attempts to develop such criteria lead to controversy over assessment methods and selection of those literacy skills considered necessary for everyday life (Quigley, 1990).

In 1983, then Secretary of Education, T. H. Bell, announced an Adult Literacy Initiative (Reder & Green, 1985). Once again the federal government called attention to a growing adult literacy problem. Bell urged national coordination, an increased volunteer effort, and additional revenues to combat illiteracy, although his program lacked funding for research or development. Seven years later, Chisman and Associates (1990) concluded that the problems remained, and the situation had become more desperate with "weak public programs and insufficient voluntary efforts" (p. 10).

For over one hundred years, educators and politicians have pointed to an illiteracy problem in the United States. Campaigns were mounted, new definitions created, but the

situation persists. The Office of Vocational and Adult Education reported that since 1976, federal spending on adult basic education decreased by 13 percent while state spending has increased 221 percent in constant dollars (Pugsley, 1985). In the same year that report was published, Lerche (1985) noted that:

Forty percent of adults with annual incomes under \$5,000 are functionally illiterate. Yearly costs in welfare programs and unemployment compensation are estimated at six billion dollars. Further it is estimated that functional illiterates constitute sixty percent of the prison population and eighty-five percent of the youngsters who appear in juvenile courts. (p. 1)

In July 1991, President George Bush signed into law the National Literacy Act. The act contained another definition of literacy and another agenda for solving the problem. Even as the number of those considered illiterate grows, debates continue on funding and program management, and the complex problems facing educators in this field remain unsolved.

To point to the ineffective actions of the past and do nothing more is futile. In Illiterate America, Kozol (1985) challenged educators "to recite the past, find where we have faltered, recognize that we may falter once again, but still persist in search of a more hopeful consummation than experience allows us to expect" (p. 199). The dismal history of adult literacy education in the United States can provide lessons and background to strengthen the efforts of educators and policymakers today.

ADULT LITERACY EDUCATION THEORY AND RESEARCH

Three aspects of theory and research in adult literacy education will be reviewed in this section: defining and measuring literacy, adult literacy students, and the educational setting and instructional practices in literacy classes. Organizing a review of the literature in this manner establishes guidelines for the study and provides cohesion in a body of

knowledge that is aptly described by Hayes (1989) as "a disconcerting array of divergent methodologies and perspectives" (p. 12)

Defining and Measuring Literacy

As noted in the historical overview, defining adult literacy has been a continual challenge. As a result, measuring levels of literacy or isolating literacy skills is difficult (Reder, Walton, & Green, 1979). Definitions of literacy have gone through transformations from the basic skill of writing one's name to more generalized social competence. Fingeret (1984), in addressing the issue, found that "literacy is a shifting and abstract term, impossible to define in isolation from a specific time, place, and culture; literacy, therefore, is described as historically and culturally relative" (p. 9). Hunter and Harman (1979) also concluded that definitions of literacy are necessarily relative. In the summary for her historical account of adult literacy education, Cook (1977) wrote:

the definition must be demanding enough to allow a person to function comfortably in today's society and yet realistic enough to be achieved by most people. It must be a flexible definition which allows for change as society changes and makes different demands on its people. It may make use of grade level, life related tasks, performance on literacy tests, or any combination of these factors. (pp. 120-121)

Cervero (1985) argued that a common operational definition limits the services available in literacy classes. By specifying particular technical skills, literacy classes restrict the content and purpose of their instruction. But defining literacy in a relative way or a flexible manner does not serve the purpose of administrators or educators who often need an operational definition to evaluate programs or assess student progress.

A definition of literacy must recognize the historical and social context of the learner, provide sufficient operational specifications for program content and evaluation, and acknowledge the values contained in any delineation of skills. Dauzat and Dauzat (1977) captured these three aspects of literacy in their definition which included: 1) a

continuum of skills that changes in response to changes in the individual and the world, 2) language skills that include communicating ideas, influencing the community and coping with change, and 3) an awareness of social, economic and political constraints.

The ephemeral nature of literacy definitions has made formal assessment of literacy skills by educators challenging. Just as definitions have changed over time, methods for assessing literacy skills have also changed. Formal methods have included grade level completion, criterion-referenced instruments, and standardized tests; the latter often modified from tests designed for children (Fingeret, 1984; Fingeret & Jurmo, 1985). A study conducted by the National Adult Literacy Project found most large ABE programs used standardized tests such as the Test of Adult Basic Education, the Wide Range Achievement Test, and the Stanford Diagnostic Reading Test (Lerche, 1985).

Fisher (1977) indicated several limitations for these types of standardized tests, such as fatigue during test taking or test items that do not reflect actual life skill tasks. Other reports had similar findings (Kirsch & Guthrie, 1977; Wolfe, 1989). Smith-Burke (1987) found cultural biases in many standardized tests used for literacy assessment. She pointed out that these tests ignore "areas of knowledge and skills which those who designed the tests have implicitly or explicitly deemed unimportant or inappropriate" (p. 5).

Recent developments and research in the use of learner-centered assessment have recognized advantages in using a learner-centered model in adult literacy education. Lytle, Belzer, Schultz, and Vannozzi (1989) defined this assessment process as involving the adult students in examining their relation to learning and literacy. Studies conducted in programs using this method indicate it is a rich source of data on students' ability and progress. Record keeping and reporting methods need to be further refined to insure efficient program documentation for classes using learner-centered assessment (Wolfe, 1989).

Bowren (1987) outlined the need for assessment methods that recognize developmental and experiential differences of adults and involve them in the assessment activity. Thistlethwaite (1986) developed one type of learner-centered assessment utilizing interviews, informal sorts, and cooperative planning that allows the teacher and student to assess and formulate a learning plan together.

Assessment and measurement of literacy skills should avoid being a process that limits adult learners or labels deficiencies. It can be a process for involving the learner as an active participant in understanding learning needs and defining goals in a self-directed manner. ABE students included in this research study were given an opportunity to examine their learning objectives and express ideas for defining literacy skills within the context of a formal educational setting.

Adult Literacy Students

An understanding of the people who participate as students in adult literacy classes is necessary to develop appropriate instructional methods and education policy. After an extensive search of the literature written between 1975 and 1985, Darkenwald (1986) concluded that only a small percentage of published articles on this subject qualified as research. Most published materials are informal reports that do not contain applicable findings or help establish a firm research base (Smith-Burke, 1987). There is a need for more rigorous studies to better understand the needs and goals of adult literacy students.

Following their comprehensive study, Mezirow, Darkenwald, and Knox (1975) gave a composite view of literacy students as people who live in an urban area, are "young to middle-aged, poor, and employed as unskilled or semiskilled laborers or service workers" (p.39). Although many literacy students do not fit this description, there is a substantial overlap between undereducated adults and other groups such as ethnic minorities, the poor, and the unemployed (G. Allan Roehrer Institute, 1990; Hunter &

Harman, 1979). Adults with low literacy skills are not a homogeneous group, but are a broad cross-section of the American population (Fingeret, 1983; Reder & Green, 1985). A look at an urban ABE class would show men and women, young and old, people with mixed skills and a broad range of goals. Students enrolled in ABE programs are more likely to be higher level readers, reading above a 4th grade level who are "socialized to middle-class norms and school practice" (Mezirow, Darkenwald, & Knox, 1975, p. 54). Excluding the least literate students and those with different cultural values appeals to programs which often measure success by attendance patterns and achievement scores alone. This study was designed to include students who were lower level readers to better understand a group who has often been ignored in other studies.

Quantitative data give a general frame for literacy programs participation. The Office of Vocational and Adult Education reports that 2.8 million people participated in programs in 1985, more than half were women, and 31 percent left programs before completion (Pugsley, 1987). These figures present a vague picture when terms like "completion" and "participation" remain poorly defined (Bagnall, 1989).

Although economic and social characteristics of literacy students have not dramatically changed over the last two decades, the perception of this group has changed in the mass media (Fingeret, 1990). Literacy campaigns and more active participation by students in programs and on advisory boards have altered old stereotypes. Still, many characteristics of the adult literacy student population remain hidden due to insufficient research and the complexity of issues. Hunter and Harman (1979) commented that:

those of us who prepare studies about disadvantaged people run the risk of perpetuating stereotypes. We tend to simplify complex lives into cases to be analyzed, or problems that need solutions, or statistics to be studied. This tendency, and our inability to interpret with understanding the first-hand information that people give us about their aspirations and their lives, are serious blind spots. (p. 55)

As more students become active participants in the educational dialogue, their characteristics, needs, and aspirations are better understood. Qualitative studies done in this field will augment those voices and inform the practice of literacy educators and policymakers.

Educational Settings and Instructional Practices

ABE programs are set up in a variety of ways: classes, drop-in centers or learning labs, and tutoring programs. State offices control the distribution and allocation of funds to agencies that provide these programs. In Washington and Oregon, community colleges are the major institutions that coordinate Adult Basic Education programs.

Most research on ABE programs describes individual programs with little generalization to instructional theory (Hunter & Harman, 1979). Larger studies are mostly descriptive and do not provide the practitioner with well-tested innovations. The study by Mezirow, Darkenwald, & Knox (1975) surveyed 1,900 ABE teachers. They concluded that ABE classes appear different from most other formal education settings in that students arrive randomly throughout the class period, behavior such as sleeping or chatting is accepted if it is not disruptive, and students can enroll throughout the course of the term. Hunter and Harman (1979) described a typical ABE class as "taught in traditional elementary teaching styles" (p. 68). Drill and practice and rote memorization are standard instructional practices. Published materials include workbooks, some initially designed for children, and others that poorly reflect the cultural experiences or background knowledge of the student population. Teacher- or student-generated materials are shown to produce better results, although teachers often do not have time or resources necessary to develop these types of materials (Harman, 1974).

Padak and Padak (1987) described the difficulty in generalizing practices of ABE programs when there is such diversity among programs. Programs are offered in a variety

of settings (colleges, libraries, high schools, church basements) with staff who vary greatly in professional training and status (full-time, part-time, paid tutors, volunteer tutors). Students come to these classes with a plethora of goals and instructional needs. Crandall (1984) studied 213 literacy programs and concluded that only a small percentage of those programs engaged in student evaluation. Boraks (1988) found that teachers placed more emphasis on attendance than on student achievement.

Attendance and persistence is a common concern in most programs (Boraks, 1979; Hunter & Harman, 1979; Mezirow, Darkenwald, & Knox, 1975). A survey in Virginia found 90 percent of students dropped out of ABE programs before 99 hours of instruction (Boraks, 1979). Reviewing various studies on attendance in ABE classes, Balmuth (1986) concluded that:

the high rate of absenteeism in ABE is taken to be a fact of life, although an embarrassing and destructive one. . . A class could have an enrollment of 20 but only 2 or 3 in attendance. (p. 58)

Problems of attendance and persistence in ABE classes are generally recognized, although research is sparse on this subject. Support services available to literacy students, such as job counseling or social service advocacy, would help many students continue in their programs. Unfortunately, this is a luxury unavailable in most programs (Mezirow, Darkenwald, & Knox, 1975).

Lerche (1979) reported from the National Adult Literacy Project study that "the most consistently successful programs are those that structure and systematize their instructional design. . . Further, these programs individualize instructional plans to reflect learner strengths and to address learner deficiencies" (p. 101-102). Mikulecky (1986) summarized another study of effective programs that integrated basic skills with life skills. Both of these studies were done using programs selected by administrators. Using teacher or student criteria for defining the success or effectiveness of programs may result in different findings.

The literature reflects the disarray and poor focus of ABE programs. Examples of effective programs exist, but little research has been done to identify particular methods or teaching strategies that contribute to program effectiveness. The diversity of students in ABE classes cannot be adequately served with one program model. What is needed is additional research that can "document a variety of organizational structures and instructional approaches that can help guide literacy practice" (Alamprese, 1990, p. 114). The purpose of this study, to identify effective practices using the criteria established by students and teachers, hopes to partially fill this gap in previous research.

ADULT LEARNING THEORY AND RESEARCH

The last thirty years have brought growth in the body of knowledge concerned with adult learning which today provides practitioners with well-founded theories, principles, and strategies. The term *andragogy* was developed to describe the "art and science of helping adults learn" (Knowles, 1970). This section of the review will examine two parts of adult learning theory: adults as learners and implications for classroom practices. Focusing on these allows for an informed application of adult learning theory to adult literacy classes.

Adults as Learners

Knowles (1970) based his premise of andragogy on four assumptions about adults as learners:

that, as a person matures, 1.) his self-concept moves from one of being a dependent personality toward one of being a self-directed human being; 2.) he accumulates a growing reservoir of experience that becomes an increasing resource for learning; 3.) his readiness to learn becomes oriented increasingly to the developmental tasks of his social role; and 4.) his time perspective changes from one of postponed application of knowledge to

immediacy of application, and accordingly his orientation toward learning shifts from one of subject-centeredness to one of problem-centeredness. (p. 39)

Knowles (1984) later added a fifth assumption concerning the adult learner's shift from reliance on external motivational sources to internal sources. Although the seminal work done by Knowles is acknowledged as recognizing distinctions between adult learners and children, other adult learning theorists have questioned his theoretical basis (Brookfield, 1986; Cross, 1981). Brookfield (1986) outlined premises from the Nottingham Andragogy Group which perceived critical thinking as an integral part of adult learning:

- Adults work best in collaborative groups
- Success comes when adults exert control over personal and social environments
- Focus of activities is determined by adults
- Adults learn best when engaged in action, reflection, and further action.

Mezirow (1991) identified the ability for critical reflection as a distinction in learning between adults and children. He also stressed that learning is shaped by cultural, sociolinguistic, and psychological factors. He described adult learning as a time when "we become able to raise questions about the paradigms upon which the principles are predicated and to engage in premise reflection" (Mezirow, 1992, p. 250).

Other distinctions of adult learners are the multiple demands and roles that typify an adult's life (Schlossberg, Lynch, & Chickering, 1989). Most adults in formal educational settings are balancing job and family responsibilities with their role of student. Tough (1970) and Aslanian and Brickell (1980) did studies to examine characteristics of adult learners. Tough (1970) reported in his research on adult learning projects that the majority of adults make deliberate efforts to learn. Learning can occur in various ways such as through a school, informally with neighbors, by oneself, or watching television. Tough concluded that adults often want to learn, but may need help identifying specific learning

goals and methods. This help can be provided in a manner that enables adults to become more self-directed in their learning, rather than maintaining dependency on "experts" (Knowles, 1984).

Aslanian and Brickell (1980) reported that 83 percent of adults in their study undertook new learning as a result of some change, and that "most adults learn in order to move out of some status they must or wish to leave and into some new status they must or wish to enter" (p. 52). What an adult decides to learn is related to this transition into a new status, but is not necessarily related to the events causing the transition. A study by Valentine (1990) of motivational factors for adults participating in ABE classes found educational advancement and self-improvement to be the two factors most highly ranked. Educational advancement included students participating as a way to re-enter the educational system. This supports Aslanian and Brickell's findings that adults learn to enter a new status.

Although there are no apparent differences in the reasons for learning among adults with different formal educational levels (Aslanian & Brickell, 1980), adults who are "hard-to-reach" may be more successful in settings less reminiscent of grade school (Brockett, 1983; Darkenwald, 1980). Hard-to-reach was defined by Darkenwald (1980) as adults who are "of low socioeconomic status, persons in their later years, and individuals who, because of physical handicaps or geographic location, are isolated from educational opportunities" (p. 1). Cameron (1981) classified these adults as "reluctant learners." Both labels, in distinct ways, identified students who are likely to be in an ABE class. Educators need to recognize these students as capable learners who may be better served with less traditional instructional approaches (Brockett, 1983; Cameron, 1981).

Implications for Classroom Practices

Three concepts of adult learning are key to classes that serve adult students: the experiential knowledge of adults, the connection between thinking and doing, and a balance of support and challenge for students. The first recognizes the abundant experiences that adults bring to any activity. Knowles (1984) pointed out that an adult's experiences define that person. If that experience is:

ignored, not valued, not made use of, it is not just the experience that is being rejected; it is the person. Hence the great importance of using experience of adult learners as a rich resource for learning. This principle is especially important when working with undereducated adults, who, after all, have little to sustain their dignity other than their experience. (p. 11)

The second, connecting thinking and doing, has been discussed in adult learning theory from Lindeman to Freire (Jarvis, 1987). Reflection and action are necessary components that can be incorporated into any curriculum (Brookfield, 1986; Knox, 1977). Learning viewed in this way is more than the acquisition of technical knowledge. It is a learning process that allows students to develop reflective skills and apply new knowledge to other areas of their lives outside of the school setting.

Daloz (1986) suggested concrete activities for adult learners that provide a combination of support and challenge. Within an adult literacy class, support can be implemented using study groups (Davis & Davis, 1987) and by endorsing the social context of the literacy class (McDermott, 1982). Challenge can be incorporated into the learning objectives in a manner that allows students to reach beyond their perceived skill level. Knox (1977) explained that adult learners feel more positive about their educational experience if educators are able to:

create settings in which adults have the freedom to explore with democratic limits both the achievement of their current academic objectives and the discovery of additional desirable objectives. Adults with a positive approach to learning are more likely to engage in an educational activity and to persist until their objectives are achieved. (p. 439)

Some studies have indicated that "hard-to-reach adults" have negative attitudes about formal educational settings (Darkenwald, 1980). Wlodkowski (1985) urged instructors to implement strategies that facilitate a positive approach to learning. Examples of his strategies are promoting a student's personal control of the subject, providing tasks that are suitable to the level of ability, and developing learning contracts. During the course of the investigation, examples of these types of practices were sought in the ABE classes as indicative of appropriate adult learning techniques.

SUMMARY

The three major areas addressed provided a foundation to define literacy as it is understood in the context of this study, established a baseline for describing ABE programs, and developed criteria for comparing instructional practices in adult literacy classes. A review of the historical development of adult literacy education in the United States, adult literacy definitions and settings, and adult learning theory produced a general picture of persistent problems in adult literacy education which may be resolved with additional research in literacy education and application of practices recommended in the adult learning literature. Ideas from this chapter are applied to the results of the study as guidelines for identifying effective practices and to better understand the educational setting of ABE classes.

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH DESIGN

GENERAL METHODS

This descriptive study comparing instructional methods and the educational practices in adult literacy classes at two urban community colleges used participant observation, interviewing, documentary materials, and collection of quantitative data. Participants in the study were adult literacy students in six classes and four ABE teachers. Data were collected over one academic term.

The research design was an inductive inquiry using an ethnographic approach. Inductive inquiry, as a research model, is a flexible design that does not limit the study to established theories or predetermined hypotheses (Merriam, 1989; Taylor & Bodgan, 1984). An ethnographic approach conducts and describes the research findings in an holistic manner. Relationships, activities, and interactions are viewed and analyzed in the natural context where the educational process occurs.

Merriam (1988) attributed two major meanings to the term *ethnography*. The first meaning includes the various techniques used in data collection such as "interviewing, documentary analysis, life history, investigator diaries, and participant observation" (Merriam, 1988, p. 23). The second meaning refers to the "sociocultural interpretation of the data" (Merriam, 1988, p. 23). This type of qualitative research was ideally suited for identifying the issues and forces in adult literacy education that affect instructional

methodology. Literacy education cannot be adequately described if it is removed from its cultural context and is, therefore, better understood using this type of research design.

The author's experience as an adult literacy teacher, familiarity with the literature in adult education, and the results of informal interviews with ABE teachers gave initial definition to the study. Descriptive case studies allowed the author to investigate similarities, differences, and results both qualitatively and quantitatively. Describing different classes delineated "generalized relations" that provided a rich source for detection of patterns and formulation of hypotheses (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

One site was a nontraditional ABE class in Portland, Oregon serving students reading at Levels I (0-3) and II (4-6), team-taught by a teacher and the author. The class was nontraditional in two aspects: the population of students served and the instructional practices applied. The class was open to nondisabled students and students with physical disabilities. The range of disabilities during Spring term included hearing impairments, orthopedic impairments, cerebral palsy, and developmental disabilities. A high percentage of students with disabilities (60%), the large class size (daily average attendance during a sample week was twenty-two students), and team instruction evolved a structure that used interactive instruction, daily schedules, and primary materials generated in the class by teachers and students. Other characteristics of this class were the extended staff (paid aides and volunteer tutors), a broad selection of subjects, and student participation in selecting and evaluating class activities.

A traditional ABE class usually does not accept students with physical disabilities, uses a learning lab structure, and provides students with published workbooks as their primary instructional material. Subjects taught are rudimentary reading, writing, and numeracy skills. Although there is broad diversity among ABE classes, this traditional model is common in Oregon and Washington community college ABE classes.

The second site included in this study was an ABE program in Seattle, Washington. This site was selected as it also served lower level students at an urban community college setting similar to the Portland site. The Seattle program had five classes included in this study: one Level I Language Arts, one Level I Math, two Level II Language Arts, and one Level II Math. Instruction for these five classes was divided among three teachers. The Level I classes had a daily average attendance of eight students. The Level II classes averaged thirteen to twenty-one students daily. There was a higher percentage of students with disabilities present in the Level I classes (46%) as compared with Level II classes (7 - 10%). Differences in the educational setting and instructional practices of each class at the Seattle site are described in more detail in Chapter 4.

All four teachers (one at the Portland site and three at the Seattle site) expressed enthusiasm at the opportunity to participate in this research in order to gain critical understanding of their practices and to enhance the dialogue between themselves and other educators and learners. In general, the author attempted to meet the criteria developed by Gitlin (1990) that research:

expands the authority to produce knowledge beyond the researcher; attempts to restructure the researcher-subject relation such that both are involved in identifying and examining beliefs, practices, and normative truths; invokes the moral claim against silencing the other in the name of research; fosters a political view of knowledge; and attempts to encourage a more collective approach to research that can mobilize groups typically left out of educational policy discourse. (Gitlin, 1990, p. 449)

SPECIFIC PROCEDURES

The author collected data in six adult literacy classes located at two urban community colleges in the Pacific Northwest. Data collection included: written questionnaires, semistructured interviews, participant observation, and documentary materials. The author also maintained a reflexive journal during the investigative process.

This type of journal is described by Lincoln and Guba (1985) as a method used for recording information about *self* and *method*, and includes daily logistics of the study, personal reflections and speculations, and a methodological log.

The written questionnaire which was completed by each of the four teachers gathered student demographic data (see Appendix A). This information was used as a common reference for the author during interviewing when a teacher described his or her class. Bogdan and Biklen (1982) urged careful consideration of quantitative data in qualitative studies, especially in educational settings where "subjects are subject to social processes and structural forces" (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982, p. 115). The number of students registered and daily attendance rates are two statistics required in many literacy programs. These figures are frequently used as criteria in the allocation of funds and were not relied upon in this study to give an accurate picture of a particular literacy class. Using these figures in conjunction with teachers' comments and the author's observations was a more accurate method for ascertaining daily attendance patterns.

Item #5 on the questionnaire asked teachers to provide a count and description of students with physical disabilities. The written responses to this item were inconsistent as teachers interpreted the statement to refer to mild to severe physical disabilities, and suspected emotional, mental, and learning disabilities within their student population. Written comments from the teachers are included in Appendix A. Although teachers undertood this item in varying ways, it did provide descriptive information on the student population in each class. The types and number of disabilities described were indicative of a trend in ABE to serve a growing number of adults with disabilities. It appears that the percentage of students with disabilities is higher in these classes than in other community college programs.

Qualitative interviewing is a method for gathering information, feelings, and opinions from a participant concerning a personal perspective on the situation or

experiences under consideration. The semistructured nature of these interviews generated comparable data from the different sites. The interview data were recorded using tape-recorders, and written field notes by the author. The audio-recordings provided a record of the verbal content of the interview and the notes a record of nonverbal responses. Data from both sources were incorporated into the reflexive journal. Typed transcripts of the audio-recordings were made for the final analysis.

Participant observation is a research method that "involves social interaction between the researcher and the informants in the milieu of the latter, during which data are systematically and unobtrusively collected" (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984, p. 15). The author observed each class on a minimum of three occasions for elements of setting and participants' activities and interactions. Observation periods lasted from thirty to fifty minutes. The results of these observations were recorded in written field notes by the author. Observations made in the Portland class were during periods when the author was relieved of her teaching duties by another teacher who was familiar with the class and students. As the Portland class was team taught and used other supportive staff, this arrangement did not seem to disrupt or alter the type of instruction. Being relieved of teaching duties during these periods provided the author with an observation experience similar to the classroom visits in Seattle. At both sites, the author was available outside of the classes for informal conversations with students, teachers, and staff.

Documents gathered for this study included student writings, attendance records, assessment results, instructional materials, and teacher journals. The limitations of using documents in qualitative research require that they not be used in isolation (Burgess, 1982). Information from the documents was analyzed in comparison with data collected from other sources. Data from documents were useful in theory building especially in comparative analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The use of documents in this study supported data collected in interviews and observations. An advantage of documentary data is the

independent nature of the source. It is not the product of an interactive process such as interviewing but is created independently of the researcher (Merriam, 1988).

At the beginning of the study, all four teachers were offered notebooks that could be used for recording their ideas or comments regarding the research. Three teachers took notebooks, but only one wrote and returned her notebook at the end of the study.

RESEARCH POPULATION

There were two major groups of participants in the study: literacy students and ABE teachers. Descriptive data gathered on students included: age, gender, ethnic representation, types of disabilities, and educational background. The student interviews provided additional data on students' educational experiences, goals, and views.

Data gathered from ABE teachers included gender, ethnic representation, length of time in profession, and employment status. Additional information on their educational background, teaching experiences, and personal history was collected during the course of the study.

More extensive descriptions of programs, classes, and teachers are presented in Chapter 4 to provide a thorough description of the cases studied.

INSTRUMENTATION

The instrumentation for the study consisted of one written questionnaire and four guides for semistructured interviews. The questionnaire was designed to collect basic demographic data on the individual classes. It was used initially to assess the comparability of classes and to provide reference in the analysis of educational needs. Teachers completed a written questionnaire for each class they taught.

The interview guides were designed to provide structure and standardization for interviews with research participants. Three guides were used with teachers and one with students (see Appendix B). Taylor and Bogdan (1984) described an interview guide as "a list of general areas to cover with each informant" (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984, p. 92). It presupposes knowledge on the part of the researcher of the situation under consideration. The three interview guides used with teachers were developed and augmented following preliminary interviews with ABE teachers in a pilot study. Two of the guides explored areas of instructional practice. The third examined the training, experience, and values that individual teachers brought to the classroom.

The student interview guide provided a format for gathering information from students concerning their lives, educational experiences, and observations of literacy education practices. Students were interviewed on a voluntary basis. The format for student interviews was designed to acknowledge their right to participate in the research not as subjects but as partners in the dialogical process (Messer-Davidow, 1985; Shor, 1980). Individual as well as group interviews were conducted with some students in all of the classes.

DATA COLLECTION

Data were collected during one academic term (ten weeks) in Spring 1992. There was an introductory meeting at each site between the author, the program director, and the ABE teacher(s) to provide information concerning the study and to acquire basic student demographic data on the adult literacy classes. These meetings were an opportunity for the author to establish rapport with the teachers and to enable the teachers to recognize their collaborative role in the proposed study. Results of these meetings and analysis of the demographic information determined the final selection of classes at the Seattle site that

most closely reflected the basic skill level of the Portland class. All the teachers agreed to participate in the study.

The teachers to be included in the study were notified by a telephone call and a follow-up letter that established a date for the initial teacher interview and class observation. A list of suggested materials for the teacher to have available for the meeting was included with the letter.

The first formal visit to each adult literacy class had three objectives: to introduce the author to the students, to interview the teacher concerning the class set-up, and to observe the class environment. Class environment included the physical layout of the classroom, the structure of class time, and interactions between students and teachers.

Introducing the author to the students and explaining the nature of the research project invited these adult learners to be active participants in the study. Fingeret (1988) pointed out that usually these adults are "not viewed as having an active role in creating programs to meet their needs, but rather as passive recipients" (p. 3). Thus it was important to recognize their value in collaborative efforts and not delegate them to the role of subject. Literacy students can be encouraged to become more involved in seeking answers to educational issues that impact their lives. As participants in this study, they were able to provide valuable insights and perspectives. It also gave them an opportunity to raise questions and address implications of practices in adult literacy education.

The interviews with the teachers employed a semistructured interview format and were an opportunity for the author and each teacher to examine materials used in class organization. The interviews were audio-recorded and samples of instructional materials were collected for later analysis. This first set of interviews covered five general topics: student intake process, student goal setting, classroom environment, class structure, and classroom staff.

A second visit to each site was arranged approximately three weeks after the first. Different week days were selected to give more perspective on each of the classes as attendance patterns and instructional schedules varied throughout the week. The objectives for this visit were to: interview teachers concerning instructional strategies, collect samples of instructional materials, begin interviewing students, and observe instructional techniques used in the classes.

An additional visit to each site was scheduled during the final week of the term. At that time, a third semistructured interview with each teacher and more student interviews were conducted as well as additional observations made. The author spent additional time in classes or with participants when necessary for clarification or for data collection. Enough time was spent at each site to develop a comprehensive description of instructional practices through interviews, observations, and the collection of documentary materials. Multiple visits allowed the author to present informal analysis of the data to teachers and students for their views on her preliminary findings.

TREATMENT OF THE DATA

In qualitative research, the analysis of data is a continuing process. The questions asked in interviews, the activities noted in observations, and the selection of materials collected were shaped at each step of the study by previous results and systematic focusing (Merriam, 1988). The analysis was a reflective process and one that involved the continual organization and synthesizing of data, a search for patterns, and verification and generation of theories.

A portion of the analysis was done concurrently with the data collection. This reflects the methodological framework developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) that comparative analysis is ". . .an ever-developing entity, not a perfected product" (p. 32).

Additional analysis occurred when the data collection was completed and all materials gathered. Hitchcock and Hughes (1989) described the distinctions in these two types of analysis as informal and formal. Informal analysis was done during the data collection process, while formal analysis occurred once the fieldwork was completed. At that point, data were coded and categories identified in a process that allowed for the further development of generalizations and theories.

Sorting data and noting patterns led to the development of categories which were a more conceptual way of understanding the data. Categories were indicated by the data but were not necessarily limited to data collected (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The procedures for coding, developing categories, and generating theory are nonlinear. There is movement and verification as categories are developed, elaborated, and refined. As categories are the conceptual level beyond raw data, the generation of inferences and theories is the next level beyond categories in qualitative analysis (Merriam, 1988). This entire process is one of moving from the concrete to the abstract and results in theory grounded in the data that captures the essence of the given research context. Guba and Lincoln (1981) developed guidelines for the creation of a set of categories that includes "a minimum of unassignable data items, as well as relative freedom from ambiguity of classification" (p. 96).

Strategies used to ensure internal validity in this study were: triangulation, peer examination, participant review, and clarification of the author's biases. Triangulation is the use of various methods to insure the credibility of data. An example of how this strategy was used is in students' evaluation of classes. Individual interviews, group interviews, and written evaluations (completed by students anonymously) were used to collect data describing perceptions students had at the end of the term. Using different perspectives around a single concept added depth to the analysis and explained the phenomena in a more comprehensive manner.

The peer examination process involved colleagues in collaborative data analysis and review of findings. ABE teachers from both community colleges and also university personnel were asked to comment on content analysis throughout the process. Participant review involved literacy students and ABE teachers as active partners in the research dialogue. Their ideas and opinions were used in determining the direction of the study and in evaluating conclusions throughout the process.

The author's biases are noted when applicable to provide readers with a factual account of the study. The role of the author cannot be separated from the research in a qualitative study, but the process can be reported and analyzed in a manner that clarifies her position.

In qualitative research, the emphasis is on validity as it is difficult to achieve a high standard of reliability in this type of research design (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984). Replication of a study such as this is not entirely possible. The rigor of the investigation is reflected in the accuracy and fit of the results to the context being investigated. Although it would be difficult to replicate this study because of the unique characteristics of the participants and viewpoint of the researcher, this does not imply that the results cannot be generalized. It is anticipated that the instructional practices and criteria identified as a result of this study will be valuable to other adult literacy programs.

SUMMARY

The author's experiences in adult literacy education, a review of the literature, and informal interviews with ABE teachers gave initial definition to this study. The qualitative research design offered techniques and an holistic approach that were necessary to create a clear and meaningful description of effective instructional practices in adult literacy classes.

A multi-method plan for data collection utilized interviewing, participant observation, document analysis, quantitative data, and a reflexive journal.

The design involved literacy students and ABE teachers as participants and partners in the research to aid in the identification of effective practices, and to provide an opportunity for both groups to benefit from the research process and become active in educational policy discourse. The validity and reliability of the study are accounted for in the research design by the use of multiple methods and a clear description of how the study was conducted.

The framework of grounded theory developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) provided a suitable foundation for conducting this type of research. Descriptive case studies of literacy classes produced evidence for the generation of theories applicable in this type of educational setting and not constrained by predetermined hypotheses.

CHAPTER IV

CASE STUDY DESCRIPTIONS

The context for instructional practice in an adult literacy program is determined by the environment and by the people involved in the educational process. This chapter, providing descriptions of the programs, classes, and teachers, illustrates the types of materials and instructional practices used in the classes examined. Describing individual components facilitates the process of analysis in subsequent chapters. Patton (1983) explained the value for using this type of narrative in qualitative studies when he wrote that it allows:

the reader to enter into the situation described on its own terms. At a later point in analysis it is possible to compare and contrast cases, but initially each case must be represented and understood as an idiosyncratic and unique phenomenon. (p. 304)

THE PROGRAMS

Seattle Central Community College

Seattle Central Community College (SCCC) is part of the Seattle Community College District which is comprised of three other institutions: South Seattle Community College, North Seattle Community College, and Seattle Vocational Institute. During the 1991-92 academic year, SCCC had an annual student headcount of 7,214. The average student age was 30.5 years. People of color represented 39.8% of the total student body.

Twenty-three percent of SCCC's students were enrolled in the Basic Studies Department during Winter 1991 term. The Basic Studies Department included ABE, GED Preparation, and English as a Second Language (ESL). The department was administered by a single director who had the responsibility for hiring and staff management, budgetary design, and final approval of curricular changes and material selection. Her office was at the main campus of SCCC where the majority of the ABE staff taught.

The ABE instructional staff was composed of three full-time and six part-time instructors. The director reported that the ABE staff was fairly stable which she attributed to a strong bargaining unit. Part-time instructors who worked at least a 0.5 load were eligible for benefits. Staff development was available through in-services provided by the SCCC Basic Studies Department, and workshops and summer institutes offered by the state of Washington. The criteria the director used for selection of new instructors was a Masters degree and experience working with adult learners. When hiring part-time instructors, work experience was sometimes given more weight than a degree.

The director spoke well of her staff and was enthusiastic about their participation in this research project. As a director for a program serving an urban population, she was concerned with the growing number of adults seeking educational services and their diverse needs. The department anticipated an increase in the number of students with disabilities and was seeking ways to address this challenge.

Portland Community College

Portland Community College (PCC) is a public institution comprised of three campuses (Cascade, Rock Creek, and Sylvania) and five service sites (Forest Grove Center, Newberg Center, Ross Island Center, Southeast Center, and St. Helens Center). The total student headcount for the 1990-91 academic year was 83,445. The average age of students was 35.9 years. People of color were 16.2% of the total student body.

Eleven percent of the college's FTE students were enrolled in basic studies courses in the 1990-91 year. Adult Basic Education, GED Preparation, and ESL were included in one department administered by a division dean. The daily operations of instruction and scheduling were managed by department chairs in each of the three major areas: ABE, GED, and ESL. The department chairs, who were full-time faculty members, reported to the division dean and were responsible for monitoring the budget, interviewing potential instructors, serving on college committees, and representing the department on state advisory boards. The offices of the division dean and the ABE chair were located at Southeast Center. ABE classes were held at all three PCC campuses, five service sites, as well as a number of off-campus locations.

There were thirty-six ABE instructors in the department; six were full-time and 30 part-time. All full-time instructors and the division dean served on the Subject Area Curriculum Committee (SACC). Issues such as curriculum, faculty qualifications, class size, material selection, and skill assessment were determined by members of the SACC. Part-time instructors did not have voting privileges on this committee but were encouraged to attend SACC meetings. The division dean reported that the ABE staff was fairly stable with the full-time faculty remaining constant.

Mandatory meetings for all ABE instructors were held at the beginning of each term to introduce new staff, provide explanations of forms and procedures, and present information for the term. Staff development opportunities included an annual department workshop, a retreat for full-time faculty members, and a state sponsored summer conference available to all ABE instructors. A quarterly newsletter sent to instructors contained articles written by staff on instructional practices and reviews of new materials.

Job requirements for part-time ABE instructors included experience teaching adults, course work in reading, communication skills, and a Bachelors degree. In addition to these requirements, full-time instructors needed a Masters degree.

The division dean said his staff was fairly satisfied. He attributed this to the SACC which provided a forum for discussion and an opportunity for staff to work on problems together. He reported some frustration among part-time instructors, but did not visualize how the large and geographically diverse group could be more involved in the decision making process. Problems such as classroom accommodations, or services to students with special needs, were difficult to resolve within the bureaucratic system of a large community college according to the division dean.

THE CLASSES

SCCC Classes

The ABE program at SCCC had classes divided by skill level and subject areas. There were four daytime classes for Language Arts: one Level I (0-3 grade reading), two Level II (4-6 grade reading), and one Level III (7-9). Math classes included: one Level I (basic numerical operations), one Level II (fractions, decimals, ratio), and one Level III (ratio and percent, geometry, algebra). The Level I and II classes in language arts and math were selected for this study.

The Level I Language Arts class had thirteen students registered for Spring term with an average daily attendance of eight. Three students who attended on a regular basis had been in the class for more than one year. Four new students with developmental disabilities had been referred to the program by a social service agency. The class was taught by a European American woman instructor, Elaine, who had taught Level I for five terms. This was however, the first term she had students with developmental disabilities. Ethnic representation in her class included three African-Americans, one Pacific Islander,

and nine European American students. Sixty-nine percent of the students were 35 years of age or older.

The class met daily from 10:00 a.m. to 11:50 a.m. in a portable classroom. The classroom had one door and a set of windows facing a noisy sidewalk. Seats were individual desks with attached chairs set in rows facing the front of the room. There were two large rectangular tables at the front where most of the students sat during the class session. The only cabinet in the room contained instructional materials (workbooks, pencils, reading books) and coffee supplies. Students brought in coffee, creamer, and sugar and made coffee on a daily basis. During the author's first visit, the walls of the classroom were blank, however throughout the term Elaine hung up posters and maps. No reference books or resource materials were available in this classroom.

Elaine usually arrived at 10:00 at which time a few students were normally in the classroom. Other students entered the classroom during the next half hour. Elaine began the class with an activity that accommodated this gradual accumulation of students. The first part of the class session was devoted to whole class activities. The initial activity was usually some type of puzzle or game that involved a minimal amount of reading which allowed for participation by all students. This activity was followed by a sight-vocabulary or phonics lesson using words generated by the puzzle or game. At 10:50, the class took a ten minute break. Sometimes after break, additional students joined the class. Following the break, Elaine often divided the class into two groups based on reading skill level. Each group worked on reading materials and worksheets as Elaine moved among them. Within each group, students worked together in various configurations. Three disabled students often sat together and worked with each other. A student with mild cerebral palsy sat alone and rarely worked with other students except when placed in a group. One student who always came to class late also worked independently.

During a group interview with seven students, the need for more staff was expressed. Although the class was small compared to other ABE classes in this program, many students felt additional staff would be helpful when students worked in groups. They all commended Elaine for her work, but saw the specific needs of Level I students requiring more support. Many wanted to spend more class time reading aloud yet acknowledged the difficulties when there was only one staff person in the room to assist them.

In this Level I class, students appeared comfortable and acted as a social unit, discussing class work as well as their personal lives and outside concerns. During one classroom observation, a student brought cupcakes for each person in the class. Elaine spent considerable time assisting students with personal problems both during class and out of class. The students used her as a resource for writing letters and making telephone calls to agencies.

The Level I Language Arts class was a small group of students with low level reading and writing skills. The individual students and Elaine formed a unit that presented a congenial environment despite the lack of resource materials or physical comforts. The core group of students attending on a regular basis during the term seemed genuinely invested in the class. All of the students planned to return to the class for Fall term (Level I classes were not scheduled during the Summer term at SCCC). Elaine expressed doubts as to how effective the class was in meeting students' needs, and continually searched for materials and methods to better serve this group of students.

Level I Math was also taught by Elaine. The class had changed teachers twice during the term. When the original teacher became ill, a substitute worked for one month but, due to contract limitations, was unable to teach any additional hours so Elaine took over the class at Week 4 in the term.

This math class was open to students working on basic numerical operations: addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division, and met for fifty minutes daily. When the class began at 9:00 a.m. two or three students would be in the room. Others would enter slowly throughout the period. Students, working independently, each had a folder with a workbook or worksheets. The class had one work-study student to assist the teacher.

The ABE program's open-entry/open-exit policy makes general comments concerning the student population in this math class difficult. Thirty students were registered at the beginning of the term. Some stopped attending class while others were transferred to Level II Math. Approximately fifteen students continued through the entire term with an average daily attendance of nine students. The ethnicity of the class included twelve African-Americans, two European Americans, and one Hispanic student.

The classroom, in the main building of SCCC, had four tables each large enough to seat six students. It had one wall of windows that gave a view of the neighborhood. The size of the classroom and the seating configuration provided a sense of space. It was the largest room used by Level I and Level II classes at SCCC during Spring term. Elaine usually sat at a small table in the front of the room near the blackboard. Often when a student had a question, they went to Elaine's table where she explained the solution using the board so other students were able to watch. The work-study student moved around the room assisting students who had questions. Students did worksheets during class and turned in completed work at the end of the session. At any point in the term if a student demonstrated mastery of the basic operations, he or she was transferred to the Level II Math class.

Elaine said she enjoyed teaching this class as she was familiar with the materials having taught this level math before. She felt the term was confusing for students since they had experienced three different math instructors, each with different techniques. The

students did not appear to have cohesion as a class group. The relaxed manner in which students entered during the period and the minimal structure of assignments and evaluation gave the appearance of a drop-in center.

Level II Language Arts at SCCC was divided into two sections: A and B. A locator test was used to assess students for initial placement in these classes. Students who were reading at approximately the 4th grade level attended the Level IIA class. Twenty-four students were registered in this class during the term with a daily average attendance of fourteen. Ethnic representation in the class included African-American, Hispanic, and Asian students. The majority of students were under the age of 35 years, considerably younger than the students in the Level I Language Arts class. The teacher reported two students with physical disabilities (one had a heart problem and the other had poor muscle coordination). Many students in this class were suspected of having learning disabilities by the teacher.

The male European American teacher, Larry, had taught this level for two years. The classroom was small for the number of students who normally attended. Three rows of tables faced the front of the room. The one cabinet in the room contained workbooks and other instructional materials. Assorted posters were on the walls. During some observations, there was a map that attached above the blackboard but Larry said other teachers used it so it was frequently missing.

The class met daily from 10:00 a.m. to 11:50 a.m. Larry divided the session into reading for the first fifty minutes, a ten minute break, and fifty minutes of English grammar. Most students were in the room when class started. The class was a comfortable environment where students felt free to express their ideas and ask questions. Larry encouraged students to bring reading materials from home or their jobs. He also used the local newspaper and designed worksheets on newspaper articles the class read.

The students in this class worked well together and expressed admiration for their teacher's skills. The crowded conditions did not seem to hamper their enthusiasm for attending. As a group, they were very willing to talk about their experiences in the ABE program. During the author's initial visit, the students were curious to know about the research project and the Portland program. Students frequently asked about the progress of the research project during the course of observation.

The Level IIB class was taught at the beginning of the term by a full-time instructor who became ill. The substitute teacher, Delores, a Native American woman, taught the class for the remaining nine weeks. Twenty-three students were registered for this class and thirteen attended on a regular basis: sixteen African-Americans, four Asians, and three European American students. A hearing-impaired student was assisted by an interpreter and a notetaker. Another student with mild cerebral palsy was the only other person with a disability identified in the Level IIB class. Students in the class read at approximately 5-6th grade level. They met in the same spacious classroom used by the Level I Math class.

This Language Arts class, which met daily from 10:00 a.m. to 11:50 a.m., began with twenty minutes of sustained silent reading. Delores explained this was an opportunity for students to read materials of their choice and to accommodate late arrivals. Many students entered the room from ten to twenty minutes after the session began. They would get a book from the cabinet and begin reading. Delores sat at the front table during this time and corrected papers. At the end of the silent reading session, Delores went over assignments or passed out work to the class as a whole. Students worked cooperatively in small groups that did reading assignments from workbooks or projects that involved library research. Following a ten minute break at 10:50, Delores taught English grammar using lecture and drill-and-practice methods for the remainder of the class period. Students worked individually on teacher-generated worksheets and responded to examples written on the board.

A few students in the class seemed consistently uninvolved. Arriving late, having discussions unrelated to the subject matter, and leaving early, they appeared to have little interest in the course material. Delores used many interactive activities but did not verbally censor any student's behavior or lack of involvement. At times, it was difficult for the author to observe teaching strategies in this class due to the movement and chatter of students in the room.

Level II Math was taught by Larry, the same instructor who taught the Level IIA Language Arts. The math class met daily from 9:00 a.m. to 9:50 a.m. in the classroom used for the Language Arts IIA class. Thirty students were registered with an average daily attendance of twenty-one. The students were predominantly African-American and Asian. Eighty-three percent of the students were under 35 years old.

Class often began with a math problem sheet that Larry handed out. Students solved the problems individually as Larry took roll and late arrivals entered the room. Many days he gave a quiz and afterwards asked students to review answers out loud. This was followed by a lecture and demonstration of new skills. Students were assigned homework and any questions were answered by Larry. Using workbooks, the students studied independently during the remainder of the class while Larry moved around the room answering questions and offering help.

Students in the Level II Math class were usually focused on their written assignments. They rarely talked together during class but greeted each other before and after the session. The structure of class time and use of workbooks created a teacher-directed environment. Interviewed students responded that they were learning desired math skills and perceived Larry as a good instructor. They felt the class structure was necessary for the type of material covered.

PCC Class

The ABE program at the Southeast Center of PCC had two daytime classes. The class used in this study served students reading at Level I/II (0-6 grade). The other class served students reading at Level III (7 or above). The Level I/II class met daily from 9:00 a.m. to noon. Language arts and math were taught within the weekly schedule along with other subjects. The class was taught by two instructors, Helen and the author, both European American women. Two personal aides for students with severe disabilities also worked in the classroom.

Thirty-five students were registered during Spring term with an average daily attendance of twenty-two people. The class was composed predominantly of European American students with four Asians, three African-Americans, and two Hispanic students. Fifty-seven percent of the students in the class were over 35 years old. A large percentage of the students had physical or developmental disabilities. Helen reported five hearing-impaired students, six students with cerebral palsy who used wheelchairs or other adaptive devices, six students who were developmentally delayed, one visually-impaired student, and five others with milder disabilities.

This class typically served a high percentage of students with disabilities according to Helen. As teachers in other ABE classes within the PCC district were not comfortable serving adult students with disabilities, these students were often referred to Helen's class. As funding to other social service programs changed and more people with disabilities began living independently, the number of adults requesting educational services in ABE had increased. Neither Helen nor the division dean were able to predict how the department would meet this growing need. The large percentage of adults with disabilities in the Level I/II class appeared to have some impact on the classroom configuration, the types of materials available, and the perception of the class by disabled and nondisabled students.

The class met in a large room with two doors and windows to a hallway. The room was divided into several different spaces. The main area of the room had four tables (each could seat six to eight students) and eight individual study carrels. A moveable blackboard and cabinets separated this main area from a smaller section that had a table with ten chairs used for small groups. In another section of the room, computer equipment (four computers and two printers) was set up. Next to the door was a structure with individual "mailboxes" for each student and tutor, and a table for coffee supplies. The classroom contained two large supply cabinets and four bookcases.

The classroom usually opened at 8:00 a.m. and early students made coffee. When the teachers arrived, they put corrected assignments in students' mailboxes and talked with students or tutors. Two or three volunteer tutors worked in the class each day with some tutors volunteering two or three days a week. Some tutors had assigned duties working with individual students or leading groups. Other tutors gave assistance to any student as it was needed.

A posted general schedule showed the daily routine for the class (Appendix C). Each student had a copy attached to a work folder indicating his or her personal schedule. When students came into the class, they collected their folders and work from their mailboxes and wrote in dialogue journals. Each student had a dialogue journal which they wrote in daily and turned in for one of the teachers to respond to in writing outside of class time.

On Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays at 9:00 a.m., students in Reading Group 1 met at the small group table with one teacher. Reading groups were arranged by reading skill level. Other students who were not in a group at that time, worked individually on assignments or used the computers. Tutors were available to answer questions or read with students. At 9:45, students in Reading Group 1 returned to their seats and Reading Groups 2 and 3 formed. One group met at the small group table and the other met at a large

table in the front of the room. On Mondays and Fridays at 9:00, students did spelling as a whole class and then broke into four math groups: Money Skills, Calculator Skills, Fractions, and Algebra. There was a fifteen minute break at 10:30. Following break, one of the teachers made general announcements to the class.

The second half of the mornings was used for a variety of activities. On Mondays and Fridays, students did math problem-solving as a whole group using story problems written on the front board. Afterwards students moved to one of the elective groups. Monday electives included: Letter Writing, Geography, Poetry, and Individual Projects. Friday electives were: Art, Discussion Group, Book Club, and Sign Language. Students each selected one Monday and Friday elective at the beginning of the term and remained with those groups although a few students did change groups during the term. The elective groups were lead by Helen, tutors, or students who volunteered for the position. The other teacher was available to help any group that needed assistance or filled in if someone was absent. Helen explained that the choice of electives changed each term depending on student interests and who was available to lead a particular group. At the end of the term the class decided through a group process with students, teachers, and tutors which electives would be offered the following term and who would lead each group.

Writing was taught using a whole language approach for forty-five minutes on Tuesdays and Thursdays starting at 10:45. On Tuesdays at 11:15, one of the teachers facilitated a class activity to enhance communication skills by examining personal or social issues. On Thursdays at that time, the class was divided into two groups with one group using this period to read and discuss newspaper articles. The other group met to rehearse a play that they performed for the public at the end of the term. Inclusion in these groups was determined by students at the beginning of the term. On Wednesdays, students did thirty minutes of sustained silent reading. This activity was followed by a captioned film or a speaker from the community. A discussion period followed the speaker's presentation.

Materials used in the class were a combination of teacher-designed materials, published workbooks, newspapers and reading books. Stories written by students were in printed form for other students to read or displayed around the classroom. On the walls maps, posters, and student art were visible and changed throughout the course of the term. Students were observed using the encyclopedias, dictionaries, and other reference books that were available in the room.

The schedule involved frequent movement as groups formed or students changed activities. Since the main classroom was often crowded, another classroom was used as a break-out room for small groups. The number of students and staff, the electric wheelchairs, the adaptive communication devices used by disabled students, and the computers and printers in an uncarpeted room created a high level of background noise which students complained was distracting.

The movement of students and staff between groups, the multiple activities, and the congestion of wheelchairs and bodies gave the appearance of chaos. Students were bothered by the noise, but seemed comfortable with the schedule. Students responded during interviews that they enjoyed the choice of activities and shifting to different activities through the morning was helpful. Helen explained that this type of schedule had evolved during the five years she had co-taught this class and that students as a group had an opportunity each term to alter the schedule. She felt this type of class structure helped students learn on a variety of levels and it also involved students in designing a schedule that addressed individual interests. This was the only class in the study that used a written weekly schedule.

THE TEACHERS

Four teachers participated in this study: three at Seattle Central Community College and one at Portland Community College. All were part-time faculty members except Larry, who was a full-time Level II instructor at SCCC. This section gives descriptions of their experiences and philosophies within the field of adult literacy education.

Elaine

Elaine taught the Level I Language Arts and Level I Math classes at SCCC during Spring term. She had been a part-time instructor in the Basic Studies Department since 1983 where she taught math classes for seven years and developed the math assessment instrument used by the department. In 1990, she was approached by the department director to teach Level I Language Arts. A conscientious teacher who demonstrated concern for her students, Elaine commented she was frustrated by her lack of knowledge and skills to serve Level I students.

Her formal training consisted of a Bachelors degree in anthropology and a minor in Indian Education, and an elementary education certificate. Following completion of her degree, she taught in a Native American education program which was her first opportunity to work with adult learners. Elaine also taught ESL and GED classes at a Hispanic center. She applied for an ESL position at SCCC, but was offered a job teaching math to higher level classes in the Basic Studies Department which she accepted. She remained in that position until 1990 when she began teaching Level I Language Arts.

Skills that Elaine saw herself bringing to the classroom were acceptance and understanding of cultural differences, a willingness to find resources for her students, and the courage to admit mistakes. In describing her effectiveness in the class, she was "not very satisfied", but believed that "most of the students are pretty happy but that's because

their goals are different than mine." Elaine felt that most students were content with what the class offered, but as the teacher she wanted to see evidence of more academic progress. Recognizing that students attended the Level I Language Arts class for a variety of reasons, Elaine described some older students as participating in the class because "it gives them something to do during the day."

In selection of course materials for the Language Arts class, Elaine designed and produced many of the worksheets used and also reproduced copies of puzzles or stories. The sources for the latter were published workbooks for low-level adult readers and published materials designed for children. Elaine felt unsure that her selection of materials was appropriate for the range of students in her class and described the search for materials and techniques to serve Level I students as:

a real challenge for me. It's been kind of fun, but it's also been real frustrating because I feel like I'm making no one happy including myself. It's too hard for this person. It's too easy for that person. This one wants to read more. As a blanket statement, almost all of them don't like to write.

During interviews, Elaine often expressed frustration with her inability to find materials or techniques that enabled her students to progress at a rate she found acceptable. At the same time she described various strategies she used that were successful in encouraging students to "read and think." She experimented with interactive activities, manipulative techniques, and selection of diverse reading content materials. Often she approached development of instructional practices with a sense of trial and error. She would develop a new game, try it with the class, and decide from students' reactions if it was successful. This development occurred within a small sphere as Elaine usually did not talk with other instructors about materials nor was she familiar with the literature in adult literacy education or adult learning.

In describing her role in the Level I Math class, Elaine recognized students were working independently in a study lab situation when she took the class over from the other

instructor. Elaine saw students in the math class as needing basic computational skills. Although students continued using drill-and-practice workbooks, Elaine introduced story problems for utilizing life skills and expressed the goal of adding more cooperative learning techniques. As some students in the class had low level reading skills, story problems posed a challenge. Elaine would read these problems to students who could not read the papers themselves.

Elaine's concern for students and her willingness to experiment with different types of instructional practices were apparent in her teaching and during interviews. Her part-time status at SCCC and the lack of formal training in adult learning limited her exposure to theories and research. Elaine's sense of frustration and her dissatisfaction with available materials and methods forced her to seek more successful strategies for teaching adult learners although her resources were limited.

Larry

The only full-time instructor in this study, Larry taught the Level IIA Language Arts and Level II Math classes. Students in Larry's classes described him as a courteous teacher who showed them respect and took time to listen. Important attributes he identified in himself as a teacher were encouraging students to take risks, being flexible, and being a good listener. Larry tried to make his classes comfortable and to give students "a sense of belonging."

Larry had attended a small liberal arts college where he graduated with a degree in psychology. He completed additional course work to earn a teaching certificate. He taught junior high school for one year but found he did not like working with that age group and took a job teaching Native American adults. When that program ended due to loss of funding, Larry was hired by a large corporation to provide basic skills training to newly hired employees. Later he worked for various Native American education programs

as a teacher and as an administrator. During one period he worked part-time with SCCC and another basic studies program. He was hired five years ago as a full-time instructor by SCCC.

Larry had concerns about the instructional practices used in his classes. In the Language Arts class, he felt that too many decisions about material content and methods were his and did not reflect the students' interests. During one interview Larry remarked that:

I think I'm really good at what I do, but I think I'm using some stuff that is really old fashioned and I need to learn new things. I'm old fashioned and kind of in a rut. I need to learn some new things from some of these leading educators in adult education.

He often spoke of the desire to take courses or find a graduate program designed for adult literacy educators. Although he had begun a Masters program in Adult Education, the courses did not meet his expectations so he stopped. He was not content with his instructional strategies but was unsure how to effect changes.

One example Larry identified was the daily class schedule and delivery of new material. He said it was difficult for many students to attend a class regularly that met five days a week. Single mothers in particular missed class frequently and had trouble keeping up with course work. In the Level II Math class, Larry reported lecturing on new material everyday so any student who missed classes quickly fell behind. Larry was uncomfortable with this outcome as he was interested in being more successful in meeting the needs of the students. He did not know how to adjust the course work to accommodate attendance patterns. Larry also reported students resisted his attempts to introduce new instructional methods. Students wanted the class to be taught in a traditional manner so Larry was reluctant to establish new practices.

Larry recognized differences between ABE and other types of college classes. For him, ABE classes are:

housed inside a college, but we have a completely different philosophy than someone who is teaching Psychology 205 or something. Completely different. . . An ABE instructor, if the student isn't learning, they're going to blame themselves or they're going to say, 'What am I doing wrong?'. Where the college instructors will say, 'I wonder what the student is doing wrong?'. That's the big difference. ABE instructors believe everyone can learn if you just throw it out there the right way.

Larry used a mixture of materials in his two classes. Although students worked mostly from published materials in the Level II Math class, Larry wrote daily problem sheets that personalized the math and provided life skill exercises. The Level IIA Language Arts class used published workbooks and worksheets as well as teacher-designed materials. Larry often rewrote newspaper articles to adjust the reading level and used the articles to teach vocabulary, decoding and comprehension skills.

Delores

Delores was hired to replace another instructor on sick leave during Spring term. She taught Level IIB Language Arts for nine weeks and Level I Math for a brief period at the beginning of the term. Delores planned to complete a Masters degree she had been working on in Adult Education during the following year.

Her background was in Native American education where she had worked as a tutor and tutor supervisor. Upon completion of her Bachelors degree, she taught at Seattle Indian Center. After teaching for a number of years, Delores decided to get a Masters degree to "try and find out what I'm doing right and find out what I'm doing wrong and how I can improve."

Delores concurred with Larry's observations that there were differences between teaching ABE and other adult classes. She described ABE teachers as needing to show respect and recognition of the students' background, and felt that the job required counseling skills. Many students who enter ABE classes:

have survived a number of years. Their school experiences have not always been good. They've not always been positive experiences so there's a lot

more interpersonal relationship with the teacher and a lot more self-esteem building and positive reinforcement. . . The first thing we have to do is build up their confidence in their own sense of self and their own ability to think for themselves.

Delores stressed the need for ABE teachers to develop active listening skills. She identified listening to students carefully when they asked questions as well as in other types of conversations as vital to achieving success in these classes. The diversity of adult learners in ABE requires instructional strategies that establish a sense of community, validate individual learning styles, and help students develop learning skills according to Delores. In her class, she used a variety of grouping techniques: students worked independently, in small groups, and as a whole class. Delores had experienced students' resistance to participating in new learning configurations, but felt that the results justified the time and energy required to help students adapt to new types of learning.

The Level IIB Language Arts class used published books for reading materials and teacher-designed worksheets for grammar. Delores gave quizzes and tests frequently to allow students to recognize progress and become aware of areas of need. She designed the assessments and follow-up sessions to focus on students' strengths and to give them an opportunity to learn from each other. She felt that ABE students were apprehensive about taking written tests, but this practice could, if handled properly, provide important information to students for their learning and self-concept.

Delores utilized instructional methods that gave students a variety of learning opportunities. Involvement of students in discussions provided an environment that many students found useful. In a written evaluation completed during the last week of the term, one student in the class wrote, "I like the way she teach. She has full of life make us alive during session. She have a idea how to please everyone." Another student, in a written response to how the class could be improved, offered:

On myself to make this class better is to have a class discussion everyday.
First is to listen what the teacher is talking about. Explain to the student

about the subject topic. Giving a short examination. Explanation and discussion will help us better.

Helen

Helen had co-taught the Level I/II class at PCC for five years. She had completed a Bachelors degree in Social Science and received an elementary teaching certificate. At the beginning of her professional career, Helen taught K - 1 with experience in remedial reading programs. Choosing to stop teaching at the elementary level after nine years, she accepted a position teaching adult literacy students at a basic skills center. After moving to Oregon, Helen took a part-time job teaching ABE and began graduate studies in adult learning, completing a Masters degree in 1991. At the time of this study, she had been a part-time instructor at PCC for six years.

Helen did not find her graduate course work in adult learning directly related to teaching low-level adult readers. Questioned further about this experience, Helen replied:

They have not a clue at the university as to what dealing with lower-level adults is like. So the best actually that I got was dealing with elementary professors and then just applying new and innovative techniques that they had to work with children to adults. Because most of the adult learning issues [at the university] are directed towards educated adults.

She clarified her distinction between students in ABE and "educated adults"; ABE students enter the class with a need to learn how to learn. She found students in her program motivated although they often lacked the skills necessary to clearly define or achieve their objectives in returning to school. Helen suggested that other adult students enrolled in classes at the university or college level primarily for job-related reasons while ABE students were not necessarily job-oriented when they return to school.

An ABE teacher should provide a respectful environment for students that is adaptable to their needs and offers an "opportunity to affect change" according to Helen. She did not see how any formal assessment could be used successfully with these students to document goals or interests, but identified an evaluative process as more realistic. To

evaluate and provide information to students, Helen's class used a variety of methods throughout the term such as progress charts, interviews, and written contracts.

Cooperative learning, daily schedules, and clear expectations were techniques that Helen attributed to the success of her class. Many ABE students experienced difficulties in other educational settings. Helen reported the structure and methods applied in her class offered students an opportunity to grow within a supportive environment. In a journal entry during the course of this study, Helen wrote:

Structure is good, but it needs to allow for choices, and needs to be flexible enough so that students have a sense of control over what they learn. The schedule must be adaptable to changes they request. . . Our class is a place where that can happen.

SUMMARY

Clear images of the environment and personalities involved are necessary to understand adult literacy classes. The above descriptions of the programs, classes, and teachers provide a foundation that is useful in the interpretation of the data.

The ABE programs studied at Seattle Central Community College and Portland Community College both served Level I and II adult literacy students in an urban setting. The individual classes contained unique features such as selection of subject matter, staffing, and student demographics. Compared to PCC, SCCC is a smaller community college where the average student age is younger and there is greater ethnic representation. The Basic Studies Department at SCCC is smaller with a higher percentage of full-time ABE instructors compared to PCC. ABE classes in the SCCC program are delineated by skill level and subject area. Five separate daytime classes for language arts and math serve students reading at Levels I and II .

Three ABE teachers from SCCC participated in the study. The two women and one man had taught in that ABE program for varying lengths of time ranging from one term to nine years. Two teachers had completed Bachelor degrees and two had credentials necessary for elementary education certificates. Another teacher was completing a Masters degree in Adult Learning. Each of these three individuals had a different teaching style. Their methods for structuring a class and choice of materials provided a broad range of instructional practices to observe and compare.

The PCC teacher who participated in this study completed a Masters in Adult Learning two years previously. She team-taught a Level I/II class that served disabled and nondisabled students. The demographics of the student population and the type of instructional practices in the PCC class presented an interesting contrast to the classes in Seattle. The differences in student ethnicity, range of disabilities, class structures and schedules, and teaching methods in the two ABE programs provided a rich source of material for investigating effective instructional practices.

CHAPTER V

ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

INTRODUCTION

This chapter contains an inductive analysis of the qualitative data collected during the course of the study. Categories, indicated during the process of collecting data and noting patterns, were more fully developed in the final analysis. They provided a conceptual way of understanding the data, and led to generalized relationships and hypothesis formulation (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). These methods of inductive analysis develop inferences and theories grounded in the data. Marshall and Rossman (1989) described this process as:

bringing order, structure, and meaning to the mass of collected data. . . It does not proceed in a linear fashion; it is not neat. Qualitative data analysis is a search for general statements about relationships among categories of data; it builds grounded theory (p. 112).

The first section of this chapter applies the analytical findings to the primary and secondary research questions. Each question is addressed using results from the inductive analysis and supporting evidence from the case studies. Beginning with the secondary questions to establish a framework, the section concludes with consideration of the research study's primary question.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

How are literacy skills defined in the classes

Literacy skills were defined in terms of the students' needs and interests by both teachers and students. Identified skills formed two principle categories of primary and secondary objectives which captured the specific skills and long term goals that students and teachers referred to as literacy skills. Although the basic skills and goals defined differed among students and between classes, common patterns emerged through the study and analysis. When asked to describe goals, students often named general skills, i.e., reading and writing or finding a job; teachers usually named more specific skills such as completing applications, handling money, and reading street signs. What skills were taught during the term seemed dependent on the particular make-up of a class. One group of students in Helen's class learned to read maps, but she indicated it was not a subject that would necessarily be taught the following term unless the need was expressed. Elaine developed new worksheets for a student to learn how to write his name because it was the first time she needed to teach that skill.

Each teacher had different discrete skills they recognized as fundamental to literacy education. Delores taught grammar rules while another teacher used a whole language approach. In one class, interested students learned to use calculators while in another class calculators were not allowed. Although different skills were selected by each teacher, they all attempted to teach skills and use materials based on their perception of learner needs and interests.

Often teachers would use phrases like "filling in gaps" or "getting the whole picture" to describe adult learning. ABE students were not perceived as children who learned in a linear fashion, but as adults whose educational needs were splintered. Helen gave an example of teaching students to make change:

You think, OK, you do this one activity or you teach how to count coins, and then you drop it. But you don't drop it. It's all part of this big circle of learning about money. When you teach children who have never seen letters before or whatever, you start with letter sounds. That makes sense. But with adults, they've got pieces of information and pieces of knowledge.

All four teachers described their students as adults who came into the class with knowledge and experiences that needed to be recognized. The skills or new information sought by a student should fit into this existing experiential base. Both ABE programs had curriculum guides, although none of the teachers used them as a standard in developing lesson plans or designing units. One teacher explained that the curriculum guide employed a sequential format that did not reflect how ABE students learn. These four teachers based what they taught in their classes on what the students' needs were during a particular term. In Elaine's class, the Level I student wanted to learn how to write his name so she developed worksheets to help him. In an interview, Helen explained how the Calculator Skills group was formed after one student had requested learning how to use a pocket calculator. When other students were queried and showed interest, a group was set up to learn that skill. Teachers did not start the term with set objectives rather objectives were determined by the students in the class each term: their needs, interests, and abilities.

Two teachers used either student interviews or surveys to determine what materials were used or which skills would be taught during the term. Larry surveyed his class at the beginning of each term to ascertain what reading content interested students. Using this information, he designed comprehension and decoding lessons using articles or stories that complemented their interests. Helen used class discussion and individual interviews to determine which life skills were needed by students in her class. During Spring term she formed different small groups that learned to handle money, read maps, and write personal letters.

Elaine was unsure what literacy skills were important for the students in her class. She described why individual students enrolled in her class:

I would say that there are usually two or three people who, yes, they would like to work their way through perhaps to get that GED or diploma or whatever. I would say for the others its just to increase their feeling of competency. Sometimes what William or Robert will say is that they want to feel more comfortable when they are out on the road going places so they'll be able to follow signs. Just feel better about themselves like when they go to the doctor's office and are asked to fill out forms. For them, it's more of that and not a movement necessarily to a higher level [class].

This teacher was able to identify the goals of the students but was unsure what skills would enable them to achieve these goals. Other teachers seemed more comfortable in deciding which specific skills would allow students to proceed, although their choices of skills varied. All teachers agreed that reading and numeracy skills were important but differed on what type of reading and what numeracy skills.

Students had difficulty defining specific literacy skills when questioned. Often their first response included basic reading and writing without any elaboration. An older student remarked he was only interested in reading because, "you accomplish more out of reading than you do anything else. If you don't do that, well, ain't no use you coming to school." Another student when asked what reading was replied, "Pronouncing words out loud." Her teacher pointed out that in the student's previous literacy program, that was probably an apt description. One group of Level I students in response to "Why are you here?" listed:

To learn to read and write
To better my education and maybe get a job
I'm sick of being dumb
To feel more independent
You feel embarrassed to fill out forms

When students were given more opportunity to explore ideas concerning literacy skills, they identified skills related to goals. Students wanted to improve literacy skills to become more independent (by reading road signs or completing forms), for work related needs, or to feel better about themselves (helping children with homework or reading the newspaper).

Formal quantitative measurements were uncommon in the classes observed. Most of the classes did not use written assessments to determine literacy skill achievement. Delores gave the Level IIB Language Arts students quizzes and tests because she felt it validated their learning. Helen tested reading levels every two terms to provide students with information and for record keeping purposes, but reported the assessment instrument used in her class was designed for school children, not for adult learners. She did not use the results of this assessment to design lessons or to determine mastery of skills. On a weekly basis, Helen gave spelling quizzes. Larry used quizzes in Level II Math although he did not use any formal assessments in his Language Arts class.

Elaine did not use written assessments in the Level I Math or Language Arts classes, but kept folders of students' work for her own information. Delores gave grades on tests and provided students with a written evaluation at the end of the term. In Helen's Level I/II class, the co-teachers met together with each student during the final week of the term to evaluate goals and progress. The written results from the interviews and a sample of the student's writing were placed in his or her file.

All teachers determined a student's ability to move to a higher level reading group or language arts class using informal assessment techniques. Phrases such as "when I determine someone is ready" or "when a student can work more independently" were representative of how teachers judged a student's ability. The math classes at SCCC did use mastery of specific skills to determine entry into another class. A student who knew how to divide and could read word problems was able to transfer into the Level II class.

Primary Objectives. The skills determined as fundamental to student need and interest in the ABE class were identified as primary objectives. Primary objectives are specific reading, writing, and numeracy skills. These objectives were usually determined by the teacher in response to the students in a particular class. An example is a student who states her goal is job advancement which requires her to learn how to fill out particular

forms. The teacher can identify what vocabulary, word identification, spelling and mathematical skills are needed by the student in order to accurately complete these forms. The skills that a teacher determines as fundamental to a student's goals are the primary objectives.

Within the scope of this study, specific primary objectives varied among classes. Reading skill lessons observed included word identification, phonics, whole language, word comprehension, and vocabulary. Math skills taught were a combination of numerical operations and applications. Life skills such as reading maps, making change, and completing forms were also taught. Not all classes observed identified the same set of primary objectives during Spring term. Teachers selected which skills would be taught based on their own experience, their perception of student goals and abilities, and available materials.

Secondary Objectives. The goals or expected outcomes given by students for enrolling in an ABE class or identified by teachers are secondary objectives. During interviews, students and teachers mentioned a broad range of secondary objectives such as completing a GED, job advancement, the ability to help a child with homework, and knowing how to read well enough to buy a greeting card. One student reported having difficulty finding a job so she "returned to school to get my GED so that would stop being an impediment to finding work." Another student expressed her desire to read a novel by herself. Teachers frequently mentioned students being promoted to a higher level class or program, feeling better about themselves, and developing the ability to better manage their lives. Secondary objectives sometimes changed as teachers and students worked together. Brookfield (1986) described this "as a transactional encounter in which learner desires and educator priorities will inevitably interact and influence each other" (p. 97). Helen noticed students' goals changed as they participated in the class. Often they entered the program with vague objectives which became clearer with exposure to new people, ideas, and skills.

She described this as a cyclical process. A student may begin with a general notion of "learning to read and write" which over time becomes focused on reading the sports section and writing letters to family members. As the student experiences success with that set of skills, other objectives are identified.

Secondary objectives, the outcomes identified by students or teachers, tended to fit within two groups: self-sufficiency and status. Self-sufficiency included objectives that enabled the student to function more fully in an adult role within a culture. Educational or job advancement were outcomes that were noted as well as self-improvement for personal reasons. Other secondary objectives that contributed to students' self-sufficiency were life skills. Helen's class had a money group that learned how to make change, set up a bank account, and write checks. Larry used a newspaper article about water conservation to practice reading skills and to give students the opportunity to follow written directions in changing a washer on a faucet. Presented with copies of the article, a faucet, and an assortment of tools, students read the directions to learn how to change the washer. It was an activity that helped students with reading directions and gave them practical knowledge of a new skill.

In describing their secondary objectives for students, all four teachers saw ABE as a program that should teach people to be more self-sufficient by developing skills in the classroom that eventually generalized to other areas of students' lives. One student described her frustration in trying to write a personal letter at home when:

I can't get a certain word I want, like I get stuck on it. In the letter group when I'm writing this letter and if I get stuck, I can ask another student or the teacher, and I know I'll get it correct. I'm not just doing it alone. . . And it makes it a little easier for me, writing a letter to a friend or my aunt, to come up with a letter. It just makes it easier all around.

Her teacher saw the class as an intermediary step in the process of this student utilizing people or resource materials to meet her needs. This would enhance her self-

sufficiency when she was able to accomplish desired tasks using resources available within her family and social network outside of an educational setting.

Status is a property that describes recognition of particular skills valued by the individual or society. One student remarked that during the play performance, he wanted to read from his script so the audience could see he knew how to read. Another student described her pride in selecting a birthday card for a friend without asking for assistance from a clerk.

A more somber example is a student who did not file a police report after a robbery because he did not know how to write. His perceived lack of skills prevented him from accessing services available to him as a citizen. A low sense of status can be internally created when a person perceives him or herself as deficient in comparison to others. One student describing people's decision to enroll in an ABE class bitterly remarked, "It's a lot of propaganda. They want to be like the people on TV." Status can also be externally effected by people who make rude remarks or limit accessibility in response to a person's literacy skills. Many students related accounts of embarrassing incidents when their literacy skills were judged inadequate by other people.

Literacy skills were defined in two ways within the classes studied. Primary objectives were basic literacy skills such as word recognition or adding figures that enabled a student to achieve a particular goal. Primary objectives were identified by teachers according to needs of the students attending during the term, their abilities and interests. Teachers, using a variety of methods and informal assessments, determined what basic skills would be taught in the term. In language arts, these skills could range from printing one's name to completing a form for food stamps to writing an essay. Secondary objectives were the learning goals identified by students and teachers. Goals varied depending on various situational factors such as a student's age or work history and could change over time. Dominant secondary objectives formed two groups: self-sufficiency and

status. Self-sufficiency describes those objectives which help a student to function in an adult role. Status is the acquisition of skills perceived as valued within the culture. In general, literacy skills were defined as those reading, writing, and numeracy skills that enabled the student to enhance performance on adult tasks and/or gain increased status within oneself or in the community.

What instructional practices are used to help students succeed in achieving their goals

Two elements of instructional practice were identified as helping students succeed: teacher communication skills and classroom setting. Although practices varied considerably in the six classes observed, these two categories stood out during interviews and observations, and in the formal analysis as integral to the instructional process. All four teachers were reluctant to identify specific classroom strategies or materials as generically helpful but teacher communication and class environment were cited frequently by students and teachers as crucial to student progress.

In ABE, the process of matching instructional practices to students' goals is complex because within one classroom there is often a broad range of primary and secondary objectives. The variety of practices observed during the course of this study indicated that there is not one standard method of ABE Level I or II instruction, but diverse practices that reflect the teacher's training, experiences, and philosophy and the particular student population. The description of classes in Chapter 4 provided examples of the instructional practices evident in the six classes observed. The analysis indicated that teacher communication skills and classroom setting were two major elements of instruction that facilitated student success.

A third element, the instructional process, was less apparent but valuable in understanding ABE instructional practices. Described by two teachers and observed during

the course of research, the process entails a continually reformulated synthesis of students' experiential knowledge and learning objectives with teaching strategies and materials.

Teacher Communication. Students and teachers frequently mentioned the importance of interpersonal communication skills in facilitating instruction. Two significant properties of teacher communication were listening and providing supportive feedback. Teachers and students both strongly identified a teacher's ability to listen as a valuable component in classroom practices. In Delores's opinion teachers needed to:

learn how to listen and to learn how to be with the student instead of having them come up and they're saying one thing and you're doing another thing. Just really stop. It's kind of Rogerian if you will. But stop and listen. Listen to the body language and listen to what's going on in the interactions within the students within the classroom and really pay attention to what they're saying. I know that takes time, but unless we take the time, we're not going to be successful.

Another teacher in the study expressed a similar idea when she explained that to listen to students means:

being more available and, you know, just making that as a goal to not rush students as they're trying to talk or finish sentences for them. . . Allow them to do their own expressing.

Stewart (1983) described this level of communication as being "present to the other and aware of the other's presence to me" (p. 388). Students usually identified communication skills first when describing attributes of a good ABE teacher. When asked what Larry did to help students learn, one man remarked, "He really knows how to listen to us." Listening was the major component of teacher communication skills that aided instructional practice. A second was providing students with feedback in a supportive manner. Adjectives such as kind, caring, considerate, and respectful were used by students in describing positive teacher characteristics. Students in the PCC class compiled a list of preferred ABE teacher traits and listed many attributes indicative of good communication skills including expressing respect and support for students' efforts. An

older student told a story about a teacher he had a few years earlier who was good at explaining mathematics but often embarrassed students when they erred. He remarked:

she's good, I'm going to tell you. But I'm a big boy now. I'm not no kid. I don't need no scolding or whatever you want to call it. She really embarrassed me and that's a lot of what Mrs. Smith do. She good, but she cut you down quick.

The student felt the teacher's tendency to embarrass him interfered with his learning. Other students who recounted negative learning experiences also pointed to teachers who did not display respect or concern for students. Effective interpersonal communication skills, especially listening, were considered valuable by teachers and students in the study and observed in positive classroom encounters.

Classroom Setting. Classroom setting describes the sense of well-being and belonging a student has in a class. It includes the physical and the social aspects of a classroom. One student described his feeling of comfort being in a class with adults who had similar skill levels. He did not mind making mistakes because he realized other students would not laugh at him. He compared this experience to his high school days when in frustration, he "started a lot of fights." Another student described her enjoyment working in groups because of the support from other students and, because studying "is easier being in a group."

A student in Delores's class wrote in an evaluation:

I would like to have work with groups together and discuss. It would help me lot and learn well. Also communication skill is important too. I am not experience discuss group together. I want to learn how to discuss and agree [with] each other. It would be fun and learn too.

Although there are often physical limitations for an ABE class in the community college setting, most teachers and students tried to establish a comfortable and inviting space. Two of the classes had coffee available that students prepared daily. Food was occasionally brought in and shared among students and staff. Helen said she attempted to make her classroom inviting and:

tries to set the tables and chairs so people have choices. They can choose to sit by themselves. They can choose to sit at a smaller table with a smaller amount of people or at a larger table with a lot of people. We try to make sure people, that no one is hidden away. That everyone has access to participating when we are doing whole group activities. But the space is small so we pretty much have to do as much as we can as far as creating a supportive, welcoming, warm environment with a small configured class[room].

Discussing the physical environment, another teacher captured a common feeling which is that students' needs:

are not considered in many ways. . . it's hard to move around, it's hard to sit in these seats, the seats aren't comfortable and inadequate for this population or for many of the people. So I think it's really kind of a bigger issue. It's not just having books on the shelves and pencils for students to use. It's bigger. . . It would be helpful to have a more inviting physical environment and one that was more physically comfortable.

When students were asked if they had complaints about a class or program, the majority of responses concerned the class setting. Some students complained about the noise level in a classroom; others remarked there was "too much fooling around." The classroom environment was an important concern for students and their sense of comfort in returning to school. As adult learners, they now had more opportunity to shape the classroom setting to serve their needs than during their childhood educational experiences.

Teacher communication skills and classroom setting were two elements of instructional practice that appeared helpful to students achieving their goals. Both were identified by students and teachers as important in providing an environment that was conducive to student achievement and retention.

Instructional Process. Two teachers distinguished an instructional process as more descriptive of effective classroom techniques than specific practices. The process is a holistic method that recognizes students' needs and enables students to adapt new information and skills within their experiential frame. It requires teachers to continually re-evaluate and reformulate practices as students master primary objectives and clarify goals.

Although it was a property less often mentioned by research participants, it is valuable in understanding effective practices in adult literacy classes.

There were two general response patterns from teachers when asked what practices they used to help students achieve goals. Both patterns seemed reflective of a teacher's self-concept. Two teachers were reluctant to identify successful instructional practices, unsure if the methods they used were effective in helping students. Larry suspected his students were satisfied. In his experience students who were frustrated or were not having their educational needs met:

don't come back to class because what they're doing doesn't have much meaning for them. . . But sometimes people will tell you, 'I don't like using this. This isn't clicking for me.'

His students' continued attendance was an indication that something was working but he was not sure what. He felt dissatisfied with his teaching methods but was reluctant to change his practice. He wanted more information from "the experts" but had difficulty finding it. His attempts to implement more learner-centered strategies met with resistance from students, so he continued his "old fashioned" way of instruction despite his feeling of dissatisfaction.

The other teacher, Elaine, after describing various techniques she used in her class (some of which appeared effective to the author), ended with the lament, "I need help!" She was unsure how to evaluate her instructional practices or student achievement. Elaine wanted better materials and ideas to help her students achieve basic literacy skills. She made many of the worksheets used in her class and designed various exercises for students but felt unsure if she was successful in making the connection between primary and secondary objectives.

The two other instructors saw their classes as successful and attributed this to an instructional process rather than any specific practices. Helen saw her class as successful

in helping students achieve goals and discussed the process for evaluating and adjusting instructional methods which had evolved over five years of team-teaching:

I don't think we just hit upon it initially and we have sort of developed what we have, evaluating over and over how we can best serve their needs. What can we do differently? What kinds of things do they want to know and how can we best teach it to them? So it seems that its a constant process of figuring those. . .things out.

Her class used various techniques for involving students in their educational pursuits. The crowded classroom seemed confusing but the majority of students appeared actively engaged. Helen thought this resulted from the teachers' attempt to:

really include the human element. This isn't like teacher directs, student does. . .its really a process oriented class with lots of discussion about things whether its vocabulary or ideas in stories read or resolving issues in stories being read. Including and involving students in the process of what it is they're learning rather than just having them rote learning stuff.

Delores's Language Arts class also had a confusing appearance with students entering and leaving the room throughout the period. She acknowledged the noise level but said it did not bother her. She used a mixture of techniques to teach skills, but stressed the importance of students piecing their new knowledge together. She described this as developing linkages:

They all need the linkages, some more than others. But its almost like weaving. Its almost like a fabric. The lesson today may be commas in a series but we're also going to look at the subject-verb agreement and is it a complete sentence and how are we going to pull it together. And we're going to get a little taste of semicolons to come later and we're going to start seeing the whole picture instead of one isolated lesson.

Teachers in the second group expressed confidence in their ability to be successful in helping students achieve goals. They described methods they found useful but stressed the significance of the process over specific techniques. They sometimes questioned their particular methods and materials, or expressed a need for more resources, but in general they had confidence in their instructional process and general class management. Each

teacher in this group had a different style in the way she structured her class, but both possessed a strong self-concept concerning their teaching and class management skills.

All four teachers in this study were reluctant to specify individual instructional practices they found successful. There were two general patterns noted in their responses. One group of teachers was hesitant to attribute success to their practices. Although practices were observed that seemed effective, the teachers seemed to lack confidence in their choice of methods. The second group of teachers identified an instructional process as more valuable than specific practices. This process involved students in their learning and helped them connect new information gained to previous knowledge and experience.

An additional point concerning the pattern of responses from the teachers was the amount of formal training the teachers had. Both teachers who expressed confidence in the instructional process they used in their classes had completed more graduate work than the other teachers in the study. Helen had a Masters degree in Adult Learning and Delores planned to complete her Masters the following fall term. Their classes were different in choices of strategies and materials used, but both teachers demonstrated confidence in their teaching ability. Neither Helen nor Delores felt that graduate study had a strong influence on their teaching. The other two teachers who were more hesitant to point out effective practices had less formal training. Larry had taken a few graduate courses and stopped. With this small sample, it is difficult to ascertain whether the differences in these teachers' self-concept was a result of additional education or personal characteristics.

The three elements identified in response to this question were teacher communication, classroom setting, and instructional process. Although teachers and students rarely identified specific instructional practices, communication skills and the classroom environment were major elements that fostered student achievement and retention. The instructional process, a third element brought up by some participants and

observed by the author, represents an important aspect of teaching practice and will be discussed in more detail in Chapter VI.

Is there a difference in students' perception of their learning in the classes

Comparing the six classes, differences were observed in students' perception of learning activities. Differences in how students' perceived their learning resulted in three general areas: the class culture, student goals, and self-esteem.

Class Culture. During a group interview with a Level I class, students consistently stressed the need for more reading and spelling. When questioned about what type of materials they would like to read, no one had ideas. Another class (Level I/II) discussed possible study topics for the upcoming term. Students suggested numerous topics ranging from nutrition and U.S. history to other cultures and science. The majority of the students who completed a written evaluation in a Level II Language Arts class requested more group discussions. These differences among student responses seemed to reflect the culture of each class. During the term, the Level I students had read isolated sections from workbooks that often were not written for mature learners. They were interested in doing more concentrated reading but were unable to suggest possible topics or materials. Students in the second class were experienced in the process of brainstorming topics and deciding as a whole class what was offered in a new term. It was part of their class culture to participate in subject selection so students were comfortable generating ideas. The third class had used group discussion as a technique throughout the term. When offered an opportunity to give the teacher feedback, they acknowledged the value they found in that particular learning method. Class culture may develop in ABE as a result of students remaining in the same section with the same teacher for a number of terms. In the six classes used in the study, four contained students and teachers who had worked together

for more than three terms. New students who entered the class could observe established patterns and values.

Students in classes where participation in the selection of methods or materials was encouraged, talked about their learning in more expansive terms. One student described her experience in the elective groups:

The art, the drama, the letter group, I enjoy going to those groups because its like a break from all the studying and, you know, get away from all the hard stuff. You need hard work but you need time just to have fun. Its good to have a little fun in school and those are good ways to have fun. Doing the drama, its like being somebody else, you know, but your part is a little bit like you.

When the class culture included participatory practices and encouraged self-directed learning, students were likely to give more vivid descriptions of their learning and more specific examples of educational objectives. Students in classes that offered little opportunity to participate in material selection or lacked exposure to student-directed learning, were less creative in identifying methods or materials that might facilitate their learning. One student requested more in-class reading using "storybooks" but could not say what these books might be about. Another student remarked that he wanted to be able "to read anything", but was unable to offer ideas as to what he might like to read.

Class culture develops when a teacher and students work together over enough time to establish values and expectations within a class. New students can be assimilated into the culture and adopt exhibited behaviors. This type of culture can shape how students in a class perceive their learning and their role within that particular educational setting.

Student Goals. Another difference observed in students' perception resulted from their secondary objectives or purpose for being in an ABE class. Teachers noted this frequently when discussing goals. Many students in Level I and II classes participated for reasons that were non-academic. A student who enrolled in an ABE class for social interaction or to acquire life skills (reading the newspaper, using maps) had a different

perception of learning than a student who wanted to complete a GED or gain job skills. A student attending a class for social interaction and structured activity used different criteria to assess the effectiveness of the instructional practices. Level I students identified advanced educational goals less often than Level II students who were more frequently oriented towards acquiring a GED certificate. Helen wrote in her journal, "What brings students to an ABE class is not what keeps them there. The affective issues end up being the more critical for low literate adults." During an interview, Larry explained how quick answers from students regarding goals can be misleading:

I guess it's something that you find out over a period of time, through asking questions and making assignments and so on. And over a period of time you begin to develop a picture of what's important to them [the students]. But I don't think it's something you can get in one sitting. Very few people really tell you what's important to them. They'll say something like the GED or to read the Bible or something like that.

Some students' perception of learning appeared to change over time. Teachers and students both noted how this occurred. It seemed to happen to students in all classes but was more evident in classes where students were given opportunities to examine educational goals. The size of Elaine's Language Arts class was conducive to discussions among students and teacher concerning goals. Helen used dialogue journals with students to privately examine frustrations and objectives in school. Larry was used as a resource person outside of his class by various students to discuss their progress and plans. Students may enroll in an ABE class for one reason which can change as their perception of their learning changes.

The goals with which a student enters an ABE program or which the student develops in the classroom effect that student's perception of learning. A student attending for less academic reasons perceives learning differently from a student working for educational or job advancement skills. A student's perception of learning can also change over time with exposure to new skills and ideas.

Self-Esteem. Another facet of student perception was related to the individual's self-esteem. Students often enter a program with a poor self-image and feel incapable of mastering certain skills. Many students apologized for their slowness or their inability to learn a new concept. Helen addressed this concern in an interview:

People in our class already come in with a very diminished sense of themselves. I mean self-esteem but also what they can do, what they're capable of doing. And it takes a lot to like, make them feel, even if they are making progress and they are engaged and they are enjoying it, to get them to understand that they're capable.

Some teachers recognized low self-esteem as a barrier to student achievement and sought ways to develop a student's sense of worth in the educational setting. One class had materials and activities specifically designed to assist adult learners in this area. In classes where teachers recognized and addressed the effect of poor self-esteem on student learning and perception, students were more likely to remain enrolled. Level I students, who often enrolled for less tangible reasons than students in Level II classes, gave the impression of being more sensitive to class environment. Lack of support, identifying other students in the class who "seem retarded", or finding schoolwork too difficult were reasons people had for leaving programs. When there was a supportive structure to address such issues, students seemed more likely to remain in a class. When students were recognized as individuals who had abilities, they seemed willing to attempt new things.

Differences in students' perceptions of their learning were apparent in this study. Differences were noted between classes and how students regarded their learning in relationship to the class culture. Students in classes that used more participatory practices were more likely to be self-directed in choosing materials and subjects. Students in classes that used teacher-centered methods tended to be satisfied with the teacher deciding what materials were used.

Differences were also noted among students with varying goals. Students who were oriented towards GED completion or job training had different perceptions of learning

than students who were interested in self-improvement or using the class as a social outlet. Over time student goals may become more defined or change as a student gains insight or a different perspective. As goals become clearer, students' perception of their learning may shift.

Self-esteem also had an effect on student perception of learning. Most teachers agreed that poor self-esteem was an issue among ABE students and presented a barrier to learning. One class developed activities that addressed this issue. Three of the four teachers in this study expressed how they structured class activities to help enhance students' self-esteem. When activities or opportunities for recognition of self-enhancement were available, student perception of learning seemed more positive.

Which classes are effective in providing adult students with a successful experience in broadening their literacy skills

The six ABE classes observed in this study each had unique characteristics as described in Chapter 4. Although all classes served adult learners with low level reading and math skills in an urban community college setting, each class varied in the relationship between teacher, students, and learning objectives. Two teachers facilitated classes that seemed effective in providing students with a successful educational experience whereas the classes taught by the other two teachers seemed not as effective. Effective instructional methods included an instructional process that balanced properties in the teacher's abilities, student goals and needs, and available resources to facilitate learning in an adult literacy class. Classes that were not as effective appeared to lack balance between these properties which hampered student progress. All the classes are examined individually in the following section that concludes with an examination of the classes identified as most effective.

Level I Language Arts and Math. Elaine's language arts class had students interested in improving basic reading and spelling. The teacher and students felt the class provided a supportive environment. A steady group of students attended daily and participated in discussions and group work. Elaine felt that students were "happy" with the class although their academic achievement was slow. She was discouraged by their lack of progress and found it difficult to find materials or methods that seemed appropriate for these Level I students. Students who attended on a regular basis all planned to return in the fall, describing Elaine as a caring teacher who "gives her best." They hoped for more reading and writing practice but could not describe what types of materials might be useful. Students usually spoke in very general terms about their goals but did specify some particular skills (reading signs, understanding maps) they were interested in obtaining.

Elaine was inexperienced working with beginning readers and adult learners with developmental disabilities. She was willing to try various techniques for serving these students but did not have any resources readily available within the department. Her frustration was apparent in her descriptions of methods used. During one interview she explained how she had students copy words:

which I never before was a great believer in, but now I can see that there is some value to it. I think there is probably more value if people really knew what the words are that they're copying. But, well, you can't have everything.

The Level I Math class was difficult to evaluate because of the changes in teaching staff through the term. Elaine began teaching this class during the fourth week by which time certain procedures had been established. She attempted to incorporate some cooperative learning strategies and practical math skills, but continued with the basic learning lab structure that existed. Poor attendance patterns, individualized work and lack of formal or informal assessment hampered the author's ability to evaluate the effectiveness of this class.

Elaine's self-concept and students' learning skills were two weak areas that impeded the successful achievement of secondary objectives in the Level I Language Arts class. Elaine felt ineffectual and did not know where to access materials for her particular student population. Students generally lacked the primary skills needed to accomplish their learning objectives. Their inability to "learn how to learn" was disappointing to them and frustrating to Elaine.

Level IIA Language Arts. Larry's Language Arts class was taught using instructional methods found in more traditional teacher-centered, college classes although students actively participated in the selection of reading materials. Students generally appeared comfortable in the class setting. Larry demonstrated concern for students and frequently encouraged them to bring materials from home or work if they wanted help. Younger students identified a GED certificate or job advancement as their major objective. Older students were enrolled in the class primarily for reasons of self-improvement.

All students interviewed spoke highly of Larry's strengths as a teacher. Larry knew students respected his teaching, often approaching him outside of class with questions or requests for assistance, but he personally felt his teaching methods were outdated and he lacked exposure to new ideas in theory and practice. He was hesitant to implement different strategies in the class as students seemed satisfied with the current format and were resistant to changes.

Level II Math. Larry taught his Level II Math class using a similar approach of lecture and demonstrated skills. Students were encouraged to ask questions and were often given positive feedback. Attendance was high compared to other classes in this study and interviewed students were satisfied with their progress.

Both classes taught by Larry, language arts and math, showed evidence of students achieving learning objectives and student needs being met. Although during interviews Larry expressed doubts about his teaching skills and was reluctant to effect changes in

these classes, students perceived him as a strong and caring teacher. Attendance and participation patterns supported the findings that his classes were effective in providing literacy skills mutually identified by students and Larry

Level IIB Language Arts. Compared to other teachers in this study, Delores had taught the least amount of time in a community college ABE program. This study was conducted during the first term she taught the Level IIB Language Arts class. She used various grouping configurations and activities in her class to involve students in the learning process. Materials were selected by Delores using criteria that attempted to match the interests and needs of the students. As a higher level language arts class, many students were working towards GED completion.

Using quizzes and tests, Delores provided students with evidence of their progress. Written evaluations by students gave Delores information concerning their perception of class activities and materials. Some students in the class were enthusiastic about the materials and teaching methods. Students who attended regularly participated in discussions and activities. Other students seemed uninterested, arriving late to class, and working erratically. The daily rate of attendance for this Level II class was lower than other classes in the study.

Delores had confidence in her teaching abilities, utilized instructional methods designed for adult learners, and demonstrated respect and understanding for students. Yet there existed problems within the class that prevented more students from actively participating and attending on a regular basis. Some students were successful in broadening the skills they wanted. Others seemed to lack either the self-esteem or basic skills necessary to participate in a class that required self-directed behaviors.

Delores recognized that all students were not equally involved and explained, that as a new teacher for this class, it would take time to establish an environment conducive to achievement for the majority of students. She had implemented various changes in the

class structure compared to the structure previously established in the class. The class under her direction was more learner-centered, giving students an opportunity to take responsibility for their learning needs.

Her ideas for the Level II class had not become part of the class culture yet within the time frame of a single term. Although effectiveness was limited in the class, the success of some students was an indication of the possibilities for more generalized effectiveness once the teacher and students had more firmly established a class culture.

Level I/II. Helen co-taught the Level I/II class that offered language arts, math, and other subjects. Students, following a daily schedule that included individual, group, and whole class activities, participated in selection of subjects and materials. Each term individual interviews and whole class evaluations gave students an opportunity to customize their learning as well as partake in a group decision making process.

The classroom environment, laid out to accommodate students with disabilities and various learning preferences, often appeared cramped with students, staff, and wheelchairs. Many students complained that noise and overcrowding were problems for the class but few thought that reducing the number of students admitted was the solution. Most students seemed actively involved in their learning, and thought the schedule met their needs. The daily rate of attendance was good compared to other classes in the study.

The structure for this Level I/II class had evolved over a five year period. Although changes in skill grouping and subject selection had occurred during that time in response to students' needs, a class culture was firmly established that provided a congenial setting and had resources available for students with varying goals. Helen, other staff members, and students agreed the class was effective in serving students. Attendance patterns and student participation confirmed this finding.

Effective Classes. Classes identified as effective in providing students with a successful experience each used different instructional practices. Larry structured his math

and language arts classes composed of predominantly young African-American students using a lecture and drill-and-practice format. The high attendance rate, observable student interest, and student satisfaction with learning gains were indications of a respectful relationship between the teacher and students and their mutual identification of goals.

Another effective class, Helen's Level I/II, served a very different student population of older European American adults using a format that included several different configurations for grouping students and involving them in participatory activities. Teacher and students agreed that the class used successful practices which allowed students to achieve their learning goals. Observations confirmed student participation and a sense of ownership among students for the class structure.

Different methods and types of materials were used in Larry's and Helen's classes but a similar balance was in place between the teacher, students, and setting. This balance created an effective instructional process that facilitated learning. Classes that were not as effective appeared to lack some element in the process. Elaine was unable to access resources or identify strategies that allowed her to facilitate basic learning skills for her Level I students. Students were comfortable in the class and respected Elaine, but unbalanced needs and resources hampered learning. The Level IIB Language Arts class was moderately effective with discernible problem areas. The teacher was attempting to implement change in the class culture. Although a portion of the students benefitted from the new practices, other students appeared uncomfortable and disengaged from the learning process. Larry's Level II classes and Helen's Level I/II class seemed most effective in providing adult students with a successful experience in broadening their literacy skills.

What instructional practices are recognized by students and teachers as facilitating learning in adult literacy classes

The instructional practices recognized by students and teachers as facilitating learning are better described as a holistic process than as discrete methods. Research participants did not identify specific practice formats such as lecturing compared to group discussion or whole language instruction compared to drill-and-practice grammar, but an interdependent relationship between students' needs and the teacher's actions within the context of the classroom. When a teacher's choice of materials and methods reflected the attributes of students and their educational objectives, there was a greater chance of students remaining in the program, actively participating in their learning, and achieving their learning goals.

A number of teacher- and student-dependent properties were identified through this study as facilitating the process. Teacher-dependent practices included identifying primary objectives, developing students' basic learning skills, providing a supportive environment, and interpersonal communication.

Identification of Primary Objectives. Identification of primary objectives by teachers is necessary to provide students with the basic instructional skills needed to achieve learning objectives. If a teacher and student agreed that a secondary objective for the term was accurately completing job applications, the teacher needed to break this objective down into elements which the student could master, e.g., appropriate sight vocabulary, spelling, and terminology used on applications. Neither understanding secondary objectives nor providing generic literacy skills were enough singularly to facilitate learning for adult literacy students. A teacher needed to infer which specific skills would enable a student to achieve his or her goal. This type of identification is essential for an adult learner who may not be aware of which skills are necessary and for the teacher who needs to make an appropriate selection of materials and methods.

Development of Basic Learning Skills. Development of learning skills was identified by all teachers in the study and involved "learning how to learn." Developing basic learning skills helped students become more independent and successful adult learners. Teachers saw many adults enter ABE classes without the skills necessary to be successful in an educational environment. Disorganization of time and materials was often cited as a problem. Methods for facilitating the development of these skills varied in different classes observed.

Larry's classes tended to be teacher-centered. He usually lectured and demonstrated new skills at the front of the room. Students then worked individually on assignments, addressing questions to Larry. The pacing of lessons, Larry's clear manner in explaining new ideas, and the serious atmosphere that pervaded the classroom contributed to students remaining on task and accomplishing required work.

Helen used methods that were quite different. She utilized group, individual, and whole class activities. Students were responsible for following their individual written schedules and moving between different activities. Within subject areas, students had weekly assignment sheets and quizzes which allowed them to chart their progress. A few students, who had difficulty working with a weekly schedule, were given daily schedules that divided the class time into short periods. As they became more successful managing their time and work on a daily basis, they changed to the weekly schedule.

Delores structured her Level II class in yet a third way. She used group work and written assessment to give students the opportunity to acquire skills and recognize progress. She said working cooperatively offered students a chance to see how other adults managed school work and completed assignments. Periodic assessments validated students' learning. Delores felt it was vital for ABE students to:

learn how to learn and they have to learn how to respect their own learning and their own way of thinking. And it's time-consuming, takes a lot of energy, but the payoffs are so much greater.

Developing basic learning skills helped students manage their educational endeavors and become more independent. It was identified as a key element in facilitating student learning. The different methods teachers chose to assist in the development of these skills seemed dependent on a teacher's style and the student population. Various methods seemed to produce comparable results.

Supportive Environment. A supportive environment was conducive to learning and the student's sense of comfort. ABE students often returned to school apprehensive of the educational setting. Establishing an environment that was flexible for this type of adult learner yet provided structure seemed beneficial. Two of the classes observed had loose time structures. Students often entered class ten to twenty minutes late and sometimes left early. The amount of time used for skill enhancement was minimal. Teachers who structured classes to accommodate students arriving late had a higher percentage of late arrivals. Other classes that began on time with the implicit message that students should be prompt had a majority of students in seats prepared to work when class began.

Students commented frequently about classroom environment. Most comments concerned the amount of noise, disruptions by other students, or lack of space. Although students complained about the physical setting, there was ample evidence of students making efforts to create an hospitable environment. Coffee and snacks were available in two classes. Guests to the classes (the author and other observers) were usually greeted by students and provided with explanations of activities. The PCC classroom and the large SCCC classroom (Level I Math and Level IIB Language Arts) displayed posters and bulletin boards that reflected student interests.

A supportive environment was found useful in helping students to feel comfortable and to give them a sense of ownership in the educational setting. Although not all teachers had the option of arranging their classrooms to fit their student population, there was an awareness among teachers and students of the importance of environmental factors.

Interpersonal Communication. Listening, demonstrating respect, and providing students with clear explanations are teacher communication skills identified as facilitating learning for adult literacy students. Both students and teachers believed interpersonal communication was a necessary part of effective teaching in an ABE class. It was an attribute noted frequently during interviews and observed in teacher-student interactions. Poor communication skills, as a hindrance to learning, were also described by students. Fast, obscure, or derogatory explanations tended to reinforce a student's perception of incompetence.

Interpersonal communication was strongly acknowledged by students and teachers as an important component of a teacher's successful instructional practice. Listening to students, "being present to the other and aware of the other's presence" (Stewart, 1993, p. 388), was stressed frequently during interviews. Students identified good listening skills in describing teachers they admired. All four teachers listed listening to students as a requirement for effective ABE instruction. Demonstrating respect and providing clear explanations were other communication skills noted during the course of the study.

Many students seemed sensitive to a teacher's perception of them as adult learners. Various students in describing why one teacher was good, remarked that he showed respect for them. In another class, a student complained about a teacher who treated him like a child. Larry commented that in his experience elementary school teachers did not do well in ABE programs because they had a condescending attitude towards adult literacy students. In response to questions concerning effective methods, Helen wrote:

Its not a person's methods, its their attitude. The experience of human interaction is so powerful that how a person relates with another can be more important than the substance of the interaction. ABE students need to be treated respectfully so that they can retain their sense of self-esteem and integrity. When teaching an adult with low skills its crucial to help them see themselves as capable reading adults. By interacting respectfully, this can happen.

Demonstrating respect for students by recognizing them as partners in the educational process was a component identified in this study. This echoes Freire's description of the literacy process as a "relationship of authentic dialogue" (1970a, p. 212).

Students, in discussing desirable traits for teachers, expressed the positive consequences of teachers giving clear explanations. When asked about qualities in a particularly good teacher, one student responded, "He's nice and he's real good explaining things, you know. He explains things so you understand them." Another student described how she felt more competent learning because of a tutor who was skilled at explaining concepts in social studies to her. ABE students, who may be hesitant to ask questions, are dependent on teaching staff who offer clear explanations.

The primary research question sought to identify instructional practices recognized by students and teachers as facilitating learning. An interdependent relationship was established between teacher action and student need within the context of the literacy classroom. Four teacher-dependent properties resulted: identification of primary objectives, development of students' basic learning skills, a supportive environment, and interpersonal communication. These properties determined the effectiveness of a teacher's action within the classroom.

Other properties which facilitated learning were student-dependent. The diverse student population included in this study was useful in providing a wide realm of experiences, opinions, and values. Commonalties found within this realm are thought to offer a comprehensive view of ABE students in urban daytime classes. Student-dependent properties were participation and self-directedness.

Participation. Student participation is the role students take in classroom operations. As students become more actively involved, their interests and needs become more apparent to the teacher. Students who assumed an active role by bringing in materials they wanted to study or requesting mastery of particular skills seemed more satisfied. A

woman in Larry's class brought forms from her job that she wanted to learn how to complete. Helen reported how students in her class initially suggested the idea of reading groups which have continued as an integral part of that Level I/II class for the last four years. By assuming an active role, students became partners in the educational endeavor rather than passive recipients. By expressing their interests and needs, students provided critical information that allowed teachers to customize lessons and offer meaningful content.

Self-directedness. Participation is a role students take in classroom operations, and self-directedness is a role they take in their individual learning. As students become more self-directed, they rely less on the definitive voice of the teacher to provide ultimate answers. Students who exhibited low self-directedness were apt to have unrealistic expectations of the teacher or tutors. This type of student may regard the teacher as an expert who has all the knowledge required to help students become skilled readers. As adult learners, these students need to begin evaluating their own learning styles and objectives to become less dependent on experts and formalized educational settings.

One student complained he was unable to improve his reading skills unless a teacher or tutor worked more frequently with him on an individual basis. After a meeting with his teacher who explained that this was not possible because of the number of students in the class, he stopped attending. His perception of learning included constant attention from another person who would teach him to read. Without that other person beside him, he felt incapable of skill improvement.

Another student was described as extremely dependent when she first entered the ABE program. Over time she developed more self-directedness which allowed her to write a book of short stories and develop crossword puzzles for the class. By becoming more adept at using resource materials and peers, she increased her learning assets and felt satisfaction with her gains.

Student-dependent properties are a vital component of the instructional process. Students who participated actively in classes appeared more satisfied with instruction. Students able to express their needs and goals to teaching staff were more likely to receive the resources they required. When students were less dependent on teaching staff to define and satisfy all their learning needs, there seemed a greater chance of success. These properties of participation and self-directedness describe aspects of student involvement within the interdependent relationship between student and teacher that contribute to effective learning.

SUMMARY

An inductive analysis of the data resulted in the generation of conceptual categories and the application of identified concepts and patterns to the research questions. The secondary research questions were addressed using results from the analysis and supporting evidence from the case studies. The outcomes identified how literacy skills were defined, which instructional practices were used, differences in students' perceptions of learning, and the effectiveness of classes in providing students with a successful experience. These results formed the framework for addressing the primary research question that was concerned with instructional practices that facilitate learning in adult literacy classes.

Research participants did not identify specific practices but an interdependent relationship between students and teacher within the context of the ABE class. This holistic process involved mutual actions to maximize learning. For teachers, recognizing a student's abilities, interests, and needs was necessary to implement instructional practices that were appropriate. Identification of primary objectives, development of basic learning skills, establishment of a supportive environment, and interpersonal communication were

four teacher-dependent properties recognized during the course of this study as facilitating learning. For students, an active role within the class and within their own sphere of learning was recognized as contributing to goal achievement. Participation and self-directedness were student-dependent properties that characterized this role.

The case studies provided examples of classes that exhibited this process in an effective manner. Student participation, attendance patterns, and satisfaction of achievement by students and teacher was high in these classes. Other classes were noted as lacking some element which contributed to a less effective process. A teacher who lacks skills necessary to diagnose students' primary objectives or a class that does not have a supportive environment established can seriously hamper student achievement.

CHAPTER VI

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

SUMMARY OF STUDY

Effective methods of adult literacy instruction have rarely been described in the literature. Past research has not sufficiently addressed the question of what type of instructional practices are recognized by participants themselves, i.e., students and teachers, as facilitating learning in ABE classes. The purpose of this study was to describe instructional practices in two urban literacy programs serving low level adult readers, and to identify which practices were effective in meeting student needs. Effectiveness was measured by the ability of students to achieve learning objectives identified by themselves and the teacher, and included attendance patterns and student participation. Quantitative measures of achievement were not used as criteria since few classes utilized formal assessment instruments.

The process of generating grounded theory developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) provided a suitable methodological framework for this qualitative research design. An ethnographic approach to the investigation was a useful format for the participatory research study. Teachers and students in six ABE classes provided data which were collected using a multi-method plan utilizing interviews, participant observation, and documentary materials. The inductive analysis was a reflective process that involved the continual organization and synthesis of data in an effort to identify patterns and categories, verify findings, and generate theories.

The study was structured around one primary and four secondary research questions. These questions were designed to address the various aspects of effective instructional practices in ABE classes. Before effective practices could be named, it was necessary to understand how teachers and students defined literacy skills and student goals, what practices were used in the classrooms, and how students perceived their learning. After this information was gathered, effective practices could be identified using the criteria elicited from teachers and students. Effectiveness was determined by whether students were successful in achieving the learning objectives identified by themselves and their teacher. Effective practices were found to be an interdependent process that included teacher, students, and goals within the context of the ABE classroom.

Applying these concepts to the six ABE classes and using evidence from the case studies, the original research questions were addressed and practices in each of the classes analyzed. The author determined that the effectiveness of discrete instructional practices was dependent on an instructional process that resulted from a teacher's choice of materials and methods accurately reflecting the attributes of students and their educational objectives. Crucial aspects of the teacher's actions were identification of primary objectives, development of basic learning skills, establishment of a supportive environment, and interpersonal communication skills. For students, an active role within the class that included participation and self-directedness was recognized as contributing to goal achievement. Where this process was observed, there was a greater chance of students remaining in the program, actively participating in their learning, and ultimately achieving learning goals.

DISCUSSION

This study was undertaken using a methodological framework based on grounded theory and qualitative methods from a phenomenological tradition. Wirth (1949) explained the implications of the researcher's role using this type of methodology:

Hence, insight may be regarded as the core of social knowledge. It is arrived at by being in the inside of the phenomena to be observed. . . It is participation in an activity that generates interest, purpose, point of view, value, meaning and intelligibility, as well as bias. (p. xxii)

The author began this investigation to better understand instructional practices in adult literacy education. It was hoped that by extensive observation, interviews, and analysis, effective classroom practices would be identified. As a teacher-researcher, the author was interested in finding practices that could easily be replicated in other ABE classes. What materials, format, schedules worked in helping students achieve their goals? She was searching for a simple answer for effective ABE instruction, a recipe with few ingredients.

The results were not simple. Observations in classes that served students of diverse ethnicity, varying ages and experiences produced the realization that one basic set of practices could not adequately serve the variety of classes found in ABE programs. This finding echoed Alamprese (1990) who cited the need for multiple instructional approaches as a single model could not suffice.

Within each classroom, the characteristics of the teacher and individual students produced varying combinations of styles, needs, and goals. One program's emphasis differed from another, and beginning adult readers in one class may have different goals from beginning readers in another. Despite the differences observed, there were similarities. The concern of the teachers, the determination of the students, the less than ideal conditions, and paucity of materials were apparent at all sites. The differences and

similarities took shape in patterns and categories that generated common themes found in all classes. Certain behaviors were noted again and again by teachers and students as fundamental for effective teaching. Analogous actions and words were observed in successful students in Seattle as well as Portland. These themes were analyzed and formed answers to the original questions. The identified instructional practices were not part of a simple recipe but an integrated process that involved teacher, students, goals, and materials. The practices did not rely solely on a particular workbook or group configuration but on an holistic process that recognized the people in a specific class.

Defining Literacy Skills and Goals

Literacy skills, as contextual phenomena, are determined by the culture, the social network, and economic conditions surrounding a person. Kazemek (1988) argued that "literacy is constrained by social and cultural practices and is not merely a private accomplishment" (p. 473). This investigation confirmed that how literacy skills are defined by students was dependent upon the individual's place within their community. The long term goals, or secondary objectives, a student had for enrolling in the class reflected his or her life outside of the classroom. Primary objectives, the skills needed to achieve the learning goals, were particular tasks such as understanding the vocabulary used on forms or spelling the names of numbers. They required the teacher to assess existing skills and knowledge, to analyze the student's learning needs, and to provide appropriate resources. Having mastered the primary objectives, the student was then able to perform the necessary steps to achieve the learning goal.

Working together, a student and teacher can enumerate the necessary skills for both primary and secondary objectives. These skills are defined by the student's needs and interests and the teacher's expertise. Pre-designed curriculum or subject area workbooks may not match the requisite skills or objectives of a particular student. The teacher should

evaluate the materials and objectives to determine an appropriate complement. A student can provide information and feedback to help the teacher, participating and developing self-directedness as an adult learner. Teachers and students need to identify both primary and secondary objectives, and find materials and methods that facilitate achievement of the desired goal.

While defining the skills required to successfully achieve the student's original goal, the teacher and student can explore broader implications of literacy instruction. The social interaction that occurred in classes, the discussions of personal, social, and political issues, and the investigation of other subjects such as drama and poetry, were part of the instruction observed in these classes. Dauzat and Dauzat (1977) included language skills that communicate ideas, influence the community, and cope with change as part of their literacy definition. Using language as an active medium in the class was not only useful for students but seemed to strengthen the perception of their role within the college and the community.

Effective Practices

Pratt (1992) described the nurturing conception of teaching as:

guided by a primary concern for the worth and dignity of each individual. All learning was believed to be facilitated by a relationship of mutual trust, rightful dignity, and reciprocal respect . . . Significant learning was not associated with content or higher forms of cognition, but with the enhancement of self-concept and personal agency. (p. 215)

Effective practices in ABE classes were found to be part of a process that utilized the teacher's skills and available materials to facilitate student achievement while recognizing the student's interests, abilities, and needs. The teachers and students in the study echoed Pratt's observations. Teachers who listened well, demonstrated respect, and recognized ABE students as adult learners were identified as effective. Students described a positive relationship between student and teacher as a component vital to remaining in a

class. In addition to interpersonal skills, teachers also needed to be adept at delineating the primary objectives students needed. Teachers who were able to identify requisite basic skills using various techniques such as interviews, surveys, or informal discussion, were more successful in helping students achieve their learning goals.

The lack of quality materials available from publishers forced teachers to be innovative in finding materials appropriate for ABE students. Although all teachers in this study designed materials for their classes, materials that reflected the adult nature of the student population seemed more meaningful and effective. Job-related forms and reading matter people might use in their homes or community (newspapers, driver's handbook, voter pamphlet, etc.) are examples of such materials. When these were tailored to the abilities and objectives of students, students responded favorably. This is not to infer that published materials are not practical for Level I and II ABE classes, but that teachers should selectively use materials to accommodate student goals.

The four teachers in this study stressed the importance of enhancing students' personal recognition of skills and abilities; moving from a negative perception of what they could not do towards a positive perception of their capabilities. This finding supports a report from Lerche (1979) that "the most consistently successful programs are those that structure and systematize their instructional design. . .[and] individualize instructional plans to reflect learner strength and to address learner deficiencies" (p. 101-102). Each teacher had different styles and methods for this. Larry quietly gave individual students encouragement as he walked around the classroom. Delores used quizzes and written tests to help students see what they were capable of achieving. Students who felt they were not gaining new skills or felt discouraged by lack of progress were likely to discontinue a class or have sporadic attendance.

Effective practices included recognizing students as active participants. When their values and ideas were acknowledged within the class setting, students developed

ownership of their learning and became more capable of identifying skills and materials appropriate to their goals. Helen's class emphasized student participation in selection of subject offerings and class management. Larry encouraged students to select reading materials. In classes where students were not given an active part, the students had difficulty defining their needs. They remained dependent on the teacher as expert and did not develop skills towards becoming more self-directed as learners.

Although various practices were identified through the course of this study as beneficial in effective instruction, of greater note is the instructional process. Two teachers spoke of an holistic process that involved constant reflection by the teacher of student need and progress in order to establish a balance in acquired knowledge and desired skills. Delores called it developing linkages. Helen described it as a constant process of evaluation and adjustment. In Larry's classes, this instructional process was observed in his self-questioning and sensitivity to students. Understanding the elements of the instructional process is key to identifying effective instructional practices.

Instructional Process

Brookfield (1986) described four premises of the Nottingham Andragogy Group which were central to adult learning. One of these states that adults learn best when engaged in action and reflection. Mezirow (1991) differentiated adult learning from the way children learn by the ability adults have "to engage in premise reflection" (p. 250). Recognition of this process of action and reflection in the classroom is valuable for students and teachers. Teachers who identified a continual process for adjusting practices to serve student needs had more confidence in their own skills. They selected and adapted learning objectives to match student progress and learning. The unique nature of adult literacy students requires piecing together the knowledge the learners have with the new knowledge they wish to obtain. This is done using an instructional process that evaluates students'

skills, abilities, and needs to determine the most appropriate strategies. It is a process that continues as long as a student remains in the class. As the student acquires new skills and knowledge, the teacher adjusts the materials and methods used.

The instructional process is not composed of particular practices, assessments or materials, but is a successful integration of the individuals with available resources. Helen's class had many more resources (computers, dictionaries, encyclopedia) available and students utilized them. Larry's classroom resources were sparse but he and students brought in reading materials that served student interests well.

For Elaine who had a small class and also lacked suitable materials, the instructional process seemed weak as she was unable to identify primary objectives that matched student needs. Students were motivated yet dissatisfied. Larry used more traditional teaching techniques in his class but was very much aware of the attitudes and needs of his students. He produced adequate materials and presented new information in a format that served that set of learners. Larry doubted his abilities although the students in that class demonstrated gains, actively participated, and expressed satisfaction with his teaching.

Students can also engage in a reflective process within the class or should be encouraged to do so by the teacher. A student who identifies learning objectives and evaluates progress towards these goals, is more aware of requisite skills, possible outcomes, and "linkages." Some students entered a class with clear goals but others had only vague ideas as to what they hope to gain from attending. Teachers working with students could facilitate goal identification and self-assessment of needs to help students acquire skills that would allow them to become involved in their educational process and more independent as learners.

Summary

Findings from this study indicated that multiple approaches to adult literacy instruction are inevitable in the context of ABE classes. The differences in programs, teachers, students, and available resources prevent one instructional approach from sufficing to meet the variations in settings. General practices which enhance instruction were identified through the study. Teacher communication skills, the importance of defining primary objectives, and the use of appropriate materials are representative of practices which recognized the students as adult learners who required materials and methods suitable to their needs and interests. Teachers who develop strategies that adjust to changing objectives as students progress and as learning objectives are re-evaluated, are more likely to facilitate learning that is successful in the adult literacy classroom.

The balance created between the students' learning and the teacher's methods utilizing available resources and establishing an active partnership is an instructional process that was defined in this study as key to effective instructional practice. The process is not dependent on a particular instructional approach but was shown effective in different classes that employed dissimilar methods. The effectiveness of the process seems dependent on a teacher defining skills that facilitate learner achievement and reflecting on the adaption of methods and materials as students progress. The students' role in this process is one of active participation which can be grounded in the class culture or established by the teacher.

AFTER EFFECTS

As a study based on ideas from participatory research methodology, teachers and students were actively involved in the collection and analysis of data. It was hoped this study would provide participants with an opportunity to "examine their beliefs, actions, and

the school context; making changes based on this understanding" (Gitlin, 1990, p. 446), as well as illuminate practices that served ABE students. The author attempted to meet Gitlin's criteria "to foster a collective approach to research that can mobilize groups typically left out of educational policy discourse" (p. 449). This section describes the results of using participatory research methods and the continuing effects of this research study.

The manner in which students and teachers at both sites entered enthusiastically into the research project surprised the author. All participants gave extended amounts of time to interviews and discussions. In addition to their efforts within the scope of the actual study, participants used the study to effect other types of changes within their educational setting. Elaine, at the Seattle site, requested the address of the Portland-based teacher to begin a correspondence concerning how she might better serve students with developmental disabilities. A student in the Portland class wrote a letter to the Level II Language Arts class requesting a pen pal. Numerous articles and books exchanged hands between the teachers and author who shared ideas and possible resources. During the last SCCC site visit, one teacher asked to "interview" the author concerning her ideas on ABE instruction. A future visit to the Portland site was planned by a Seattle teacher.

The ABE program at SCCC decided to offer electives similar to a concept used by the Portland class during the Fall 1992 term. The teachers involved in planning this curricular change hoped to arrange elective groups based on interests rather than skill level.

In Portland, the Level I/II teachers decided to try combining separate reading, writing, and spelling periods into a language arts section that met for a longer time period similar to the blocks used in the SCCC program. They planned to implement this change in their class during the Summer 1992 term.

These interactions between teachers and students, the exchange of ideas and examination of practices are recognized as valuable outcomes of this study. Although not

specifically included within the research questions, these effects reflect the dialogue that is necessary in adult literacy education. As a field that serves a disadvantaged population with resources that are often inadequate, dialogue among educators and between educators and students is one available avenue for exploring ideas and examining beliefs of adult literacy education. These effects also reflect the political element of this study which gave two groups, ABE students and teachers, an opportunity to express their ideas concerning adult literacy. For the students and teachers involved in this participatory study, the after effects indicate recognition, better understanding and forecast possible change, fostering involvement in the educational discourse.

In Chapter I, the interconnection of people, programs, and politics in understanding the dimensions of adult literacy education was addressed. This research study described the people and the classes at two urban community college ABE programs. The design of this study recognized the political nature of adult literacy by including ABE students and teachers, both groups who are frequently silent in debates of educational issues, as active participants and respected informants. It brought their ideas and words within the research literature in a manner that acknowledges their right to be involved in Freire's authentic dialogue.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

This study was designed to describe ABE classes in two urban literacy programs, identify effective practices in adult literacy education, and involve students and teachers in an authentic dialogue. It has practical implications for practitioners and others in the field of adult literacy education. These implications, organized under four general headings of teachers, program administrators, university programs, and ABE students, indicate a strong need for awareness and action from all levels of the educational system concerning

adult literacy education. Providing adequate funding, conducting adult learning research on underserved populations, and strengthening skills of the teaching force are examples of how governmental and educational leaders could respond to the growing problem of adult illiteracy in the United States.

Teachers

Two implications apparent from the study are the need for teachers to match literacy instruction to student goals and the importance of developing a supportive environment. The first implication reflects the connection between primary and secondary objectives. Students enroll in an ABE class for a particular goal. Although it was recognized that these goals may sometimes be vague and possibly change over time, teachers should make efforts to assist students in goal identification and to design instructional strategies that will allow students to progress towards their objectives. As adult learners, ABE students have a self-identified purpose for returning to school, but the means for realizing that purpose need to be understood and prioritized by the teacher.

Recognizing individual student goals and planning appropriate instructional methods to accommodate them does not imply that students must necessarily study independently. Apparent from this study were various ways teachers accommodated students' goals in classes that utilized whole class and small group configurations. Often adults learners in a class had common primary objectives which could be worked towards in a cooperative manner. Instructional practices can be designed to assist students in goal achievement by providing them with prerequisite skills and to encourage them to work with others, developing peer support and sharing resources.

Working cooperatively and using peers in a learning situation can help students feel connected to their educational setting. A supportive environment fosters a sense of ownership that lets students become more self-directed as learners and has a positive effect

on student retention. Although the author recognizes that ABE classrooms are often overcrowded or are otherwise inadequate physical sites, teachers can use seating arrangements, class activities (field trips, social functions), and interactive exercises (group discussions, peer tutoring) to promote a sense of belonging and ownership among students.

In many respects, the entire study has implications for ABE teachers in offering insight to six classes and their management. As few teachers in this field have opportunities to visit other classrooms, this study provides a glimpse of the strategies used by teachers, the response of students, and successful practices. Understanding the mechanics of other classes provides teachers insight into their own. With concepts and terms to identify practices and problems, teachers have a greater ability to diagnose and improve the educational process in their classes. The two implications for teachers noted in this section stood out for the author as fundamental in establishing ABE classes that truly serve adult learners, but it is hoped the entire study will be useful to teachers in this field.

Program Administrators

In an article on suggested changes in the field of adult literacy education, Kazemek (1988) wrote, "Without long-term and ongoing financial support, professional input, and guidance, literacy programs and tutors cannot be effective" (p. 469). Both administrators interviewed for this study faced inadequate funding for their programs and a growing demand from students and agencies for educational services. The problems of funding and program needs cannot be easily addressed at the community college level or as a result of this research study, but administrators can be aware that solutions for providing quality education in adult literacy programs are not simple. Purchasing the latest materials does not compensate for teachers who are under-trained. Developing new "orientation-and-placement" procedures does not help student retention if, after students are in a classroom,

they are poorly served. Offering an annual workshop does not turn an elementary school teacher into an adult educator. This study described the frustrations, challenges, and visions of ABE teachers and students. Program administrators need to recognize the reality of the people in the classroom, their strengths and weaknesses, to determine what solutions are possible and effective.

Helen co-taught an ABE class. During interviews she described the value of a co-teacher in discussing ideas, providing feedback, and lending support. She believed this allowed both teachers to feel more secure when experimenting with new techniques or developing new materials. In diagnosing student needs, both teachers could "compare and share" their information and opinions. The other teachers in the study taught by themselves and two of the three spoke of a desire for more collaboration among colleagues. Most ABE teachers work in isolation. The variation of schedules and sites makes it difficult to exchange ideas, share resources, or discuss problems. Program administrators are encouraged to experiment with teaching configurations; using co-teachers where appropriate or setting up teams that can meet periodically. A team can be composed of teachers who each have a separate class but have formal (and frequent) opportunities to meet with other teachers on the team. By establishing a system for teachers that provides support and a forum for exchange, administrators can enhance the abilities of their teaching staff and strengthen their program.

University Programs

Very few university programs exist that offer graduate level studies for adult literacy educators. Three of the four teachers in this study had taken courses in general adult education and learning. All commented that many of the theories and practices they gained from these courses were not applicable to the ABE population. They were frustrated by their desire to become more skilled as practitioners and the slim resources

available in graduate programs. Limited course offerings are one aspect of the problem. The paucity of research leading to development of materials and methods appropriate for low level adult readers is another. University programs urgently need to address this lack of available training and research in the field of adult literacy education.

Partnerships with community colleges and community-based literacy programs would provide universities with the sites and personnel necessary to conduct research and recruit graduate students. The growing interest in family or intergenerational literacy helps support the idea that adult literacy is a relevant issue for schools of education to seriously acknowledge and address. University programs need to take the initiative in seeking ways to establish partnerships, offer courses, and undertake research that acknowledges the implications of adult illiteracy in our society. As many ABE teachers are under-trained and few community colleges have the resources to conduct research in the field of adult literacy, it is dependent upon university programs to assume a leadership role in addressing these concerns.

ABE Students

It is hoped that ABE students, like teachers, will benefit from the results of this study. The active role of the students who participated in the research was an indication of the involvement possible for any adult literacy student. The implications outlined for students in this section reflect and support this role. Students need to be more assertive in ABE programs by requesting services, by demanding rights, and by expecting quality in education. They need to move from the role of passive consumer to active participant in literacy classes. This will help to elucidate an awareness of their goals and abilities to staff at all levels within the community college setting.

Students in the study who were actively involved in material and topic selection evidenced more independence in their learning. Students whose ideas and suggestions for

instructional practices were acknowledged showed greater respect for themselves and their learning environment. As adult learners, ABE students need to demand educational services that are appropriate, meaningful, and respectful. Materials or methods designed for children, or workbooks that do not address adult literacy needs should not be considered acceptable. ABE students need not accept an inferior status within a college or school, but can request teachers, materials, and physical conditions that mirror the quality in other departments. Students are encouraged to recognize ABE as an educational program that can provide them with desired skills, not as a holding tank for "dummies." As students, citizens, and parents they can participate in establishing appropriate adult literacy classes, but this requires speaking out and letting their needs and expectations be known.

Summary

These implications for teachers, administrators, university programs, and ABE students stress the need for enhanced communication and alliances to identify needs and create solutions. Talking together within a class, within a program, and within the postsecondary system is the beginning of action that can lead to better educational services and a better community. Enhanced communication will benefit many aspects of adult literacy education but more substantial action is also required.

Teachers and students can work together to outline requirements for ABE classes that serve adult learners effectively. Program administrators need to establish hiring, pay and scheduling standards that are consistent with other college departments. University officials and government representatives need to decide if adult literacy will be an issue they truly address and support or simply acknowledge in glossy bulletins.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Research is sorely needed in two areas of adult literacy education: development of materials and methods and adult learning theory. It is shocking to compare the vast amount of research done in elementary and secondary education to what has been done in adult literacy. Very few studies have seriously investigated what types of materials and instructional methods are effective with adult literacy students. Poorly designed published materials show little understanding of adult learners' lives. All teachers in this study commented on the inferior quality of what was available from publishers and, as a result, designed many materials used in their classes.

Additional quantitative and qualitative research that investigated available materials and provided practitioners and publishers with valid findings would be extremely useful. Similar studies could be done to understand instructional methods suitable for different adult populations. One-on-one tutoring and drop-in centers have been a standard for adult literacy education for many years. Most of the classes in this study were structured differently; some in ways that seemed effective in meeting student needs. More research to identify and compare various instructional models would help administrators and teachers select instructional methods that reflected the needs of their student population.

Researchers could further investigate effective teaching practices. Four teacher-dependent properties were identified in this study, but additional research could crystalize the elements within these properties. An example is the identification of primary objectives. What methods and materials would assist teachers in identifying the basic literacy skills needed for particular goals? Is a competency-based curriculum appropriate for this? Are there common literacy objectives that could be addressed using published workbooks similar to the materials available for GED preparation? Research to fill these

gaps and provide practitioners with appropriate materials and strategies is desperately needed.

The literature on adult learning theory has seen remarkable growth in the last twenty years. Unfortunately many of the studies were conducted on educated and middle-class populations. Work by Gilligan (1982) and Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule (1986) began to uncover gender differences in learning. Differences in cultural, economic, and ethnic socialization may also affect literacy acquisition. Studies that examined how different adults learn would not only enhance literacy education but enrich adult learning theory.

Further research in adult literacy education is needed. For the above recommendations to be more than empty words however, adequate funding is required.

Kazemek (1988) pointed out that:

if adult literacy is a state and national concern - and I believe it is - then local and state governments, and especially the federal government, must accept responsibility for adequately supporting viable, innovative, and professional programs. I want to emphasize that this is a political issue and, indeed, a moral issue, which we as professionals must address. . . (p. 483).

Adult literacy education is a field that has implications for the individual, the family, the community, and the nation. Research to enhance practices and further understanding of adult learning would provide students, teachers, and administrators with the knowledge and skills needed for effective literacy instruction. Although only part of the solution to the growing illiteracy problem, effective instruction in ABE programs can make a difference if supported with adequate funding and trained professionals.

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APPENDIX A

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION ON CLASSES

I. ABE Data - Instructor Questionnaire**Instructor's Name:** Elaine**Institution/Level:** SCCC Level I Language Arts**1. Total number of students registered in your class this term:**9 male4 female13 total**2. Average number of students attending your class daily this week:** 8**3. Length of time each student has been in the ABE program at your college:**1 - 3 terms 61 - 2 years 53 or more years 2Information not available 0

(Total for this item should correspond to total registration.)

4. Ages of students:16 - 24 years old 225 - 34 years old 235 - 44 years old 245 - 54 years old 355 or older 4**5. Students with disabilities:** Please provide a count and description of any students with physical disabilities in your class.

(See attached)

6. Ethnicity: Please provide a breakdown of student ethnicity.

European American (9)

African-American (3)

Pacific Islander (1)

Elaine SCCC Level I Language Arts

Student Disabilities:

1 Asthma/Allergies

1 Cerebral palsy

4 Developmentally Delayed

1 Aphasia

1 Work related back injury

I. ABE Data - Instructor Questionnaire**Instructor's Name:** Elaine**Institution/Level:** SCCC Level I Math**1. Total number of students registered in your class this term:**

9 male
6 female
15 total

2. Average number of students attending your class daily this week: 9**3. Length of time each student has been in the ABE program at your college:**

1 - 3 terms 8
1 - 2 years 5
3 or more years 2
Information not available 0

(Total for this item should correspond to total registration.)

4. Ages of students:

16 - 24 years old 2
25 - 34 years old 3
35 - 44 years old 5
45 - 54 years old 3
55 or older 2

5. Students with disabilities: Please provide a count and description of any students with physical disabilities in your class.

(Not available)

6. Ethnicity: Please provide a breakdown of student ethnicity.

African-American (12)
European American (2)
Hispanic (1)

I. ABE Data - Instructor Questionnaire**Instructor's Name:** Larry**Institution/Level:** SCCC Level IIA Language Art**1. Total number of students registered in your class this term:**10 male14 female24 total**2. Average number of students attending your class daily this week:** 14**3. Length of time each student has been in the ABE program at your college:**1 - 3 terms 141 - 2 years 83 or more years 2Information not available 0

(Total for this item should correspond to total registration.)

4. Ages of students:16 - 24 years old 225 - 34 years old 1435 - 44 years old 545 - 54 years old 255 or older 2**5. Students with disabilities:** Please provide a count and description of any students with physical disabilities in your class.

1 heart problem and 1 extremely poor muscle coordination

Many have learning disabilities

6. Ethnicity: Please provide a breakdown of student ethnicity.

African-American (17)

Hispanic (4)

Asian (3)

I. ABE Data - Instructor Questionnaire**Instructor's Name:** Delores**Institution/Level:** SCCC Level IIB Language Arts**1. Total number of students registered in your class this term:**11 male12 female23 total**2. Average number of students attending your class daily this week:** 13**3. Length of time each student has been in the ABE program at your college:**

(not available)

1 - 3 terms _____

1 - 2 years _____

3 or more years _____

Information not available _____

(Total for this item should correspond to total registration.)

4. Ages of students: (not available)

16 - 24 years old _____

25 - 34 years old _____

35 - 44 years old _____

45 - 54 years old _____

55 or older _____

5. Students with disabilities: Please provide a count and description of any students

with physical disabilities in your class.

1 Hearing-impaired

1 Cerebral Palsy

6. Ethnicity: Please provide a breakdown of the student ethnicity.

African-American (16)

Asian (4)

European American (3)

I. ABE Data - Instructor Questionnaire**Instructor's Name:** Larry**Institution/Level:** SCCC Level II Math**1. Total number of students registered in your class this term:**12 male18 female30 total**2. Average number of students attending your class daily this week:** 21**3. Length of time each student has been in the ABE program at your college:**1 - 3 terms 30

1 - 2 years _____

3 or more years _____

Information not available _____

(Total for this item should correspond to total registration.)

4. Ages of students:16 - 24 years old 1225 - 34 years old 1335 - 44 years old 345 - 54 years old 155 or older 1**5. Students with disabilities:** Please provide a count and description of any students with physical disabilities in your class.

1 speech impaired

1 hearing impaired

1 sight impaired

6. Ethnicity: Please provide a breakdown of student ethnicity.

African-American (22)

Asian (6)

Hispanic (2)

I. ABE Data - Instructor Questionnaire**Instructor's Name:** Helen**Institution/Level:** PCC Level I/II**1. Total number of students registered in your class this term:**13 male22 female35 total**2. Average number of students attending your class daily this week:** 22**3. Length of time each student has been in the ABE program at your college:**1 - 3 terms 191 - 2 years 73 or more years 9Information not available 0

(Total for this item should correspond to total registration.)

4. Ages of students:16 - 24 years old 025 - 34 years old 1535 - 44 years old 1545 - 54 years old 055 or older 5**5. Students with disabilities:** Please provide a count and description of any students with physical disabilities in your class.

(See attached)

6. Ethnicity: Please provide a breakdown of student ethnicity.

European American (24) Hispanic (2)

SE Asian (4) Virgin Islander (1)

African-American (3) Afghani (1)

Helen PCC Level I/II

Students with disabilities: Please note that the total number exceeds the total registered in the class. This is due to students having more than one teacher-identified or documented disability.

Emotional Disabilities: Included here are problems that are non-diagnosed. They appear to be emotional impediments to learning. These problems can either be suspected by me as a result of working with the student or problems that a student tells me about that I feel present serious emotional blocks to learning.
Total: 4

Developmental Delays: These problems include adults that seem immature. Some adults included in this category have described themselves as "retarded."
Total: 6

Hearing Impaired: Students that are deaf, whether they voice, lip read, or wear hearing aids. All of these students use sign language as a primary means of communication.
Total: 5

Visually Impaired: The student included has degenerative eye problems that impair her ability to see printed words clearly. Often this student uses a magnifying device to enlarge print.
Total: 1

Physical Impairment: Included in this category are all students with cerebral palsy, or who are otherwise physically disadvantaged. These students require wheelchairs, canes, or other adaptive devices.
Total: 6

Disability due to trauma: Childhood head injury which has cause multiple problems including speech delays, comprehension problems, and general slowness.
Total: 1

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW GUIDES

I. ABE Data - Instructor Questionnaire**Instructor's Name** _____**Institution/Level** _____

Please answer the following questions as completely as possible. If you are unclear on any items below, please contact me and I will be happy to answer your questions. Send the completed form to:

Rita Collins
 ABE Research Project
 2332 SW Seymour Drive
 Portland, Oregon 97201
 Phone: (503) 725-4604

1. Total number of students registered in your class this term:

_____ male
 _____ female
 _____ total

2. Average number of students attending your class daily this week:**3. Length of time each student has been in the ABE program at your college:**

1 - 3 terms _____
 1 - 2 years _____
 3 or more years _____
 Information not available _____

(Total for this item should correspond to total registration.)

4. Ages of students:

16 - 24 years old _____
 25 - 34 years old _____
 35 - 44 years old _____
 45 - 54 years old _____
 55 or older _____

5. Students with disabilities: Please provide a count and description of any students with physical disabilities in your class.

6. Ethnicity: Please provide a breakdown of student ethnicity.

II. Class Set-Up - Instructor Interview Guide

1. **Student Intake Process:** Describe the procedures you use for taking in new students. How often are new students admitted? What type of orientation do they receive? Is there any assessment done at the time of intake? Please specify if students enter your class in various ways.

2. **Goal Setting:** How are student goals set in your class? How is progress towards goals documented? What are the procedures when a student achieves the goals that have been set?

3. **Classroom Environment:** Describe your classroom. Include seating arrangements, location of materials, supplies, and audiovisual aids (tape recorders, computers, etc.). Explain the students' seating arrangement.

4. **Class Structure:** Describe how the structure of your class time is established. Do you follow a curriculum plan from the department or state? Do students contribute to the class organization? If so, how? Does your class curriculum remain consistent term to term? If changes are made, how are they implemented?

5. **Classroom Staff:** Are there other staff who work with the you in the classroom? If yes, please describe their duties and roles. What type of training and orientation do they have prior to working in the ABE class?

II. Class Set-Up - Request for Sample Materials

In preparation for my visit to your class, I am requesting examples of materials used by you. Below are some materials I am interested in. Please include other materials that you think would provide beneficial information about your classroom organization and teaching strategies. It will be helpful if these are available at our next meeting.

Examples of materials:

Student Intake:

- assessment instruments
- intake-folders
- information sheets
- registration forms
- introductory materials

Goal Setting:

- evaluation materials
- schedules
- contracts

Class Structure:

- curriculum
- semester/term plan
- attendance system
- schedules

Follow-Up

- end of term evaluations
- materials for "stop-outs"

III. Instructional Strategies - Instructor Interview Guide

1. **Reading Instruction:** Describe the level of reading skills served in your class and the types of materials used. What teaching strategies are used by instructors or tutors in your classroom? What do you feel are the strengths and weaknesses of your current reading program?

2. **Math Instruction:** Describe the level of math skills served in your class and the types of materials used. How are math skills taught in your class? What skills are covered in a typical semester/term?

3. **Other Subject Matter:** Are other subjects covered in your class? How is the scope of subjects determined? What types of materials are used?

III. Instructional Strategies - Request for Sample Materials

In preparation for my visit to your class, I am requesting examples of materials used by you. Below are some types of materials I am interested in. Please include other materials that you think would provide beneficial information about the methods and materials used in your classroom instruction. I am interested in your teacher-generated materials as well as ready-made. It will be helpful if these materials are available at our next meeting.

Examples of materials:

Reading materials:

- workbooks
- computer programs
- teacher generated materials
- texts
- assessments

Math materials

- workbooks
- computer programs
- teacher generated materials
- texts
- assessments

Writing and Spelling

- workbooks
- texts
- exercise sheets
- computer programs
- journals

Other Subject Areas

IV. Instructor Profile - Instructor Interview Guide

1. Describe formal education, paid and unpaid work, life experiences, and other influences that have attributed to your skills as an ABE instructor. When did you begin teaching Adult Basic Education?

2. What is your normal teaching load? Do you have any observations about the students you serve and their needs?

3. What three skills and/or values that you offer your students do you consider the most important?

4. **Visions:** Are there any changes you would like to see in your ABE program? If yes, please describe them. Possible areas of change could be in staff, materials, physical environment, or program mission.

5. **Your Opportunity:** These questions have attempted to establish a clear description of your class and students, your teaching practices and teaching philosophy. If there are other remarks or examples of materials not included in previous items that you feel are important for clarification, please take this opportunity to address them.

V. Student Profile - Student Interview Guide

1. Describe other educational experiences you have had? How would you describe yourself as a learner? What type of education do other people in your family have?

2. Can you describe your decision to return to school? What did you think an ABE class would be like before you started? What did you want to get from coming to the community college?

3. How does this class help you achieve your goals? Are there any changes you would like in how this class works? Describe your role as a member of this class.

3. How long have you been in this class? How do you learn best? What does the class do to support your learning? hinder it? How will you know when you have met your goals?

4. Will what you learn here change your life in any way? What recommendations do you have for people who run adult literacy programs? How could these programs be more useful to adult students?

APPENDIX C

LEVEL I/II WEEKLY SCHEDULE

SPRING SCHEDULE 1992

	Mon.	Tues.	Wed.	Thurs.	Fri.
9:00	Spelling		Reading Group I		Spelling
9:30	Money Fractions Calculator GED Prep				Money Fractions Calculator GED Prep
9:45			Reading Group II Reading Group III		
10:00	Group & Individual math				Group & Individual math
10:30 - 10:45 BREAK					
	Math Problems	Writing	Silent Reading	Writing	Math Problems
11:00	*Letter writing *Poetry *Geography *Special project		Film or Speaker		*Book Club *Sign *Art *Discussion
11:30		Commu- nication		*News *Drama	
12:00					