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The purpose of this interpretive study was to build upon research conducted with other adult learner populations to explore the perceptions of adult intermediate readers participating in an Adult Basic Education program. Of particular interest, and unique to this study, was a focus on how these readers attributed relevance to the reading-related instruction they experienced as part of the adult education and parent education components of a family literacy program. *Reading-related instruction* was defined as any program activity, whether inside or outside the classroom, that 1) involved reading written text and/or 2) included any communicative act (e.g., discussion, presentation, writing, drawing) about a written text.

This exploratory, interpretive study drew from a practice theory of identity transformation (Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, & Cain, 1998) and sociocultural perspectives on literacy (Street, 1984, 2003; Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Gee 1996, 2000, 2005) to investigate how three adult intermediate readers attributed relevance in terms of the identity work guiding their participation in the program and their understandings of reading and the role it played in their lives. Employing a multiple-case study design (Miles & Huberman, 1994), I studied three women in a rural community in the Appalachian foothills. Data was collected over a nine-month period and included individual interviews, group interviews, classroom observations, a Reading Diary, and program information for each learner.

Key findings include: 1) pairs of current identities and pursued identities worked together to spur participation in the adult basic education program; 2) these identities were impacted most heavily by positional attributions related to being an Educated Person, which required at a minimum having a high school diploma; 3) participants' past and current out-of-school reading practices influenced greatly their perceptions of themselves as readers prior to entering class, but once in class, their in-school practices led them to refine their self-evaluations; 4) participants' out-of-school reading practices and associated cultural model of reading were substantively different from those related to in-school reading. The study concluded that the participants accessed four key reference points to attribute relevance to reading-related instruction: future senses of selves that had spurred enrollment in the program; "stepping stones" that were required in order to realize their pursued identities; current identities; and self-evaluations of their participation in current reading practices (and thus the felt need to improve their reading). Attributions of relevance were filtered through considerations of time, what counts, connections to specific life contexts, and cross-identity impact. This study complements intervention studies involving adult intermediate readers, offering insights into how reading instruction for adult intermediate readers might be shaped in ways that are valued by and are beneficial to learners.

**SENSES OF SELVES: ADULT INTERMEDIATE READERS'  
IDENTITY, AGENCY, AND LITERACY LEARNING  
IN AN ADULT BASIC EDUCATION SETTING**

by

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Approved by

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Dedicated to Ben, Hannah, and Duncan  
and to Magdalene Young Tate,  
grandmother and champion

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## **CHAPTER I**

### **INTRODUCTION**

In the year 2004 alone, almost 2.7 million adults in the United States enrolled in education programs designed to build the basic skills individuals need to support their families and to participate successfully in the workplace (U.S. Department of Education, 2005a). Close to 60% of adults typically served by these programs are “intermediate” readers, scoring between the fourth and ninth grade equivalents on standardized reading assessments (Strucker & Davidson, 2003; Student Achievement in Reading (STAR), 2004). Despite comprising a majority of adult education students, little mention is made of this group in journal articles, dissertations, or public reports, especially related to their perspectives on learning. The dearth of literature on adult intermediate readers is also troubling in light of federal and local initiatives currently underway to design professional development activities specifically targeting reading instruction for these students. These initiatives are welcome and needed, but they are unlikely to have far-reaching effect without a better understanding of the target population. This study hopes to contribute to this broader understanding.

## Orientation to the Chapter

In this chapter and throughout the report, I will use the term “Adult Basic Education (ABE)” to refer to programs and classrooms which receive federal funding through the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act (AEFLA), Title II of the Workforce Investment Act (PL 105-220, 1998), to serve, specifically, English-speaking students<sup>1</sup>. In this chapter, I provide an overview of the purposes of AEFLA and the accountability measures designed to assess the achievement of these purposes. This discussion provides background information relevant to the study and explains the origins of the recent attention being turned on intermediate adult readers as a group. Here I introduce the possibility that, although educators and policymakers may have an interest in raising student scores on standardized reading assessments and, thus, in focused instruction in reading, adults who read in the intermediate range may not share these priorities. In the section *Statement of the Problem*, I propose that re-framing the motivations of adult learners in terms of the new identities they are pursuing when they enter an ABE program, instead of around their expressed goals, may help to explore the relevance of improved reading for this group. I also suggest that, in order to examine this notion of relevance, a concomitant investigation of learners’ understandings of “reading” is in order. Finally, in the section *Purpose of the Study*, I introduce the research questions guiding the study, the theoretical perspectives providing the lens for the inquiry, and the significance of the proposed study.

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<sup>1</sup> AEFLA also provides for programming for the teaching of English for Speakers for Other Languages (ESOL), but participants in these programs are not the focus of this study.

### **AEFLA and Adult Intermediate Readers**

Funding provided in Title II of the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act (AEFLA) is channeled through state agencies to local Adult Basic Education (ABE) programs, which serve learners through classrooms, labs, one-on-one instruction, or distance learning. According to the legislation, funding may be utilized for three main purposes. Providers may:

- (1) assist adults to become literate and obtain the knowledge and skills necessary for employment and self-sufficiency;
- (2) assist adults who are parents to obtain the educational skills necessary to become full partners in the educational development of their children; and
- (3) assist adults in the completion of a secondary school education. (Workforce Investment Act of 1998, Title II, SEC 202)

In return for funding, states (and thus local programs) must meet certain outcome standards related to these goals. In 2000 the National Reporting System (NRS) for Adult Education was implemented nationwide to collect data in forms that demonstrate the effectiveness of states and local programs in achieving these legislated goals (U.S. Department of Education, 2005b). The NRS identifies Core Outcome Measures, which must be reported to show how states are meeting key legislated targets. These include *educational gains, entered employment, retained employment, placement in postsecondary education or training, and receipt of a secondary school diploma or pass GED [i.e., General Educational Development] tests* (USDOE 2005b, p. 7). The first Core Outcome Measure, *educational gains*, requires that students advance from one of six “educational functioning levels” to another within a certain number of hours of instruction, which is determined by state policy. These educational functioning levels



are defined operationally by a set of qualitative descriptors and by correlations to scale scores and grade-level equivalents (GLE) of various standardized assessments. The NRS Educational Functioning Levels for Adult Basic Education students are: Beginning Literacy (0-1.9 GLE), Beginning Basic Education (2-3.9 GLE), Low Intermediate Basic Education (4-5.9 GLE), High Intermediate Basic Education (6-8.9 GLE), Low Adult Secondary (9-10.9 GLE), and High Adult Secondary (11-12.9 GLE). Scores may be submitted for either reading, math, or writing.

As a result of the mandates to “move” ABE students from one level to the next, there is a growing interest in providing professional development for adult educators in the area of reading. There is a special interest in improving instruction provided for learners who fall in the category of “intermediate readers” because, although adults who enroll in Adult Basic Education programs may range from non-readers to those reading at the high school level, the largest percentage of students perform *between* these two points, at what has come to be called “the intermediate level.” Strucker and Davidson (2003) found that 56% of 676 randomly-selected native English-speaking students in ABE classes from seven states could be classified as intermediate readers<sup>2</sup>. Similarly, data collected by the Division of Adult Education and Literacy (DAEL) at the U.S. Department of Education reveal that a full 60% of adult students served by programs receiving federal funds fall within the intermediate level (STudent Achievement in

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<sup>2</sup> Although “intermediate reader” is not defined in their research brief, an associated web site [Assessment Strategies and Reading Profiles, 2005] indicates that students were identified as intermediate readers if their silent reading comprehension grade-equivalent scores fell between 3.0 and 8.9.

Reading [STAR], 2004), correlating roughly to grade-equivalent scores of 4.0-8.9 on standardized assessments (USDOE, 2005b).<sup>3</sup>

Of particular concern in this study is the relevance that reading and related instruction have for these adult intermediate learners, who already exhibit some proficiency in reading. A growing number of studies suggest that, in fact, levels of reading which government funders consider deficient are *not so perceived or experienced* by some adults reading at those levels (Kirsch, Jungeblut, Jenkins, & Kolstadt, 1993; Sticht, 2005; Belzer, 1998, 2002) and that, for many, their other skills and social networks permit them to function to their satisfaction in the different contexts of their adult lives (Fingeret, 1983; Johnston, 1986; Merrifield, Bingman, Hemphill, & Bennett de Marrais, 1997; Bingman & Ebert, 2000; Reder, 1994). Indeed, in a brief review of ethnographic studies of practical problem-solving, Merrifield et al. (1997) concluded that “many people who perform below targeted levels for ‘functional literacy’ may nevertheless be functioning adequately, or to their own satisfaction, in their everyday lives” (p. 11). Thus, before instituting new instructional approaches for adult intermediate readers, teachers, professional developers, and policymakers could benefit from studies focused on students’ perceptions of reading in their lives and in their classrooms. Insights gained from such investigations could help bridge potential barriers to learning.

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<sup>3</sup> However, scores from math, reading, and writing assessments are aggregated in this analysis.

### Statement of the Problem

The goals of the AEFLA legislation are broad, with reading improvement being only one possible focus of teaching and learning. Based on recent research showing both the proportion of intermediate readers in ABE programs and the diversity within that subgroup, federal, state, and local initiatives are currently being enacted to support teachers in providing reading instruction to students at this level (e.g., see *STAR Project Update*, 2004). The need for professional development is further fueled by recent federal mandates which require states (and thus local ABE programs) to meet certain performance standards, including educational gains operationalized as gains on standardized reading and math assessments, in order to receive federal funding. Yet very little is known about adult learners who enter ABE programs reading in the intermediate range.

What *is* known about students, in general, who enroll in literacy programs is that they have their own goals for learning, which may or may not fall neatly within those targeted by policy (Demetrian, 1997). Framed in different ways by different researchers, the goals students offer upon entering the educational setting ultimately seem to reflect Lave and Wenger's (1991) assertion that learning of any sort involves the "construction of identities" (p. 53). From an analysis of essays in which adult learners shared their reasons for seeking to improve their literacy, Stein (1995) concludes: "Adults seek to develop literacy skills in order to change what they can do, how they are perceived and how they perceive themselves in specific social and cultural contexts" (p. 10). Similarly, Wenger (1998) maintains that "we accumulate skills and information, not in the abstract

as ends in themselves, but in the service of an identity” (p. 215).

For now I will define “identity” as a “sense of self” (Holland et al., 1998, p. 8), which arises out of interactions and relationships with others. Researchers in both identity transformation (Holland et al., 1998) and adult literacy learning (Fingeret & Drennon, 1997; Bingman & Ebert, 2000; Comings et al., 1999; Mezirow & Associates, 2000) have identified a rupture occurring in the adult’s current identity as key to the decision to pursue new identities. When adults enroll in an ABE program, they are acting as agents on behalf of this identity construction, perceiving that what is learned there will support their efforts (Fingeret & Drennon, 1997). Again and again, adults report seeking more education in order to become a certain type of worker, a different sort of parent, a different kind of person within their communities (Bingman & Ebert, 2000; Skilton-Sylvester & Carlo, 1998; Fingeret & Drennon, 1997; Wikelund, 1993; Lytle, 1991; Beder & Valentine, 1990; Gowen, 1990; Auerbach, 1989; Stein, 1995; Rogers, 2004b; Comings et al., 1999). Whether or not adult intermediate readers perceive that improved *reading* will contribute to the development of their new identities is unknown. Relatedly, it is not even known how adult readers at this level conceptualize the notion of “reading” itself. Although the understandings and uses of reading by adult beginning readers (Belzer, 2006; Bingman & Ebert, 2000; Malicky, Katz, Norton, & Norman, 1997; Fingeret & Drennon, 1997; Merrifield et al., 1997; Purcell-Gates, 1995; Keefe & Meyer, 1980), immigrants (Skilton-Sylvester & Carlo, 1998; Auerbach, 1989), and adults at unspecified or various levels (Belzer, 1998; 2002; Rogers, 2004b; Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Heath, 1983; Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines, 1988) have been explored to varying degrees, no

published studies to date have sought those specifically of intermediate readers. This is problematic since the studies with these groups suggest that the meanings adults assign to literacy and to what occurs in the classroom may affect whether and in what manner they participate in instruction (Wiklund, Reder, & Landsberg, 1992; Lytle, 1991; Belzer, 1998; Gowen, 1990).

Lytle (1991) "argues for the systematic study, over time, of what counts as literacy to different groups and individuals within societies, of the varied literacy events or activities in which they participate, of adults' intentions, and of their knowledge of specific uses, functions, and forms of literacy" (p. 116). Belzer (1998) echoes this call, asserting that, "If we are to assist learners in their literacy development, we need to explore with far greater complexity and description the ways in which they use (and hope to use), interact with, and struggle over literacy in a variety of contexts relevant to their lives" (p. 207). This study responded to these calls from the field by exploring how a small group of adult intermediate readers used and thought about reading in their lives and how they saw reading and related instruction connecting to the identity pursuits that brought them into an adult education program.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this interpretive study was to build upon research that had been conducted with other adult learner populations to explore the perceptions of adult intermediate readers participating in an ABE program. Of particular interest, and unique to this study, was the relevance they saw reading having to the identity pursuits that

brought them to ABE programs, the meanings they held related to reading, and how these meanings impacted the relevance they attributed to reading-related instruction. I define *reading-related instruction* simply as any program activity, whether inside or outside the classroom, that 1) involved reading written text and/or 2) included any communicative act (e.g., discussion, presentation, writing, drawing) about a written text.

### ***Research Questions***

The qualitative inquiry drew from a practice theory of identity transformation (Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, & Cain, 1998) and sociocultural perspectives on literacy (Street, 1984, 2003; Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Gee 1996, 2000, 2005) to explore how adult intermediate readers attribute relevance to reading-related instruction in light of who they are and who they want to be. Specifically, I sought answers to the following questions:

1. What are the identities guiding participants' involvement in adult basic education?
2. What understandings do participants have about reading and the role it plays in their lives?
3. How are participants' perceptions of the relevance of reading-related instruction connected to their identity work and to the role of reading in their lives?

### *Significance of the Study*

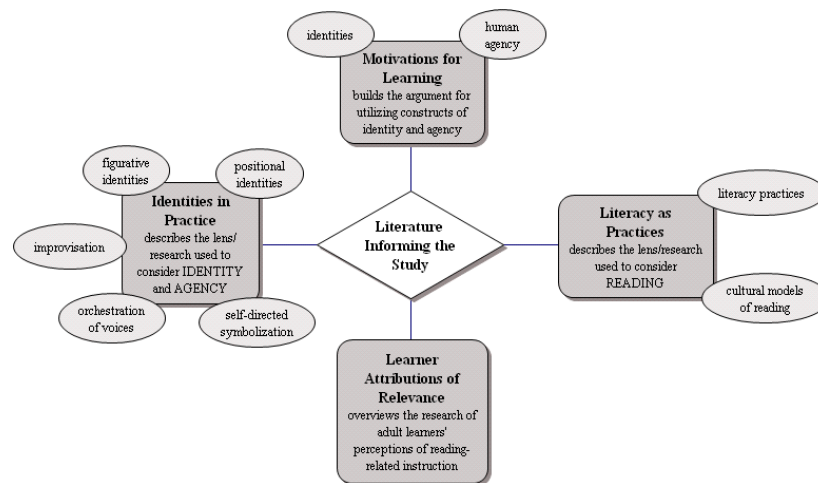
The proposed study contributes to the field of adult education and literacy in several ways. For one, it responds to calls from the field to investigate the meanings that adult learners bring to their learning (Lytle, 1991; Belzer, 1998; Quigley, 1997; Wiklund, et al., 1992). The proposed study was built upon previous studies which researched the perspectives of various groups served in adult education programs to document the perspectives of the largest population served by ABE programs, i.e., adult intermediate readers. Although several studies were currently underway to ascertain the efficacy of certain instructional practices for adult intermediate readers (e.g., Strucker, Curtis, & Adams, n.d.; Adult Literacy Research Network, 2006), at the time this study was conducted, it was the first investigation of the perceived relevance of reading in their current and future lives. As such, it complements these efficacy studies by drawing conclusions about how reading instruction for adult intermediate readers might be shaped in ways that are valued by and beneficial to students. Furthermore, this study expands and deepens theories related to adult literacy learning by applying a practice theory of identity transformation. Insights gained from this study are offered for teachers providing direct services to these students, policymakers striving to enhance systemic delivery and accountability mechanisms, and researchers attempting to account for adult learner responses to reading instruction.

## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### Orientation to the Chapter

The purpose of the study was to investigate the ways in which adult intermediate readers' identities and the meanings they have about reading influence the ways in which they attribute relevance to reading-related instruction. To achieve this purpose, I explored how a small group of adult intermediate readers viewed their current and future selves, how they engaged in and thought about reading, and the value they ascribed to the reading-related instruction they experienced in the program they attended. In this chapter, I describe the contributions of four strands of literature (see Figure 1) to the study: *motivations for learning*, *identities in practice*, *literacy as practices*, and *learner attributions of relevance*.



**FIGURE 1: Literature Informing the Study**



In the first section of the chapter, I draw from research in the area of adult literacy to reframe how ABE students' *motivations for learning* are conceptualized. In so doing, I argue for the consideration of notions of identity and agency in exploring students' decisions to enroll and persist in Adult Basic Education classes. From here I move into a description of the *identities-in-practice* construct (Holland, Lachiotte, Skinner, and Cain, 1998; Barlett & Holland, 2002), the actual lens I used to define identity and agency. I then describe the conceptual lens and research literature I used to focus on reading, drawing from theorists within the *literacy-as-practices* orientation and their constructs of literacy practices and cultural models (Heath, 1983; Street, 1984, 2003; New London Group, 2000; Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Barton, Hamilton, & Ivanic, 2000; Gee, 2000, 2002, 2005; Fingeret & Drennon, 1997; Reder, 1994; Merrifield, Bingman, Hemphill, and Bennett deMarrais, 1997; Rogers, 2004a). Lastly, I summarize what is known about the perceptions of adult learners related to reading-related instruction and why it is useful to investigate these perceptions in terms of *attributions of relevance*. The last section in the chapter integrates these strands into a cohesive conceptual framework, proposing a model for conceptualizing the relationship among 1) identity, 2) reading, and 3) the relevance of reading-related instruction.

## **Reframing Motivations for Adult Learning**

### **Adult Learner Goals: Current Frames**

Research on adult literacy learning in recent years has increasingly recognized the role of learner goals in adult learning. Reviews of findings from participation,

motivation, and persistence studies by Wikelund, Reder, and Hart-Landsberg (1992) and Comings, Parella, and Soricone (1999) reveal that the pursuit of concrete goals serves as a driving, positive force in adult learning. For instance, in an interview study designed to identify supports of and barriers to persistence in adult learning (defined in terms of participation in a program or home study), Comings et al. (1999), found a positive relationship between students' persistence in adult learning and their mentioning a specific goal when asked why they entered a program. Of 150 learners, close to 70% (N=104) were specific in naming goals, which the researchers categorized according to whether they were related to work, family, citizenship, GED/Adult Diploma Program/reading/writing, or training/further education. Of these, 72% persisted at least four months in adult learning, compared to 54% of students who did not respond by naming a specific goal.

The Comings et al. (1999) study demonstrates a commonality with other research studies conducted in this vein. Goals are often framed, by both students and researchers, in one of three ways: skills, life tasks, or general self-improvement. Skills-related goals often relate specifically to reading, writing, or arithmetic for ABE learners, and speaking and listening, in addition, for ESOL learners. Goals related to life tasks often include such things as earning a high school diploma, obtaining a job, reading to children, getting a driver's license, or passing the citizenship test. Goals related to general self-improvement, recently termed "transformational goals" (Comings, Cuban, Bos, Porter, & Doolittle, 2003, p. 57) are often phrased in terms of proving something to oneself, of being recognized as an educated person, of becoming somebody new (Bingman & Ebert,

2000; Beder & Valentine, 1990; Lytle, 1991; Comings et al., 2003; Comings et al., 1999).

Few theorists have attempted to address the relationship among these different types of goals, seemingly content to assume that the three types are distinct from one another instead of, perhaps, being different expressions of similar pursuits. However, findings from more qualitative studies initiated in the 1990's hint at connections among these three categories. Fingeret and Danin (1991), for instance, found in their evaluation study of a large New York City volunteer tutoring program that beginning adult readers often talked initially about goals in terms of concrete tasks—obtaining a job or a better job, filling out an application, reading a novel, improving their lifestyle, getting a GED, going to college, going to trade school. On the surface, at least for these beginning readers, these goals, for the most part, seemed very much like those valued by policymakers, as depicted in the AEFLA legislation. But Fingeret and Danin also identified motivating forces that ran beneath the litany of specific tasks mentioned by learners. They found a sense of vulnerability expressed in many students' reasons for enrolling: a desire to protect their rights, to appear intelligent in front of their children, to lead their children in different directions to ward off a repetition of their own lives. Most importantly, adult learners shared a desire to “be able to read and write ‘like other people do’” (p. 43), to accomplish everyday tasks in ways that showed that they “fit in” (p. 44), in ways that would not draw attention to themselves. Fingeret and Danin concluded, “Students do not necessarily have a concrete goal in mind, an instrumental view of literacy tied to some specific task or aspiration. More than anything, they want to feel

that there are possibilities in the future, that there are choices and the potential for change” (p. 45).

Demetrios (1996), a director of a community-based tutoring organization and researcher/theorist, reaches a similar conclusion based on his research and work with adult learners. He maintains that:

...even in the attainment of a GED or a job, the satisfaction is not always in the material objects sought as important as they might be, but in what they represent in the psychic and social experiences of particular individuals. They often point to more deeply rooted aspirations that perpetually call people further into life in the on-going constructions of their *personal and social identities*” (pp. 245-246; emphasis mine).

Similarly, in a study of two groups of female ABE students in Philadelphia and rural North Carolina, Luttrell (1997) found a consistent and prevalent desire among these women to “become somebody” (p. 13), supporting earlier findings (Rockhill, 1987) with Hispanic women immigrants living in Los Angeles.

A seminal piece of research conducted in the mid-1990’s reinforces the notion that these underlying motivators to students’ expressed instrumental goals deserve greater attention. In 1994, over 1500 adult literacy students submitted essays in the first phase of a national study (Stein, 1995; Merrifield, 2000) to determine the knowledge and skills adults require to accomplish National Education Goal 6 of the Goals 2000 Act (1994). Called the Adult Literacy and Lifelong Learning Goal, the goal stated: *Every adult American will be literate and will possess the knowledge and skills necessary to compete in a global economy and exercise the rights and responsibilities of citizenship.* Having been called upon by Congress to report on the progress of the nation toward Goal 6, the

National Institute for Literacy recognized the broadness of the goal and sought to define just what the requisite knowledge and skills might be for competing in a global economy and exercising the rights and responsibilities of citizenship. Their researchers decided to begin with the perspectives of those targeted by the goal, adult learners themselves.

Utilizing a set of guidelines developed specifically for the research task, adult practitioners across the United States were asked to engage adult learners in class discussions and then in writing responses to several stem sentences (*In my community, competing in a global economy means...; To me, having the knowledge and skills to compete in the global economy means...; To me, exercising the rights and responsibilities of citizenship means...; To exercise the rights and responsibilities of citizenship you have to be able to...*). The resulting essays, though not collected from a representative national sample, came from students in 151 adult literacy programs from a wide variety of settings in 34 states and Puerto Rico (Merrifield, 2000, p. 45). Although the prompts were structured to elicit adult perceptions around arenas important to government stakeholders, adult learners used the opportunity to speak to the larger issues of how literacy affects their lives. This study constitutes arguably the best source we have of adult learners themselves speaking to their purposes for returning to school settings.

Analysis of the responses uncovered four major purposes that adult literacy learners seek in returning to the classroom: 1) access and orientation; 2) voice; 3) independent action; and 4) a bridge to the future. Merrifield (2000) describes *learning for access and orientation* as being tied to the desire to be physically, psychologically, and socially oriented—“knowing what is going on in the world, understanding institutions

that have an impact on one's life, getting needed information" (p. 15). *Learning for voice* is described in terms of, not only the skills that are required for communication in both oral and written domains, but also the recognition of having something worthy to communicate, of contributing to social discourse. *Learning for independent action* highlights learners' desire to be able to accomplish daily tasks on their own in their families, workplaces, and communities; and *learning as a bridge to the future* reflects their understanding of the world as constantly changing and of their need to learn in ways that will prepare them for these changes. Stein (1995) concluded that these four broad purposes "express the social and cultural meaning or significance" (p. 9) that underlies more concrete goals adults typically articulate as reasons for enrolling in adult education. Together, these purposes work as a potent, empowering force "for individuals engaged in defining themselves as *competent actors in the world*" (Stein, 1995, p. 9; emphasis mine).

### **Reframing: From Skills/Tasks to Pursued Identities**

Viewing the adult learner as an actor—as someone consciously, intentionally, and strategically playing a role in a certain context—suggests a foregrounding of identity and agency that often gets lost in literature focused on the traditional notion of education to develop skills or to accomplish functional tasks. Reframing student motivations for participating in formal ABE settings in terms of *persons adults seek to become* instead of *on skills they wish to learn* or *tasks they wish to accomplish* shifts the interpretive lens from, for example, task analysis (i.e., what skills are needed to do \_\_\_\_\_) to meaning analysis (i.e., what meanings are being constructed and assigned in the learning

process). Such a shift honors the agency adults enact as they make decisions about if and how they will participate in structured learning settings. Considering identity and agency together, then, may offer new insights into factors influencing how intermediate readers participate in reading instruction.

In recent years a growing number of theorists have situated themselves within a sociocultural perspective to consider adult literacy learning. Within such a perspective, discussion of identity and agency has emerged, specifically in research related to women (Luttrell, 1997), adult immigrants (e.g., Skilton-Sylvester & Carlo, 1998), and adult beginning readers (Fingeret & Drennon, 1997; Bartlett & Holland, 2002; Belzer, 2006). The work of Fingeret and Drennon (1997) offers perhaps the most comprehensive approach thus far to applications of the constructs of identity and agency to adult literacy development—and the most relevant to this proposed study. Expanding upon the Fingeret & Danin (1991) study, Fingeret and Drennon seek to describe how change in literate identities occurs. In so doing, they:

- Define literacy in terms of social and cultural practices;
- Place literacy development within a broader understanding of “the larger process of change in which adults are engaging” (p. 66);
- Describe the role of socially-constructed shame in shaping some individuals’ “vision of self” (p. 70);
- Identify five phases of change related to literacy learning: *prolonged tension, a turning point, problem solving and seeking, changing relationships and changing practices, intensive continuing interaction*;

- Describe low-literate adults enrolling in literacy programs as transitioning from an oral subculture to the more dominant literate culture, seeking identities as “literate people” (p. 65);
- Recognize the role of personal agency in the form of “personal resources, perspective, and hard work” (p. 65).

Fingeret and Drennon (1997) note that adults who have very limited reading practices are concerned about public versus private literacy events, defined by the extent to which they feel that they are controlling the information being communicated about them to others and by their relationship to those others. Fingeret and Drennon suggest that, in order for adult beginning readers to develop the literate identities they are pursuing, programs need to provide opportunities for them to become more and more public, within the supportive environment of the program, in their growing literacy practices.

Although this study is a benchmark event in introducing the identity-related motivations that bring adults to literacy programs, it is focused exclusively on beginning readers, whose identity work (i.e., intentional efforts to transform who they are) is clearly tied to their limited range of literacy practices. It is unclear whether or not the identity work being undertaken by members of this population is the same as for adult intermediate readers, who already have access to a larger range of literacy practices and may not think of themselves as poor readers (Kirsch, Jungeblut, Jenkins, & Kolstadt, 1993; Sticht, 2005; Belzer, 1998, 2002). The current study was designed to fill this gap, drawing from a theory of identity transformation (Holland et al., 1998) to elaborate the



conceptualizations of identity and agency currently found in the adult literacy literature. Specifically, I hoped to identify the kinds of identities driving the participation of a group of learners—termed by others as “adult intermediate readers”—and, ultimately, how these identities impacted the value they assigned to their experiences with reading in the classroom. In the next section, I present the major tenets of the theory and follow this explanation with a discussion of how I saw these to be important to the study.

### **Theory of Identity Transformation**

#### **Defining “Identity”: Identities in Practice**

Holland et al. (1998) contend that formal theories about identity have traditionally been categorized into two distinct camps. In one camp are those that emphasize the role of the “essential self,” a durable self that is constructed either by psychological structures and processes innate to the species or by the culture in which one lives. In the other camp are constructivist theories that deny the existence of any kind of durable self but focus instead on the on-going development of the self in response to power-laden discourses and practices that serve to construct individuals according to social categories (e.g., gender, race, class, ethnicity).

In actuality, Holland’s group maintains, identity theories fall along a continuum, with the extreme versions of each camp on either end and versions acknowledging the relative influences of both extremes distributed in the middle. Their “practice theory of the self” (p. 28) is their own attempt to blend the relevant constructs from the two extremes, employing Bourdieu’s (1977, 1985) theory of practice as a foundational piece.

Bourdieu is recognized in sociological and anthropological circles as a key contributor to attempts to connect and explain the roles of social structures upon behavior, and Holland's group borrows heavily from his constructs of field, habitus, and practice. Bourdieu describes *field* as "'a separate social universe having its own laws of functioning independent of those of politics and the economy' (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 162-163)" (Holland et al., 1998, p. 58). He offers as examples the literary field, academia—and the overarching field of power, which influences every other field. *Habitus* refers to the dispositions developed through the individual's experiences through time and space, which not only characterize the individual but *are*, in essence, the individual. The notion of habitus foregrounds the role of the social and historical forces in shaping the person through time. Bourdieu saw habitus as an "embodiment" of these forces in a unique construction of the individual. And, when the individual--recognized as habitus--intersects with a field of activity, the result is *practice*.

Although Holland et al. (1998) build their practice theory of identity from Bourdieu's work, they find his constructs lacking in notice paid to the cultural tools and influences on individual behavior. To remedy this omission, the group infuses Bourdieu's social-oriented constructs with a more elaborated vision for the role of culture, drawing principally from the work of cultural-historical theorists Vygotsky (1978, 1986) and Bakhtin (1982). Bartlett and Holland (2002) ultimately describe *practice* as the everyday activity of "a core of actors using cultural resources...toward some culturally given end, all the while immersed in the flow of social life" (p.10). Using this expanded notion of practice as an umbrella, Holland et al. (1998) interpret the

findings of various ethnographic studies of the interworkings of identity and human agency. They conclude that, although individuals are largely constrained by cultural rules and social structures, they draw idiosyncratically and improvisationally from the same source of these constraints—i.e., cultural resources--to shape themselves as actors in everyday life. In essence, Holland et al. propose that:

- both *culture* and *social practices and discourses* supply cultural tools that can be used by the individual to “figure the self” (p. 28) in open-ended ways, rather than as moulds of or dictates for behavior;
- the self is always recognized as being embedded in social practice, both constrained by it and empowered by it; and
- identity is a plural concept, since many “sites of the self” (p. 28) are developed through participation in varied practices.

*Identity*, then, is better thought of as *identities*, or “senses of the self” (Holland et al., 1998, p. 8) that develop through participation in social practices that are enacted within cultural worlds. Building on this notion of “identities in practice,” Holland et al. (1998) posit at least two types of identities, defined by the context through which they are viewed: figurative identities and positional identities.

### ***Figurative Identities***

Figurative identities are senses of the self that are constructed as the individual participates within a particular domain of social life, drawing upon the collective understanding of a social group to form expectations for and make sense out of everyday

activity within that domain. Holland et al., use the term “figured worlds” to refer to the spaces referenced by these collective understandings, describing these worlds as “historically contingent, socially enacted, culturally constructed...frames of social life” (Holland et al., 1998, p. 7). Figured worlds are constructed in the collective imagination over time; they are a taken-for-granted version of the lived world and are culturally-infused adaptations of Bourdieu’s construct of field.

Some of the examples of figured worlds offered by Holland’s group include romance, domestic relations, and Alcoholics Anonymous, all of which at one time or another have been a focus of research by one of the authors. This research has explicated the notion that a figured world is a simplified world, characterized by a basic storyline, including major characters, certain acts, and typical motives. For instance, Holland et al. (1998), describe the figured world of cross-gender romance of young adults as follows:

[It was] populated by a set of agents (for example, attractive women, boyfriends, lovers, fiances) who engage in a limited range of important acts or state changes (flirting with, falling in love with, dumping, having sex with) as moved by a specific set of forces (attractiveness, love)....

The typical progress of events posited in this figured world follows this course:

An attractive man (“guy”) and an attractive woman (“girl”) are drawn to each other.

The man learns and appreciates the woman’s qualities and uniqueness as a person.

Sensitive to her desires, he shows his affection by treating her well: he buys things for her, takes her places she likes, and shows that he appreciates her and appreciates her uniqueness as a person.

She in turn shows her affection and interest and allows the relationship to become more intimate.

This standard scenario also presupposes the motives or purposes of such relationships:

The relationship provides intimacy for both the man and the woman.

The relationship validates the attractiveness of both the man and the woman.

And it allows and accounts for some exceptions:

If the man's attractiveness or prestige is less than the woman's, he compensates by treating her especially well.

If the woman's attractiveness is the lower of the two, she compensates by being satisfied with less good treatment from the man. (p. 102-103)

Holland et al. (1998) contend that individuals participating in other figured worlds have similar prototypical conceptualizations of how things go within that world.

Figurative identities, then, are formed within these figured worlds. For example, individuals participating in the figured worlds of romance, domestic relations, and Alcoholics Anonymous, may view themselves and are viewed by others as, respectively, a nerd, a good wife, an alcoholic based on their styles of participation within the specific figured world. Because individuals participate in many figured worlds, often simultaneously, they are understood to have multiple figurative identities, which may overlap and influence each other.

### ***Positional identities***

The other broad type of identities described by the Holland group is *positional identities*. Positional identities are senses of the self that relate to where one stands in terms of one's experience with social positioning over time. Holland et al. (1998) describe social position as one's sense of "entitlement to social and material resources and so to the higher deference, respect, and legitimacy accorded to those genders, races,

ethnic groups, castes, and sexualities privileged by society” (p. 271). Issues of power and status in relation to others, per Bourdieu, are addressed through positional identities, which tend to be durable and cut across multiple figured worlds (though they are more and less relevant in particular worlds).

### **Agency and Identity Transformation**

Holland et al. (1998) contend that figurative and positional identities, or, identities in practice, are important because they “are a key means through which people care about and care for what is going on around them. They are important bases from which people create new activities, new worlds, and *new ways of being*” (emphasis mine; Holland et al., 1998, p. 5). Related then to the Holland group’s consideration of identities is the notion of agency. Holland and her colleagues (1998) present the following definition of agency, which I will use in this paper:

“Inden (1990:23) defines human **agency** as  
 ‘the realized capacity of people to act upon their world and not only to know about or give personal or intersubjective significance to it. That capacity is the power of people to act purposively and reflectively, in more or less complex interrelationships with one another, to reiterate and remake the world in which they live, in circumstances where they may consider different courses of action possible and desirable, though not necessarily from the same point of view.’” (p. 42)

Holland et al.’s (1998) construction of agency explicates how identities can be transformed, even though they are intricately linked to the social, cultural, and historical contexts in which they are formed. Their constructs of *the orchestration of voices*,

*improvisation*, and *self-directed symbolization* serve to explain how transformation might take place.

### ***Orchestration of Voices***

In explicating the construct of agency, Holland et al. (1998) appropriate a key tenet of Bakhtin's (1982) work. Bakhtin, they explain, argued that individuals exist, moment to moment, in a state of "answering" the world. Day-to-day living requires responding to people, situations, and messages within certain sociocultural contexts, and such responses are tied up with the language and meanings that have comprised an individual's development up to the point in time where they must answer the world anew. Holland et al. explain that, in Bakhtin's view, language guides action in the form of "voices" (p. 179). These voices may be internal, in the form of words or emotions remembered from past experiences and called up in response to a set of circumstances, or external statements made by other people in the present moment.

Clashes of internal voices, external voices, or a combination necessitate negotiation, or orchestration, with certain weights being given to certain voices (see also Gee, 1992). Weights are attributed to voices often on the basis of the status assigned to their speakers, dependent on their relative social positions. In terms of agency, orchestration can be contrasted with "being ventriloquated by first one and then another authoritative voice" (Holland et al., 1998, p. 185). Identity, then, Holland's group maintains, evolves over time as one develops *patterns* of orchestration, or "authorial stances" (Holland et al., 1998, p. 183). This "space of authoring" (p. 169) is integral to

the notion of agency: whereas the individual has collected various voices throughout her history and must use these and only these when answering the world, the way in which these voices are orchestrated at a particular point in time is the manifestation of agency and arises out of the identity the individual has developed from regularly orchestrating voices in similar situations. From their research, Holland's group identified a similar phenomenon that occurs not at the level of language, but at the level of practice, of behavior. The notion of *improvisation* is another component of agency and is discussed in the next section.

### ***Improvisation***

Holland et al. (1998) borrow from Bourdieu (1977) to describe improvisations as “the sort of impromptu actions that occur when our past, brought to the present as habitus, meets with a particular combination of circumstances and conditions for which we have no set response” (pp. 17-18). Their studies provide multiple examples. In one, a woman of a low caste in Nepal came to the researcher's house to be interviewed. When the researcher called down from a second story balcony for her to enter and take the interior stairs, she was surprised to see the woman scale the outside of the house. The woman had cultural reasons for not entering the house (i.e., she risked polluting the higher-caste household) as well as social reasons (i.e., as a person of lower caste than another woman in the house, she was positioned as inferior and did not have the right to enter into her presence). The strength of these constraints, Holland's group points out, is significant: the woman did not enter the house. However, her sense of agency is clear:



she found a way to obtain her goal of maintaining her identity as a willing research participant by improvising a creative means of responding to the researcher's invitation. In another example, a man diagnosed with mental illness improvised how he communicated his illness to distinct audiences, namely his parents and his wife, appropriating different sets of terms and explanations to meet his own goals of maintaining certain identities in his relationships.

What sets up an improvisation, then, is a situation in which contradictory identities collide with each other. The outcome may be constrained by the pervading sociocultural context, but it is not always specifically prescribed. Where there is room for improvisation, there is room for identity (trans)formation: The "unusual form of behavior" (Holland et al., p. 17) and the identity it invoked may then be remembered in the future in a situation that is similar in some way, bolstering perhaps a new and heretofore fragile sense of self. I take up this notion of *self-directed symbolization* in the next section.

### ***Self-Directed Symbolization***

Blending the contributions of Bourdieu and Bakhtin, Holland et al. (1998) maintain that the individual's unique response to the world in the moment--either via improvisation in practice (Bourdieu, 1977) or through inner or outer speech (Bakhtin, 1982)—has the potential to be called upon later and used as a tool for self transformation. To make this argument, they utilize Vygotsky's (1978) concept of semiotic mediation, or the use of symbols as tools for activity. In particular, "Vygosky," they explain, "was

fascinated by the human ability to escape the immediate control of environmental stimuli and instead organize behaviors, thoughts, and feelings in relation to imagined stimuli” (Holland, et al., p. 280). In considering this notion that individuals can “manage their own behavior through signs directed at themselves” (p. 281), through “self-directed symbolization” (p. 277), Holland’s group identifies how this “modest ability” (p. 281) can contribute nonetheless to agentic action and identity transformation.

First, when individuals are able to objectify their identities—to “evoke one’s own sense of who one is” (p. 282)—they can use this understanding of these identities to motivate certain behaviors, either for the purpose of maintaining those identities or for transforming them. For instance, an individual who has identified himself as an alcoholic within the figured world of Alcoholics Anonymous can remind himself of his identity when tempted by a drink (Holland et al., 1998). Similarly, the image of self engaged in an earlier improvisation can become an “icon for reflection” (p. 17), which guides self-in-action in future activity.

Self-directed symbolization is especially relevant when a “rupture” (Holland et al, 1998, p. 141) or “disruption” (p. 74) in how one has thought about oneself occurs. For example, Holland et al. report how Kondo, a Japanese American doing fieldwork in Japan, caught a reflection of herself while she was shopping in a market for an evening meal.

Kondo had acquired the dress, posture, and habits of a young Japanese housewife...simply by immersing herself in social activity from the position that her gender and her associates assigned her. Her acquisition of the dispositions that marked a particular, gendered identity had occurred without her awareness, and the moment of recognition was disorienting. The image of herself in the

butcher's display case and the image of herself in her mind's eye did not match, and that disparity led Kondo to distance herself from her fieldwork (p. 139).

The authors report that, for Kondo, "the image reflected in the display case became a mediating device; it allowed her to think about what she had become, and to attempt to change it" (Holland et al., 1998, p. 142). Thus, the objectification of her current identity became the basis for Kondo's agentic action as she considered preferable identities to take on.

The power of self-directed symbols to shape new identities, Holland's group qualifies, is delimited by the nature of the symbols themselves. For instance, in a study of the figured world of romance, researchers discovered the level of expertise within the figured world, the salience of that particular figured world to their lives, in general, and their emotional identification with the figured world-- all affected how effective the symbolized identity was in managing and motivating behavior. Specifically, they found "that beginners may not know the assumed motives for romantic activity—prestige and intimacy—or may not find them especially enticing. Their knowledge of the conduct of romantic relationships may be rather piecemeal, their overview of romantic situations rather vague, their responses to romantic situations rather labored, and they may not have developed any engaging visions of themselves as participants in the figured world" (Holland et al., 1998, p. 121).

### **Ties to the Study**

Holland et al. (1998) have constructed a weighty theory of identity and agency by linking concepts proposed by Bourdieu, Bakhtin, and Vygotsky. They explain how, in a landscape of powerful cultural and social influences, individuals may act to “redirect themselves” (p. 272) and set out with varying degrees of intentionality to develop new identities. Of key relevance to the proposed study is the understanding that, in enrolling in an ABE program, many individuals are addressing a rupture, either major or minor, in their identities. They have begun to imagine themselves in a new way and have sought education as a means of creating this new self. Thus, they arrive in ABE with these histories-in-person (Holland & Lave, 2001), continually orchestrating voices and making on-the-spot decisions and judgments about how to answer the world, perhaps referencing these pursued identities in the process. Such might be the case with their reading-related experiences in the ABE classroom—how are these pursued identities referenced, if indeed they are, to give meaning to what happens “back in school”?

The construct of identities-in-practice described by Holland’s group offered two ways of focusing the investigative lens on identity during this study in order to answer that question. The concept of figurative identities pointed toward the need to attend to the storylines within which an adult intermediate reader’s various current identities have been shaped and to the perceived storylines within which they see their new selves operating. For me, figurative identities suggested a focus on the localized sociocultural domains of family, work, and community and on the figured worlds that made up those domains for participants in the study. Whereas figurative identities pointed to the

localized cultural groups and the practices within which participants understood their roles, the concept of positional identities suggested that these local worlds are situated within a larger sociohistorical world, where issues of gender, race, ethnicity, and income often cut across figured worlds, positioning individuals as more or less worthy, more or less powerful, than those around them. Positional identities pointed to the need in this study to solicit and attend to comments from participants about the ways they might be resisting the constraints of social structures in their decisions to join the ABE class. It also suggested the need to attend to other markers of status that might be operating in their figured world(s) and might be embedded within their reasons for enrolling.

The theory of identity transformation also suggested that the pursued identities of participants in the study would have varying degrees of saliency as far as how they impacted current understandings and actions, especially related to reading. I wanted to be attuned, therefore, to how much participants knew about the figured world they sought to participate in—and the role they envisioned reading playing, how tied this figured world was to other aspects of their lives, and how much of their emotions were engaged with this vision of themselves.

Probing for understanding of the identities that motivated adult intermediate readers to enroll in ABE provided a basis for exploring the perceived relevance of their reading-related experiences in the classroom. Whatever the identity work providing the impetus to join the class, my ultimate concern for this study was how relevant participants saw *reading* being to this work. Whereas research has demonstrated that reading is noticeably relevant to the pursued identities of some learners, such as

beginning-level adult readers seeking “identities as literate people” (Fingeret & Drennon, 1997, p. 105) and non-native speakers of English accessing entry into the social, economic, and political practices of a new country (e.g., Skilton-Sylvester & Carlo, 1998), it is less clear how native English-speaking adults reading at the intermediate-level perceive reading to be connected not only to their current identities but also to the ones they hope to form. The theory of identity transformation provided a vehicle for considering identity and agency on the way to addressing this question; however, I needed to draw from another strand of literature to define reading itself. In the next section I present what the literacy-as-practices lens offered the study.

### **Literacy As Practices**

Like Holland et al. (1998), theorists and researchers operating from the literacy-as-practices perspective build off Bourdieu’s work to posit that different groups of people have social and cultural practices that have evolved over time, are characteristic of the group, and known fully only to and by its members (Heath, 1983; Street, 1984, 2003; New London Group, 2000; Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Gee, 2000, 2002, 2005; Fingeret & Drennon, 1997; Reder, 1994; Merrifield, Bingman, Hemphill, and Bennett deMarrais, 1997). Gee (1992, 2000, 2002, 2005) uses the term *Discourses* to capture the notion that different groups have sets of practices which trigger recognition within those groups. Distinct from the term *discourses* (with a lower-case “d”), which Gee uses to refer to connected stretches of spoken or written texts (2002, p. 109), Discourses are “amalgams of ways of talking, valuing, thinking, believing, interacting, acting, and sometimes,

writing and reading, together with various “props” (books, clubs, buildings, birds, and so on) in the world” (Gee, 1992, p. 104). Whereas Holland et al.’s (1998) construct of figured world refers to the landscape of an imagined realm with its own storyline, I see the construct of Discourse adding the notion that individuals send signals that they are operating within a particular figured world by the ways they act (and value, think, believe, and so forth), including how they interact with written text (Bartlett & Holland, 2002; Gee, 1992).

Because they understand literacy to be embedded in the historically, socially, and culturally evolved Discourses characteristic of specific groups of people, proponents of this literacy as practices perspective dispute what Street (1984, 2003) calls the “autonomous” (p. 1) model of literacy. Street (1984, 2003) contends that the autonomous model treats literacy as a set of skills that, once learned, automatically and unproblematically transfers to a multitude of life contexts. In contrast, the “ideological” model foregrounds the confluence of historical, social, and cultural forces on and within any literacy activity, forces which re-present and reinforce the values, meanings, and relationships embedded within the community. Thus, instead of thinking in terms of literacy skills, proponents of the ideological model consider literacy practices to be the relevant construct deserving theoretical and practical attention.

### **Literacy Practices**

In this paper, I will use the term *literacy practices* to refer to a particular group’s regular and repeated ways of using written language and the “associated values, attitudes,

feelings, and social relationships typically enacted by members of that group” (Barton & Hamilton, 1998, p. 6). To be clear, this definition assumes that literacy has uses outside of the classroom and that these uses are understood and interpreted (perhaps) differently by different groups. In order to conceptualize the literacy practices of a particular group, their uses of written language *outside of the classroom* need to be investigated (Hull & Shultz, 2002).

Theorists from the literacy-as-practices perspective (Street, 1984; Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Hamilton, 2000) tend to distinguish between *literacy events* and *literacy practices*. “Literacy event” is used to refer to an activity involving written text (Heath, 1983); “literacy practice” is used to refer more broadly to, not only the present literacy event, but also to the hidden array of ideological assumptions within which the actual literacy event is immersed. A literacy event is visible, something that can be photographed (Hamilton, 2000), such as reading a bedtime story to a child. It is enfolded within a literacy practice, such as *bedtime story reading*, with its often invisible but powerful patterned ways of bringing together actors (e.g., adult and child), cultural artifacts (e.g., children’s books), settings (e.g., bed or chair, usually in a home), meanings and values (e.g., books are to be talked about; books are to be enjoyed) and ways of doing things (e.g., asking questions, pointing to pictures). Because a literacy event is often an instantiation of a type of activity that is repeated regularly within a literacy practice, it is often the starting point for researchers interested in literacy practices (Barton et al., 2000), as it was in this study.



In this study I am most interested in a sub-set of literacy practices: reading practices. The concept of reading practices, like literacy practices, assumes that reading:

involves socially developed and culturally embedded ways of using text to serve particular social or cultural purposes (Moje, Dillon, & O'Brien, 2000; Gee, 1999; Hourigan, 1994; Lee, 1995; Scribner & Cole, 1981; Street, 1984). All texts are shaped by specific conventions and structures of language, and proficient reading of all texts therefore demands the use of these conventions to navigate layers of meaning (e.g., Cope & Kalantzis, 1993; New London Group, 1996; Scott, 1993). Additionally, the resources and processes used by proficient readers are influenced by the specific contexts and situations in which reading occurs and the social functions that it serves (e.g., Courts, 1997; Gee, 1996; Heath, 1983; Scribner & Cole, 1981). (Greenleaf et al., 2001, p. 87).

Barton and Hamilton (1998) make several points about reading practices relevant to the proposed study. First of all, in an ethnographic study of the literacy practices of adults in Lancaster, England, in the 1990's, they discovered two main types of reading practices: one is where reading is integral to the activity; the other is where reading is the means to another end. The first, they explain, is what you have when, in response to *what are you doing?*, the individual answers *reading*. The second is what you have when you get a response other than reading, even though a text is involved. Barton and Hamilton (1998) elaborate:

Whilst some reading and writing is carried out as an end in itself, typically literacy is a means to some other end. Any study of literacy practices must therefore situate reading and writing activities in these broader contexts and motivations for use. In [a] cooking example, for instance, the aim is to bake a lemon pie, and the reading of a recipe is incidental to this aim. The recipe is incorporated into a broader set of domestic social practices associated with providing food and caring for children (p. 11).

Thus, an important assumption is that reading practices are embedded within other social practices and have varying degrees of relevance to the social practice (Gee, 1992; Barton & Hamilton, 1998). When investigating reading practices, then, it is important to study practices in which reading is integral and those in which reading is instrumental.

### ***Relevant Research on Literacy/Reading Practices***

Literacy practices have been investigated in a variety of ways, most often via naturalistic approaches. Although no studies have investigated the reading practices of adult intermediate readers, several studies offer insights into the range of reading practices, specifically, in the lives of adults who might be considered to have limited literacy skills, and into how these adults participate in these reading practices. In a study commissioned by the U.S. Congress, Office of Technology Assessment, Merrifield et al. (1997) utilized two teams of researchers, one in Knoxville, Tennessee, and one in San Francisco, California, “to explore literacy in the everyday lives of people whose literacy is limited” (p. 2). The team used the term “limited literacy skills” (p. 2) to describe performance in English reading and writing that would likely be below high school level, if they were assessed with conventional paper-and-pencil tests. The two teams employed a series of informal and formal interviews, participant observations, and archival data to develop case studies about six individuals in the Appalachian region and six individuals (immigrants) on the West Coast.

The research group identified four ways that individuals with limited literacy skills were able to meet the literacy demands of their lives: *other-oriented strategies*,

such as using “readers,” asking others for help, listening, and observing; *self-reliance strategies*, such as memorizing bill formats, phone numbers, and other information, guessing (e.g., instead of reading directions), and using texts selectively; *avoidance of difficult or potentially difficult situations*; and *substitution of technology for literacy*, such as using television, VCRs, and tape recorders to access and remember information instead of relying on reading and writing (Merrifield et al., 1997, pp. 186-192). This study built upon and explicated earlier research describing how low literate adults made use of their social networks to negotiate literacy activities (Fingeret, 1983).

The strategies described by Merrifield et al. (1997) and Fingeret (1983) might be considered “ways around” using texts, and, in fact, Merrifield et al. (1997) discovered that literacy demands—what was needed to “get by” (p. 121)--were minimal for the individuals in their study. However, the researchers actually documented quite a range of reading practices engaged in by participants. They were able to categorize both groups of participants’ uses of reading according to six categories described by Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines (1988): *Instrumental* (to gain practical information), *Social-Interactional* (to maintain social relations), *News-related* (to learn what was happening to third parties or in the world), *Recreational* (to plan or participate in leisure activity), *Confirmational* (to check or confirm facts in archival materials); and *Critical/Educational* (reading to fulfill educational requirements or to educate oneself) (Merrifield et al., p. 183). Thus, even individuals with limited literacy skills engaged in a variety of reading practices, though only a few used reading in all six ways and fewer than half of the participants used reading for news and recreation. Differences in reading practices across the individuals

were attributed more to their idiosyncratic personal histories and “cultural, social, and employment contexts” (p. 185) than to their skills levels.

So, how do individuals with such low skill levels engage in reading practices? Reder (1994) explicates the notion of “other-oriented strategies” (Merrifield et al., 1997) and social networks (Fingeret, 1983) with his practice-engagement theory. He posits three *modes of engagement* which may characterize an individual’s participation in a collaborative literacy practice: *technological*, *functional*, and *social*. He explains:

Some persons directly manipulate written materials, reading and/or writing as part of performing the task at hand—these individuals are here said to be *technologically engaged* in the literacy practice. The term *technologically engaged* refers to the particular technology of writing involved in the practice. Other individuals may not be *technologically engaged* in the practice but nevertheless interact closely in performing the task with others that are *technologically engaged*—these individuals are said to be *functionally engaged* in the collaborative literacy practice. They may provide specialized knowledge and expertise vital to the performance of the collaborative practice as the literacy skills of the *technologically engaged* participants. Other individuals may be neither *technologically* nor *functionally engaged* in the practice, but nevertheless have knowledge of the nature of the practice and its implications for the life of the community, and must routinely take others’ *technological* and *functional engagement* into account. Individuals in such positions are here said to be *socially engaged* in the practice (Reder, 1987:257). (Reder, 1994, p. 53).

Reder elaborates that it is possible for an individual to be engaged in one mode and not the others: for example, an immigrant may be *technologically engaged* in signing his name without understanding the *functional* ramifications or *social* meanings involved in the act. It is also possible for an individual to be engaged in some combination of the three modes, as when a business executive engages *functionally* and *socially* in dictating a letter but isn’t involved *technologically* (whereas the secretary is). In terms of this

study, an individual may also be functionally and socially engaged in the collaborative act of a group reading a newspaper--offering commentary, explaining nuances, sharing their background knowledge--without being engaged in the technological aspect of turning the print on the page into words and sentences.

Although individuals with high-literacy skills may participate through any of these modes, Barton and Hamilton (1998) suggest an important implication for adults with limited literacy skills. They found that when the social networks are particularly effective in supporting individuals in literacy tasks, individuals may not even recognize their own difficulties. When these social networks fall apart, as in the case of a divorce or death, an individual may confront problems in participating in reading practices that, before, were accomplished rather automatically with the collaboration of others.

### *Ties to the Study*

Of particular interest to the proposed investigation was the range of reading practices in which adult intermediate readers were currently able to participate and how doing so had shaped how they described their own reading. At issue here was a concern that students who perceive their reading to be “good enough” (Belzer, 1998, p. 222), enabling them to get done that which they need to do in their lives and to be who they need to be, might not desire to spend time in something called “reading instruction.” Thus, the design was attuned to the means through which adult intermediate readers in the study participated in the reading practices in their lives—what strategies they used and who was involved. Another implication is the finding by Barton & Hamilton (1998)

that participants exhibited two ways of looking at reading—as something that is the focus of attention and as something that is a means of getting to another goal. This suggests that adult intermediate readers may not recognize the reading they do on the way to something else as “reading.” In order to get them to talk about the reading they already do and the meanings they assign to these acts, the design of the study needed to include opportunities for them to talk about activities in their lives and then probe for how they used text within these. In discussing these literacy events, I planned to probe for who was involved, what texts and other tools were involved, where the practice occurred, what meanings were drawn upon, and how the task was accomplished.

Lastly, the construct of reading practices is important to this study because it is a foundational piece for understanding how notions of reading are developed. These will be discussed in the next section through the construct of cultural models.

### **Cultural Models**

One of the goals of this study was to understand the meanings that participants held related to reading. In order to explore these, I drew from the literature about cultural models (Gee, 1992, 2004a; Rogers, 2004a; Holland & Quinn, 1987; Holland et al., 1998). *Cultural models* can be thought of as the “shared implicit understanding[s]” (Holland & Skinner, 1987, p. 79) that members of a group construct and maintain through the social practices of the group. Each Discourse has, in Holland et al.’s (1998) terms, a “figured” component to it, in which the ways people relate, the words people use, the actions people take up are each attributed specific meanings based on the cultural

models that have developed. Insiders, or group members, “figure” that each of these things means something rather specific when it is encountered; outsiders may not share this same understanding. In essence, cultural models are “conceptualizations of figured worlds” (Holland et al., 1998, p. 55). Gee (2001), a theorist and researcher in the field of literacy, elaborates, describing how cultural models can be recognized through:

often tacit and taken-for-granted schemata, storylines, theories, images, or representations (partially represented inside people’s heads and partially represented within their materials and practices) that tell a group of people within a Discourse what is typical or normal from the point of view of that Discourse (p. 721).

Sociocultural literacy theorists posit that cultural models come to be “embodied” (Bourdieu, 1977, 1985) by individuals who are operating within a Discourse(s) containing literacy practices. As individuals perform reading and writing activities at specific points in time, these embodied understandings cast long shadows over the process and product of performance and give meaning to the activity. Researchers have noted, for instance, that schools, whose faculty are often comprised of members of the mainstream Discourse and whose institutional history is tied up in the replication of this Discourse (Luttrell, 1997; Heath, 1983), tend to act as if reading is a set of skills to be transferred from the teacher’s head to the student’s head (Lytle & Wolfe, 1989; Fingeret & Drennon, 1997; Street, 1984; Freire, 1970; Rogers, 2004b). This understanding is embedded within certain notions of how literacy learning is accomplished and is enacted through certain types of textbooks and teaching practices (Heath, 1983; Reder, 1994). In general, the school Discourse, and its associated cultural models, may be taken up easily

by students whose home Discourses are closely aligned with the school's. However, those whose home literacy models do not align so closely with those of the school, the argument goes, encounter barriers to learning, especially if the home Discourse is not valued and incorporated in some way into the classroom (Heath, 1983; Gee, 2004b; Purcell-Gates, 1996; Rogers, 2002; 2004b; Auerbach, 1989).

A single individual may participate within multiple figured worlds/Discourses, each with its own notions of reading. During any particular reading event or discussion of reading, then, certain Discourses may be more salient than others, requiring the reader (and any interested researcher) to negotiate which Discourse(s) is (are) most applicable. The work of Barton & Hamilton (1998) suggests that in order to ascertain the cultural models that individuals use to give meaning to literacy events, investigations of their "own history of literacy" (p. 12) is required. Similarly, Reder (1994) calls for investigation of the individual's engagement in literacy practices over time (p. 48) in order to ascertain the meanings they ascribe to literacy. Although studies of this sort involving adult intermediate readers, specifically, have not been conducted, findings from other studies point to the importance of understanding students' cultural models related to reading. The next section overviews key research that has been conducted in this area with English-speaking adult learners to date.

### ***Adult Learners' Cultural Models of Reading***

Based upon their trajectories through various Discourses--including school but also those related to work, their communities, and their families--individuals entering



ABE programs can be expected to have certain conceptions of what it means “to read” and to be a “reader” which influence the role they see reading playing in their current and pursued identities.

Studies that have investigated adult learner’s models of reading suggest that they reflect the Discourse of school (Rogers, 2002; 2004b), displaying a words-oriented, skills-based emphasis (Keefe & Meyer, 1980; Gambrell & Heathington, 1981; Taylor, Wade, Jackson, Blum, & Gould, 1980; Rogers, 2004b; Maclachlan & Cloonan, 2003) and an understanding of “reader” as someone who “crave[s] to read” (p. 108) such things as “encyclopedias, dictionaries, or Shakespeare” (Belzer, 2002, p. 111). Many of these studies, however, were conducted with beginning-level readers (0-3.9 GLE) or aggregated data from students at various performance levels. Details related to data collection and analysis methods are typically sketchy as well. Thus, relevance of the findings of these studies to intermediate-level readers, specifically, is unknown.

Furthermore, recent studies by Rogers (2002, 2004b) and Belzer (1998, 2002) have complicated the notion of cultural models as they relate to literacy. Rogers (2002) theorized that adults may possess perhaps conflicting cultural models about literacy related to the various Discourses in which they participate—and that these must be negotiated in different instances of application. To test this theory, Rogers (2004b) used Critical Discourse Analysis in an interview study to investigate how 15 adult learners perceived literacy in different contexts of their lives. She found that her participants did indeed think about and enact literacy differently in different domains (i.e., past and present experiences with school, family and community language and literacy practices,

and involvement with children's education). When talking about literacy in school settings, whether past or present, the adults drew upon the Discourse of school, mentioning such things as "pronouncing words" (p. 288), "breaking words down" (p. 288), and "rereading for perfection" (p. 286). In the domain of the family and the community, reading was viewed quite differently. The majority of participants discussed reading and writing as purposeful, as something one did in order to get other things done. One participant wrote about writing a proposal for a women's shelter, another of reading the Bible aloud to her daughter, another of preparing sermons. When operating within purposeful contexts, as opposed to school contexts, participants had positive views of themselves as readers, and their language evidenced a sense of control, of agency, in these literacy events.

In an interview study of five women involved in a GED program, Belzer (1998) identified similar issues. All of the women would be considered intermediate or secondary-level readers, but Belzer at first considered them to be aliterate, choosing not to read when in fact they could. Belzer soon realized, however, that, although the women disavowed any involvement in reading activities outside of class, they actually engaged in a range of reading practices. These reading practices did not register as "reading," Belzer concluded, because students possessed school-based models of what reading was all about. Belzer also found that only two of her participants saw a need to improve their reading, and only one of these—perhaps the best reader in the group-- could articulate how reading would help her achieve her goals. Belzer explains that, although the GED is mainly a reading test:

[N]o one said they wanted to get better at reading and writing because it would help them pass the GED test. Polly and Laura did not feel that improving their literacy skills would make much difference in their lives at all. Polly said she is satisfied with herself as she is. Laura acknowledged that improving her reading would help her with her comprehension and would therefore make her a faster reader (because she would not have to re-read), but it's just not that important to her. Tamika and Mattie, in contrast, would like to become better readers. Mattie feels that if she were a better reader she 'would get a lot farther'. She is sure that it would help her reach some of her goals, but she had trouble articulating specifically how. Tamika is the most hopeful and articulate about what improved literacy skills will do for her. She feels that it would improve her spoken language grammar, would enable her to be of more help to her children when they have trouble with school work, would improve her job prospects and would be personally satisfying (Belzer, 1998, p. 227).

### *Ties to the Study*

The literature around cultural models raised several issues that informed this study. The first was that, although Rogers' (2004b) and Belzer's (1998, 2002) studies are provocative explorations of the cultural models related to literacy that come into play under different circumstances, they offer at most only vague insight into how these models relate to the *pursued identities* of adults who enter ABE programs. Nor was it clear how the findings relate to adult intermediate readers, in particular, since findings were not analyzed in these terms. Belzer (1998, 2002) points to the possibility that participants do not see reading, as they envision it, being related to the identity work that has brought them to ABE in the first place, so the proposed study hoped to investigate this notion more fully with adult intermediate readers.

The literature also points to design issues that are relevant to the study. The first is that, when exploring students' understandings of "reading," I should look for 1) simplified storylines (with associated characters, setting, plot), 2), images or metaphors,

and 3) theories that participants reference when talking about reading (Holland & Quinn, 1987; Gee, 2001). Secondly, exploration of participants' "own history of literacy" (Barton & Hamilton, p. 12) was in order. My intent here was not to trace the origins of the cultural models, but rather to provide context to the findings. During interviews, then, comments were solicited around how students developed as readers through school and in their families and about their current reading practices in various domains of their lives. Thirdly, during data analysis, I was attuned to the possibility that participants actually had several cultural models for reading and that the one(s) which was(were) relevant at any given point likely corresponded with the context of the reading (Rogers, 2004b).

Thus far, I have outlined how the literature shaped the lenses I employed to investigate learners' current and pursued identities, reading practices, and cultural models related to reading. I now move to explore the literature around learners' perceptions of instruction and why these are important to consider.

### **Learner Attributions of Relevance**

Researchers in ABE and literacy settings have concluded that, from the perspective of most researchers, instruction is largely decontextualized, skill-based, and disconnected from the goals that bring students to class (Collins, 1992; Koen, 1986; Fingeret & Danin, 1991; Bartlett & Holland, 2002; Gadsden, 1988; Purcell-Gates, Degener, Jacobson, & Soler, 2002; Purcell-Gates, Degener, & Jacobson, 1998; Beder & Medina, 2001; McCune & Alamprese, 1985; Young et al., 1994). Implications discussed

in these research reports, and in much of the theoretical literature on adult learning as well (e.g., Brookfield, 1988; Knowles, 1984; Freire, 1970; Mezirow & Associates, 2000; Fingeret, 1991; Lytle, 1994; Stein, 2000; Purcell-Gates & Waterman, 2000; Sticht, 2005), typically call for pedagogical approaches that tie instruction to student's life-based goals, use authentic materials, and/or involve students in designing curriculum. Reasons preferred for "life-contextualized" (Purcell-Gates et al., 1998) materials and tasks include facilitation of transfer of skills in real life situations (Sticht, 2005; Stein, 2000), increase of literacy practices in out-of-school contexts (Purcell-Gates, 1998); critical analysis of social structures (Degener, 2001; Freire, 1970; Purcell-Gates & Waterman, 2000); transformation in ways of thinking (Mezirow & Associates, 2000); and increased participation and engagement (Beder et al., 2001; Brookfield, 1988).

*Students'* perspectives on instruction, however, have for the most part been unsought. Several studies include examples of beginning readers (Fingeret & Danin, 1991; Fingeret & Drennon, 1997; Malicky et al., 1997) and higher-level readers (Belzer, 1998, 2002) desiring instruction that could be described as decontextualized, skill-based, and academic in nature, despite the life-based goals that bring them to class. Studies of attempts at contextualized instruction and the use of participatory approaches (e.g., Gowen, 1990; Belzer, 1998; Reumann, 1995) also cite student resistance to these approaches, at least at first. Reumann (1995) explains, "On the one hand, adults want education that speaks to their lives and concerns and they know the ways of traditional school didn't work for them. On the other hand, they carry many strong assumptions and expectations based on past educational experience" (p. 282).

An interview exchange with a woman in a GED program demonstrates the rather unexpected role that previous school experience plays in adult learners' expectations for ABE instruction. After "Laura" comments that she would like her GED program to be more like her tenth-grade year, with the teacher being "up in front of the class" (Belzer, 1998, p. 243) and saying things like "It's time to take a quiz" (p. 243), Belzer presses her:

- A: The thing that kind of puzzles me, Laura, is you didn't like school when you were in school and I'm wondering why you would want it to be the same now.  
 L: Maybe because I want that what I missed. The education that I missed, I want it now.  
 A: Do you ever think, "I didn't like it then, I might not like it now?"  
 L: No, I be wanting it now. I be wanting that education that I missed.  
 A: But the exact same way? Like desks in rows and teachers at the front lecturing.  
 L: No I wanted the teaching. You know like the teacher getting up there handing out—you get them books. You doing class work.  
 A: You don't think that would be boring to you?  
 L: No

(Belzer, 1998, p. 244)

In essence, instead of disdaining the kind of instruction with which they had originally failed, many adult learners seem to desire that instruction.

The research literature reveals that, whatever kind of instruction they encounter, adult learners assign meaning and respond accordingly. In their investigation of change in low-level readers enrolled in the Literacy Volunteers of New York City program, Fingeret and Drennon (1997) described adults who had clear expectations for their reading instruction. Tutors were trained to encourage students to take risks when reading, applying strategies to decode unknown words. "Don," though, wanted the tutor to tell him when he didn't know a word, "instead of letting me beat my brains out trying to figure out what it is because I'm not going to know what it is because I'm not good

with sounds” (p. 29). When he didn’t get the type of help that matched his perception, he found it tempting to skip the next tutoring session. “Ann” balked at certain real-life content. When encouraged by her tutors to make a grocery list, Ann couldn’t see the point. However, when it occurred to her that a “shopping list might make for a good spelling exercise” (p. 40), she bought into the idea.

Studies with more skilled learners report similar examples of agentic action. In her study of how a local GED program enacted participatory approaches, Reumann (1995) documents how students requested learning experiences more in line with their school-based notions of what was important. Gowen (1990) described how black workers enrolled in a hospital literacy program employing functional context methodology (Sticht, 2005) resisted the use of work-based texts, finding them irrelevant to and unreflective of the reality of their work situations and infused with power-laden meanings. “Although many had joined the class to pursue work-related goals, they resisted the overwhelming work-related contexts used by the curriculum: some dropped out, some refused to do the work, and some adapted assignments to incorporate other aspects of their lives” (Gowen, 1990, p. 328).

Another study complicates the issue of what is relevant and what is not even further. In a study of how the learning context shapes learner engagement, Beder et al. (2006) were surprised by how engaged students were who attended classrooms characterized by Individualized Group Instruction, in which students are in the same classroom as other students but work independently, or with teacher assistance as needed, through self-paced materials. The researchers (2006) found that, overall, the students

seemed highly engaged, and they noted:

[M]erely wanting to do well on a test is a more useful motivator than one might think. This is interesting to think about in terms of adult learners, who often seem to be completing tasks that don't seem to have any relevance other than degree attainment. The issue of relevance, or authenticity, is common ground in both K-12 and adult learners. In both contexts, motivated and nonmotivated students are often faced with tasks that may appear to lack meaning (Beder et al., 2006, p. 24)

However, sociocultural theory would argue that meaning is indeed being made and, if they were engaged, the activity was valued in some way. Beder et al. (2006) concluded that the value lay in the goal to achieve a high school diploma; interest in what they were reading mattered very little. Why the high school diploma carried such motivational weight to offset admittedly boring material was not explored.

These examples demonstrate two realities: 1) the value that students assign experiences in the classroom do not always seem to connect directly to how authentic the task or text is, and 2) student perceptions of their experiences affect behavior and persistence. Because of the latter, examination of the former is in order. I have chosen to examine student perceptions of their experiences in the classroom in terms of attributions of relevance, with relevance being defined as the importance a learner ascribes to an experience in an educational setting, because “all learning—and literacy learning, in particular—can be conceived of as moments in identity construction and representation” (McCarthy & Moje, 2002, p. 233). If indeed adult learners are entering adult education programs to intentionally manage the development of new selves, it follows that they would assign meaning to activities within the program, using these identities as a reference point. Sociocultural perspectives of identity also suggest that the unique



intersection of the social, cultural, and historic milieus in which individuals develop complicate attributions of relevance related to a particular activity (Wells & Claxton, 2002). No activity in and of itself then can be termed “relevant;” the attribution must come from an individual and a reference point. They may also reference something else in attributing relevance, but this investigation was designed to provide insights into identity-guided attributions of relevance in particular.

I could find no research to date focused on the perspectives of adult intermediate readers, specifically, on classroom instruction, but the examples cited in these reports of studies with beginning and more advanced adult readers raise the possibility that learners see connections that researchers miss between academic-based learning and the identities the learners are seeking. If so, the typical ABE instruction described in the classroom research may be sufficient to prepare adult learners for their pursued identities, and reading instruction for adult intermediate readers can be constructed accordingly. Or, as some researchers have noted, this apparent alignment should serve as a red flag, warning of the deeply-held cultural models reflected in students that work against the changes they envision making in their lives. Rogers (2004b), for example, shares a concern related to adults enrolled in a family literacy program who want to be advocates for their children. (NOTE: Rogers uses the term “discourses” here as Gee uses “Discourses”).

Often, when we discuss clashes between groups with differential access to power, we do so in terms of a *conflict* between discourses—ways of interacting, representing, and being. However, we need to be just as concerned when there is discourse alignment as when there is discourse conflict. The prime example of this in the data I have presented is that all of the adults value education and uphold a view of themselves and of literacy that is in alignment with the views of the school. Further, in the domain of involvement with children's education, the adults specifically placed their children in special education despite not agreeing with the placement. It is this *alignment* that causes them to more readily believe when the school tells them that they or their children are deficient or disabled, because they so readily believe in and value the institution of the school" (Rogers, 2004b, pp. 295-296).

Bartlett and Holland (2002) raise another concern. In a study of how literacy learners in Brazil conceptualized the "educated person," they identified, like Fingeret & Drennon (1997), the role shame plays when adults with very limited literacy practices compare themselves with their cultural model of the educated person. Like Fingeret and Drennon, Bartlett and Holland emphasize the role of social structures in "literacy shaming" (p. 15), maintaining that this physical and emotional response to being positioned as inferior affects how students approach instruction. Bartlett and Holland contend that, in order to overcome this literacy shame and to support adults in developing a "new sense of self" (p. 19), classrooms in Brazil should be run differently, with opportunities for students to objectify their shaming by discussing it critically and by refiguring the value of their current identities and literacy practices.

It is unclear whether or not the concerns that Bartlett and Holland raise are pertinent to intermediate adult readers, though, who likely engage in a greater range of literacy practices and are possibly less affected by socially-constructed literacy shame, if at all. If cultural models related to reading are different, and literacy shame is of little

concern for this group of learners, perhaps more traditional approaches to instruction suffice to support the identity work, of a different nature, that this group is undertaking. This study was designed to begin to explore just what the perspectives are of a small set of adult intermediate readers and to understand the implications for reading-related instruction.

### **Conceptual Framework**

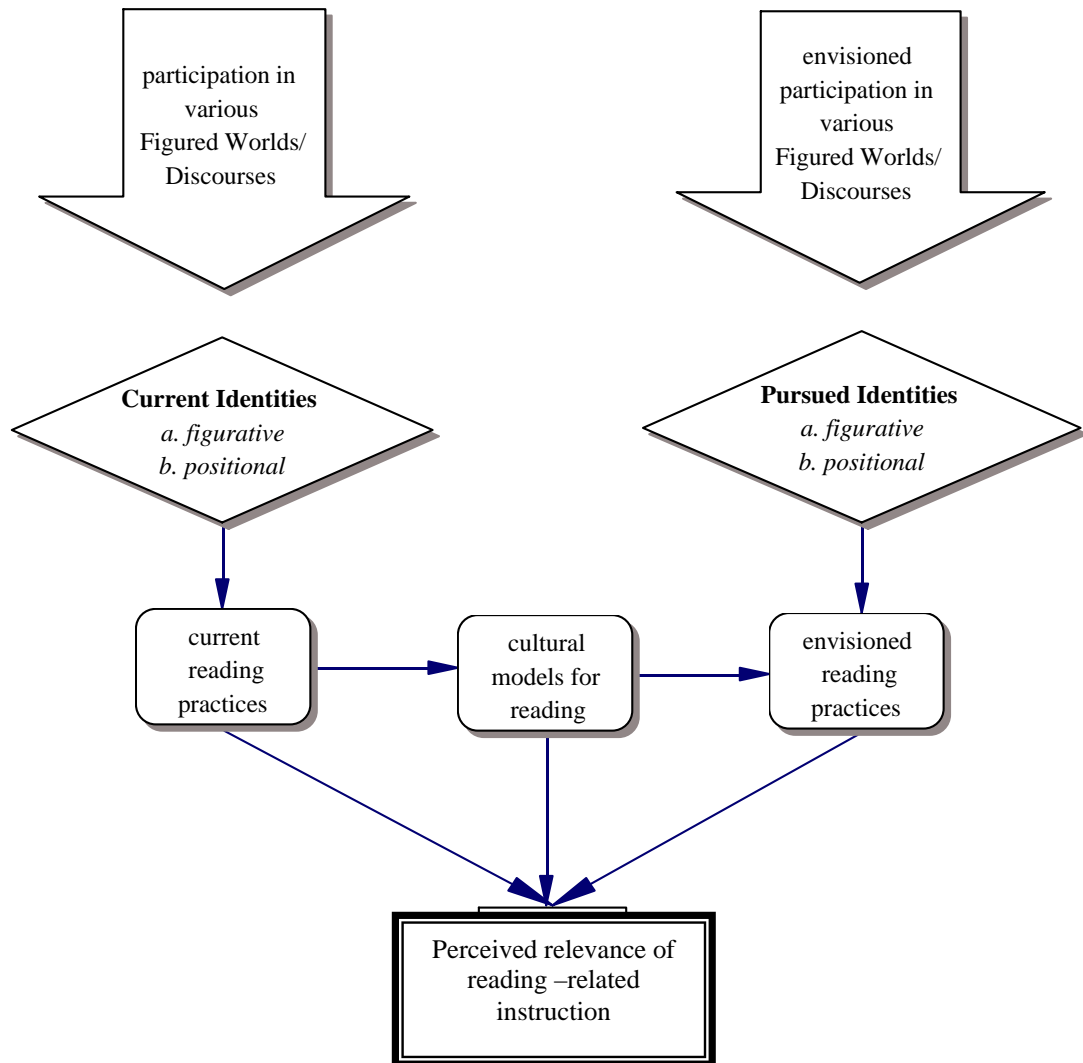
The act of agency that adult learners embrace when they enroll in adult education has been recognized in the literature for some time; however, theoretical conceptualizations of where this agency comes from and what it says about the identity work being undertaken are weak. Holland et al.'s (1998) theory of identity transformation provides an overarching frame for considering the motivations that bring adult intermediate learners, specifically, to ABE programs and, ultimately, to the role these identity-oriented motivations play in learners' perceptions about reading-related instruction. Together, the identities-in-practice and literacy-as-practices constructs offered useful tools for answering the research questions:

1. What are the identities guiding participants' involvement in adult basic education?
2. What understandings do participants have about reading and the role it plays in their lives?

3. How are participants' perceptions of the relevance of reading-related instruction connected to their identity work and to the role of reading in their lives?

Figure 2 depicts how I originally envisioned key components of the identities-in-practice and the literacy-as-practice perspectives working together to explain how adult intermediate readers might attribute relevance to their reading-related experiences in the classroom. Beginning in the upper left corner, the figure shows how past participation in various intersecting and overlapping figured worlds or Discourses have resulted in the individual's current identities. These identities may be both figurative, in the sense that they represent imagined prototypical roles within a figured world, and positional, in the sense that they indicate how the individual sees himself, and is seen by others, in terms of power, status, and rank.

In the service of at least some of these identities, individuals engage in reading practices, through which they construct cultural models of what reading is all about. These cultural models and individuals' evaluation of their participation in reading practices work together to permit individuals to make judgments about the relevance of reading-related instruction. But this perceived relevance is also evaluated in terms of the identities they have projected into the future, in the form of pursued identities. Perhaps originating in a "rupture" in a current identity and/or in an improvisation in behavior or thought, these new visions of being may be used as symbols to give meaning to current activities. Starting from the top right corner of the figure, then, individuals enrolled in ABE settings are envisioning themselves as different kinds of people, either within the



**FIGURE 2**

**Conceptual Framework**

figured worlds they already participate in or in imagined new worlds of work, family, or community. As with current identities, these identities have figurative and positional aspects to them. Since understandings about what is entailed in these new identities may be broad and general, learners may have to imagine the reading practices that are integral to their pursued identities, based on their current cultural models. Referencing all these factors, individuals make decisions about how relevant reading-related instruction is to their identity pursuits.

This conceptual framework guided the design of the study and the analysis of the data; however, significant changes occurred in my understanding of how the various constructs served to explain the perceptions of the adult intermediate readers in the study. The conceptual framework is revisited and revised in Chapter VII.

### **Key Terminology**

In order to be transparent in the meanings I am assigning to certain vocabulary, a list of definitions is provided below. I appropriated certain terms from the literature but also use familiar terms in ways that are unique to the situated condition of the study.

**Adult intermediate reader** - an individual of at least 16 years of age who scores between the 4.0-and 8.9 grade equivalencies on a standardized English silent reading assessment

**Agency** – “the realized capacity of people to act upon their world and not only to know about or give personal or intersubjective significance to it. That capacity is the power of people to act purposively and reflectively, in more or less complex

interrelationships with one another, to reiterate and remake the world in which they live, in circumstances where they may consider different courses of action possible and desirable, though not necessarily from the same point of view” (Inden, 1990, p. 23 as cited in Holland et al., 1998).

**Cultural model** - “shared implicit understanding[s]” (Holland & Skinner, 1987, p. 79), held by a group and cultivated and reproduced through social and cultural practices. Cultural models are recognized as cultural schemata, simplified storylines, theories, or images (Gee, 2001).

**Current identity** –a now-oriented sense of self

**Discourses** - “amalgams of ways of talking, valuing, thinking, believing, interacting, acting, and sometimes, writing and reading, together with various “props” (books, clubs, buildings, birds, and so on) in the world” (Gee, 1992, p. 104).

**Guiding identities** - pairs of related current and pursued identities which motivated participants to enter the adult basic education setting

**Identity** - a “sense of the self” (Holland et al., 1998, p. 8) that develops through participation in social practices that are enacted within cultural worlds. Because individuals operate within multiple cultural worlds simultaneously, identities are understood to be multiple as well.

**Identity work** - intentional efforts to maintain/transform a particular sense of self

**Improvisation** – one form of agency described by Holland et al. (1998); “the sort of impromptu actions that occur when our past, brought to the present as habitus, meets with a particular combination of circumstances and conditions for which we have no set

response” (pp. 17-18).

**Literacy practices** - a particular group’s regular and repeated ways of using written language and the “associated values, attitudes, feelings, and social relationships typically enacted by members of that group” (Barton & Hamilton, 1998, p. 6).

**Orchestration of voices** – one form of agency borrowed from Bakhtin (1982) and described by Holland et al. (1998); the negotiation of internal and/or external forces in order to “answer the world.”

**Pursued identity** – a future-oriented “sense of self”

**Reading-related instruction** - any program activity, whether inside or outside the classroom, that 1) involves reading written text and/or 2) includes any communicative act (e.g., discussion, presentation, writing, drawing) about a written text.

**Relevance** – the importance/value a learner ascribes to an experience in an educational setting.

**Self-directed symbolization** – one form of agency described by Holland et al. (1998); the use of imagined signs to manage behavior

### **Overview of Chapter III**

In the next chapter, I explore how I collected and analyzed data. I provide the rationale for the qualitative design and overview the context in which the study was conducted. Procedures and tools used for data collection are described as is the process employed for analyzing data. Finally, I discuss my role as an instrument in the study and how threats to the quality of the study were addressed.



## **CHAPTER III**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **Orientation to the Chapter**

The purpose of the study was to investigate the ways in which a small group of adult intermediate readers attributed relevance to reading-related instruction in terms of who they were and who they wanted to be. Specifically, the investigation hoped to answer the following questions:

1. What are the identities guiding participants' involvement in adult basic education?
2. What understandings do participants have about reading and the role it plays in their lives?
3. How are participants' perceptions of the relevance of reading-related instruction connected to their identity work and to the role of reading in their lives?

In this chapter, I first introduce the interpretive paradigm and multiple-case study design which will guide the study. Following this discussion, I provide an overview of the research site and participants, details about the methods employed for data collection and related ethical considerations, analysis procedures, my role as a research instrument, and how the trustworthiness of the findings were ensured.

### **Introduction to the Design**

Since the purpose of the study was to understand the meanings that participants bring with them and construct during reading-related instruction, it was situated within the interpretive/constructivist paradigm (Mertens, 1998; Marshall & Rossman, 1995; Creswell, 1994; Merriam & Associates, 2002). Mertens (1998) describes interpretive research in terms of its ontology, epistemology, and methodology. Ontologically, researchers operating within this paradigm assume that reality is socially-constructed and plural in nature. Mertens contends that interpretive researchers “[reject] the notion that there is an objective reality that can be known and [take] the stance that the researcher’s goal is to understand the multiple social constructions of knowledge” (p. 11). In epistemological terms, what the researcher claims to know from the study is based on close interactions between “the inquirer and the inquired-into” (p. 13). To this end, the researcher is open to having the direction of the study changed by what is experienced while working with participants, is conscious of how the researcher’s own presence and interaction with participants is affecting what is professed to be known by them, and is explicit about how the researcher’s own values and assumptions affect the design and findings of the study. Finally, methodological approaches reflect the appreciation the researcher has for how reality is viewed and knowledge is constructed. Qualitative interviews, observations, and document analysis are often the methods employed, with the aim of collecting data in multiple forms and from varied perspectives.

A common method used in interpretive studies is the case study. Although Yin (1994) approaches qualitative research differently from how I chose to do in this study, I

find his definition of case study a useful one. He defines a case study as “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (p. 13). The phenomenon at issue in this study was the relevance that adult intermediate readers attribute to reading-related instruction, and the real-life context of interest to me was the confluence of historical, social, and cultural forces that have shaped and continue to shape who they are and the meanings they hold about reading. The study was explanatory in nature, not in the sense of deriving a theory of causality but in the sense that Lincoln and Guba (1985) offer of seeking understanding. They suggest that “[u]nderstanding results from an appreciation of the myriad mutual shapings that are synchronously ongoing and abstracting from that complexity a sub-system that serves the investigator’s needs. Certain causality is transmuted into relative plausibility” (p. 152). My principal need as the investigator was to determine 1) how adult intermediate readers value reading-related instruction 2) in terms of how they construe reading to be related to their current and pursued senses of selves and 3) based on their understandings of what reading is all about.

In order to contribute to the explanatory nature of my interest, I employed a multiple-case study design (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Miles and Huberman (1994) recommend establishing boundaries for the case, which will define the unit of analysis. In this study, then, a case was defined as an adult intermediate reader and the meanings s/he brings to reading-related instruction. All of the participants in the study were students in a local ABE program, which I will describe in the next section.

### **Research Context**

I collected data from students enrolled at a family literacy site managed by the Appleton Community College Adult Basic Skills program (pseudonym). Appleton Community College was located in the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains and served a large, rural county, comprised of over 750 square miles of land and, at the time of the study, approximately 65,000 people. The adult population was primarily White (93%), with 72% holding at least a high school diploma and 11% having earned at least a bachelor's degree (U.S. Census Bureau, 2007a). A regional hospital, community college, and the local school system provided a significant percentage of the jobs in the area, as did several large factories and a substantial retail strip. Table 1 provides a summary of demographic information related to Appleton County.

The community college served over 1,500 full-time students, offering a variety of certification programs and associate degrees to adults in Appleton and two contiguous counties. It also had a Basic Skills division, which provided free public and workplace classes in adult basic education, compensatory education, English as a Second Language, and preparation for the General Education Development (GED) or Adult High School Diploma. Classes were provided both on-site at the community college and throughout the community. As part of the Basic Skills program, the community college ran two family literacy programs, providing educational services for both parents and children. The site selected for the study was one of these programs.

**TABLE 1****Appleton County Demographics**

<b>Characteristic</b>	<b>Appleton County</b>	<b>United States</b>
High School Graduate or Higher (25 years or older)*	72.1%	84.1%
Bachelor's Degree or Higher (25 years or older)*	11%	27%
White**	93%	75.1%
Black**	4.2%	12.3%
Hispanic/Latino (of any race)**	3.4%	12.5%
Per capita income *	17,564	25,257
Individuals below poverty level*	17.5%	13.3%

\*Census 2000 Demographic Profile Highlights for Appleton County (U.S. Census Bureau, 2007a)

\*\*American Community Survey Data Profile Highlights for Appleton County (U.S. Census Bureau, 2007b)

**Appleton Center for Family Education**

The Appleton Center for Family Education was housed in a former elementary school building and provided child care and preschool services for the children of the adult participants in the program. I taught a class (on financial literacy) on-site but not in the classroom two years prior to the study to become familiar with the context of the family literacy program and to evaluate whether it would be appropriate for the study. The classroom seemed an ideal context for the study for several reasons. First of all, attendance was relatively high (12-20 students daily) which increased the likelihood of identifying intermediate level readers who would be willing to participate in the study. The class also met every day, providing me with a certain amount of flexibility in visiting

the site. Thirdly, the family literacy context elicited family-related reading experiences in addition to basic skills instruction, which allowed some range in classroom reading activities. The class was also convenient in location and meeting times, which enabled me to visit the site often over time.

The director of the Center, Beatrice (pseudonym), shared that the program targeted three groups of people. The first group was comprised of parents enrolled in Work First, the state's enactment of the federal welfare-to-work program, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families. The goal of Work First was to support parents in gaining employment and becoming self-sufficient. Benefits were limited, in most cases to 24 months, and parents who participated received short-term education and/or training if needed and were expected to find jobs as soon as possible. The Center worked with the Department of Social Services to provide the education and training component of the Work First services. Participating parents were required to attend the program a certain number of hours a week for a certain number of months (depending upon their caseworkers' determination), and teachers in the program worked with the Work First parents to document hours and complete required paperwork. The Center also provided child care and education while parents participated in the program.

The second group targeted by the Center was displaced workers who had worked in local textile and furniture mills and had lost their jobs when these businesses moved out of the area. The county had experienced a loss of over 1,400 jobs in the last few years. These factories had not required a high school credential for employment, but the remaining jobs in the county did, so the Center recruited these workers-in-transition into

its program. The third targeted group was anyone else who wanted to develop the skills needed to earn a high school credential. Adults could prepare for the GED tests or earn an Adult High School Diploma. The diploma could be earned by completing prescribed curricula in required and elective courses and adding these completed courses to the ones for which learners had received credit in high school. The diploma was offered through the local Board of Education and Appleton Community College.

The Center was organized as a family literacy program. It was structured around the Kenan Model for family literacy, including all four components: Adult Education, Child Education, Parent and Children Together Time, and Parent Education. Three early childhood teachers taught in the Child Education component, which provided services for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers. Parent and Children Together Time involved parents spending the first thirty minutes each day transitioning their children into the program, playing with them, and/or reading with them. The Adult Education components were taught by two teachers, Kate and Nancy, and by the Center's assistant director, Francine, who taught a Creative Writing class. (NOTE: All personal names are pseudonyms.) The grant which funded the Center's operations required at least one Parent Education activity daily, and this activity was provided either by one of the staff or by a teacher who worked with a program funded through the state's early education initiative.

Both the Adult Education and the Parent Education components were situated within what the program called the "adult education class." Kate and Nancy provided instruction for the class in a main classroom, which was comprised of six sets of long tables with chairs around them, bookcases filled with textbooks and parenting material,

two teacher desks, a photocopying machine, and various bulletin boards and filing cabinets. Next door to the main classroom was Francine's office, which doubled as a kitchen and a meeting space for the Creative Writing class and was used for assessing students upon entry into the program. A third room, a computer lab, was used for computer classes that were regularly offered for elective credit by the community college. Since computers lined the walls, the space in the center of the lab allowed two long tables to be pulled together to offer a rectangular meeting space.

The Center was open each weekday from 8:00-2:00, except for Friday when it closed at 1:00. Students came and went throughout the day and the week as their schedules allowed. The default mode of working was individually in assigned textbooks in the main classroom, but parenting activities, field trips, and guest speakers/teachers were also common during the data collection period.

### **Participants**

In light of the interpretive and exploratory nature of the study, I chose to focus on understanding a few students in depth rather than a large number of students in breadth. Many studies with similar goals in ABE have involved 5 to 12 students (e.g., Belzer, 1998; Merrifield et al, 1997; Bingman & Ebert, 1999; Fingeret & Drennon, 1997), so I used that range to inform my own decisions about the number of students I included. The design was also informed by previous research with ABE/ESOL populations (Drago-Severson, 2004; Strucker, 2000), which identified sporadic attendance and "stopping out" (a term used instead of "dropping out" to capture the documented tendency of students to



re-enter when life circumstances were more supportive of their attendance) as issues that faced researchers of these populations. With this in mind, I hoped to engage six to eight students as participants in the study, with an eye toward collecting enough data to support an in-depth analysis of three or four students.

I used purposive sampling (Patton, 1990) to identify participants, seeking diversity in age, gender, ethnicity, and assessment scores. After receiving consent forms from students willing to participate in the study, I reviewed student folders to identify those who scored at either the Low-Intermediate or High-Intermediate educational functioning level, as described by the National Reporting System (U.S. Department of Education, 2005b). The Center administered the Life Skills Reading test in the Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment System (CASAS; CASAS, 2001) as a regular part of the enrollment procedures. CASAS reports assessment results as scale scores, which may be used to identify which educational functioning level adult learners should be assigned. Scale scores of 211-220 correspond with the Adult Basic Education Low-Intermediate educational functioning level, and scores of 221-235 correspond with the High-Intermediate level (U.S. Department of Education, 2005b).

I found upon reviewing student folders that, despite the purported prevalence of adults scoring in these levels nationwide, only a handful of students at the Center could be classified as adult intermediate readers. I invited all six students who enrolled by mid-October and scored at the intermediate level to participate. All six—Shelley, Megan, Paulette, Feathers, Belle, and Star—agreed. The group was not as diverse as I would have liked in terms of gender, ethnicity, or even assessed reading levels, but their

homogeneity on these issues ultimately offered the opportunity to look at other differences among them. Table 2 provides demographic information for each participant.

One participant, Star, left the Center after the first two individual interviews and the first group interview. After I had completed all the data collecting activities with the remaining five participants, I selected three participants to ultimately include in the study. Feathers had been in the program for 10 years, and although her data presented a fascinating case, her recollections of events going back that far were often understandably fuzzy. She attributed this inability to recall details to using drugs in her early adult life. I was originally attracted to the idea of including Belle in the study. Belle was a native Spanish speaker from Mexico and, at the time, the only non-native speaker of English in the program. She spoke English fluently and switched between the two languages easily, making her an ideal candidate to explore bilingual issues that may be involved in intermediate reading. However, because of the complexity of the study already, I decided that Feathers' longevity in the program and previous drug use and Belle's bilingual status—although both of great potential significance and pertinence to the ideas guiding the study—would add complexities to an already complex framework and I would not be able to do justice to any of them.

**TABLE 2****Participant Demographics**

Name	CASAS Scale Score	English as First Language	Original enrollment date	Last Grade Completed	Received Special Services in K-12	Current Age	Children (gender, age)
Belle	223	N	6-19-06	10th	Y	26	1 son, 2
Feathers	229	Y	9-09-96	8th	Y	33	1 son, 13 1 daughter, 2
Megan	229	Y	5-18-06	9th	N	39	1 son, 2
Paulette	227	Y	1-09-03	11 <sup>th</sup>	Y	44	2 sons, adult 1 daughter, 18
Shelley	235	Y	8-16-06	10th	Y	35	1 son, 15 1 daughter, 13
Star	224	Y	8-16-06	11th	N	20	1 son, 3 1 daughter, infant

I felt that the remaining participants—Megan, Shelley, and Paulette—offered enough homogeneity in gender and age (35-44) to allow me to explore the research questions in considerable depth. Despite their apparent homogeneity, each brought something unique to the study. They all had children of different ages: Megan had a two-year-old, Shelley had teenagers, and Paulette had adult children, one of whom was 18 and still living at home. The remaining participants were also somewhat diverse in their educational histories and assessed reading levels. Paulette had received special services in school and entered the program originally at a low-intermediate range (however, the fact that she had been in the program for four years presented some of the issues that I had with Feathers). Based on my observations, Paulette was a noticeably weaker reader than the others. Shelley's scores placed her in the higher range, which was confirmed by my observations. Megan was in the middle of the two, both in terms of assessed reading level and my own observations. This diversity in terms of reading levels within the intermediate range and in terms of the specific parenting issues that might be affecting each, considering the ages of their children, made me comfortable with focusing on Shelley, Megan, and Paulette. However, because Feathers, Belle, and Star were involved in the group interviews, reference to them in transcribed conversations is included in Chapters IV and V.

### **Data Collection Procedures**

The purpose of the proposed study was to investigate the ways in which adult intermediate readers' identities and meanings of reading influence relevance they

attribute to reading-related instruction. Therefore, multiple measures were collected to develop a case study for each participant. To collect the range of data needed to facilitate the development of valid explanatory theory, I was a regular part of the program's activities from mid-August to mid-December 2006, visiting the site at least three days a week and often staying for three to four hours. I also returned to the site periodically from mid-March through April 2007 to conduct my last set of interviews/member checks.

Spradley (1980) describes participant observation along a continuum from nonparticipation, in which the observer is not even present in the setting but uses television or videography to investigate the setting; to passive participation in which the observer is in the setting but does not participate in the activities; to moderate participation, in which the researcher strikes a balance between an active presence in the setting and a distanced observer, to active participation, in which the researcher seeks to *do* that which the participants do and to use these experiences to learn about the culture; to complete participation, in which the researcher turns “ordinary situations in which they are members into research settings” (p. 61).

In the study, I acted primarily as a moderate participant observer. During the first weeks, I was more active as I became oriented to the context, working directly with students as a tutor. I felt it was important for me to engage with the students and teachers regularly in order to build trust and to become familiar with the context (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). However, the design called for focused observations of participants at certain point in the data collection process; at those times I chose to disengage from participation

in the activity of the classroom and take on the role of distanced observer.

### **Overview of Data Sources**

Data for each individual case was collected through interviews, participant observations, review of documents, and a researcher-developed instrument. Specifically, data included:

#### *Interviews:*

- transcripts of three sets of individual interviews
- transcripts from three group interviews

#### *Observations:*

- field notes from participant observations
- at least three student-focused observations per participant

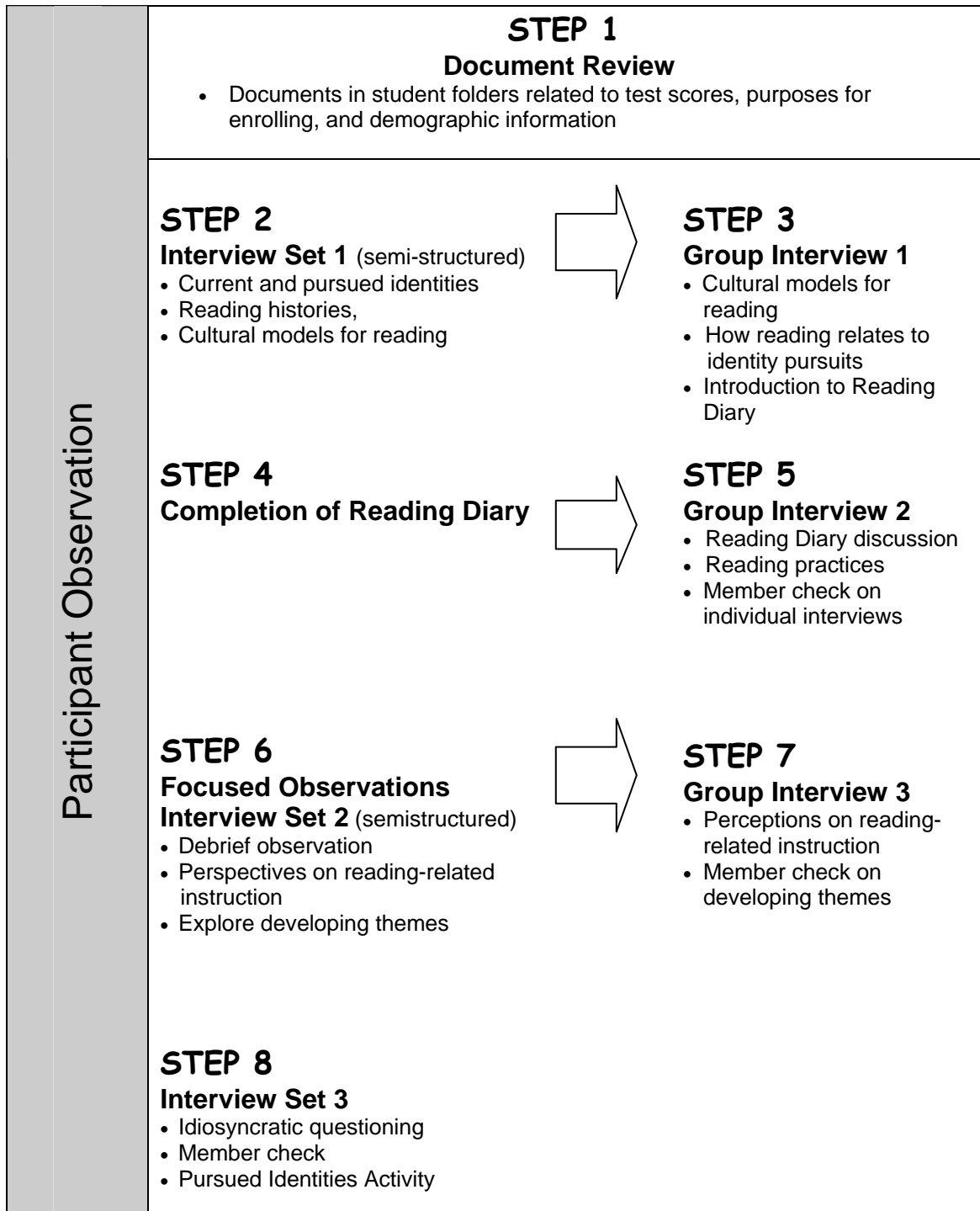
#### *Document Reviews:*

- documents from student folders, such as testing data, registration forms, and high school transcripts/Center tracking forms.

#### *Researcher-Developed Instrument*

- a Reading Diary, completed by each participant

Each of these was collected and analyzed in an iterative cycle (See Figure 3) to enable me to build questions about developing categories into the process. All protocols are provided in *Appendices* in the order in which they are mentioned. I discuss each data collection source in more detail next.



**FIGURE 3**

**Iterative Data Collection Process**

## **Interviews**

Lincoln and Guba (1985) cite Dexter (1970) in claiming that an interview is a “conversation with a purpose” (p. 268). I engaged each participant in three sets of individual interviews and three different group interviews, each for a different purpose.

### ***Individual Interviews***

The three types of individual interviews enabled individuals to construct their understandings of key components of their past, present, and future lives. Early in the study I engaged each participant in a semistructured interview (Schensul, Schensul, & LeCompte; 1999) in order to explore student perceptions related to their school and reading histories, the role that reading currently played in their lives, and how reading related to the identities they were forming in joining the class. Schensul et al. (1999) explain that semistructured interviews follow a preformulated interview guide but the answers are open-ended and can be “fully expanded at the discretion of the interviewer and the interviewee, and can be enhanced by probes” (p.149). I used a protocol of open-ended questions (see Appendix A) informed by protocols used by Bingman & Ebert (2000), Mikulecky & Lloyd (1993), Keefe & Meyer (1980), Kegan et al. (2001), and Skilton-Sylvester & Carlo (1998) to guide the interview and audiotaped and transcribed the interview. I had thought that I could conduct the protocol in one interview but found that two were required to be able to probe in depth. I reference these as Interviews 1A and 1B, and each lasted about one hour.



The second set of interviews (Interviews 2A, 2B, and 2C) were designed to solicit student perspectives on reading-related instruction. These were also semistructured interviews, using the protocol in Appendix B. I developed questions related to how the participant perceived instructional activities documented during observations to be relevant to their current and pursued identities. I also engaged students in talking about the reading-related instruction, in general, that they participated in as a member of the class—what they had learned, what seemed important, what they had learned about reading. These interviews tended to last between 20 and 45 minutes.

The third set of interviews (Interviews 3A and 3B) served as a final member check and provided an opportunity to pursue idiosyncratic avenues of questioning with each student, based upon my analysis of their responses in the preceding interviews. These occurred in March and April of 2007 during the final stages of data analysis. A few days before the Interview 3A, I hand-delivered a copy of the Participant Profile to each participant. The Participant Profile used simple language—usually that of the participant—to summarize details of her early life, her experience with school, her reading history, the reasons she gave for leaving high school, and the precipitating events leading up to her enrollment in the adult education program. Within the profile I also embedded questions for the participant to answer. In preparing these profiles, I was considerate of the reading abilities of the participants. I used the readability tool on Microsoft Word to ensure that each profile was in an accessible readability range, taking into consideration that, since students were reading about their own lives and mostly their

own words, they would be able to read comfortably parts of the profile that were in a higher readability range.

When I delivered the profile to each participant, I explained the directions verbally (i.e., to highlight or make notes of anything that needed to be corrected, added, or deleted) and left them with a brief set of written directions as well. Interview 3A then began by discussing corrections, answers to the embedded questions, and anything else participants wanted to talk about. Afterwards, I asked questions related to gaps I had noticed and which had not yet been addressed. In Interview 3B, which usually occurred within a few days of 3A, I engaged students in what I called the Pursued Identities Activity. I presented notecards with pursued identity terms that I had derived from their data. These included both terms that participants themselves had used (e.g., Someone That Kyle Can Depend On) and ones that I created to capture something I had seen in the data (e.g., High School Graduate, Educated Mother). I also included “red herrings,” terms that I thought were definitely *not* relevant pursued identities, in the set of notecards. I asked participants to first choose 3-5 terms that captured why they were coming to the program. I then asked students about each one, asking why it was important to them and what kinds of reading they felt they would need to read to either prepare for or when acting within these “roles.”

### ***Group Interviews***

Three group interviews were held with the participants with the goal of supporting the students in exploring more deeply and in different ways themes that emerged from

preliminary analysis of the data and to permit me to clarify and deepen my own understanding of the phenomenon. My hope was that the interaction among participants during the group interviews would spark insights and/or memories as we revisited some of the questions from the individual interviews—and that it would offer a different venue for those participants who may have felt uncomfortable in a one-on-one interview. The group interview procedures I used were drawn from Krueger’s (1988) work with focus groups. I designed a protocol, or “questioning route” (p. 30), for each which included opening questions, introductory questions, transition questions, key questions, and closing questions. I paid careful attention to moving from general questions to more specific questions, following a logic that would be apparent to the participants.

Group Interview 1 (Appendix C) focused on exploring developing themes related to participants’ pursued identities and perceptions of reading and reading needs. Questions related to the analysis of Interview 1 transcripts were incorporated, and I explained the Reading Diary. Group Interview 2 (Appendix D) involved discussion of the Reading Diaries and further exploration of their reading practices, both current and projected. Group Interview 3 (Appendix E) permitted discussion around reading-related instruction and also served as a member check and opportunity to explore categories that had to date emerged from the data.

## **Observations**

Marshall & Rossman (1995) define observations as the “systematic noting and recording of events, behaviors, and artifacts (objects) in the social setting chosen for the study” (p. 79). I incorporated two kinds of observations during the study.

### ***Exploratory Observations***

The first type of observation was open-ended and exploratory in nature, the goal of which was to better understand the context of the classroom (Schensul, et al., 1999; Marshall & Rossman, 1995). I sought opportunities to observe small and large group instruction, class meetings, and one-on-one instruction at various times during the data collection period. Following Spradley (1980), I made “condensed accounts” of my observation on-site and wrote up detailed, “expanded” notes immediately following the on-site visit.

### ***Focused Observations***

The second type of observation was considered “focused observation” (Marshall & Rossman, 1995, p. 79) and involved observing only particular participants in the study. I followed the protocol in Appendix F for these observations. The process was as follows: At designated points during data collection period, I observed classroom activities. During these observations I alternated my focus among individual participants in the study, engaging in detailed note-taking for at least a 15-minute span of time as he or she engaged in reading-related instruction. I noted particular kinds of reading engaged in, the

talk about reading, types of reading tasks, and time spent reading. If I had thoughts about the meanings of these events, I bracketed these. Following the site visit, I typed up my observations on an electronic version of the protocol form, adding my own recollections to the final data source.

### **Document Review**

Three kinds of documents from student folders maintained by the Center were also included as data:

#### *Test Data*

Scores on the standardized silent reading assessment administered by the program were used to identify adult intermediate readers in the class.

#### *Registration Forms*

Learners completed a registration form at the beginning of each semester, providing contact information, reasons for joining the program, and demographic information. I used these to obtain initial information about each participant's work history, family situations, and original goals for enrolling in the class.

#### *Transcripts and Tracking Forms*

Students pursuing the Adult High School Diploma were required to provide copies of their high school transcripts. These offered an opportunity to get a sense of

participants' educational history. The teachers at the Center had created their own tracking form of the coursework that students completed on-site, and I accessed these throughout the data collection period to ascertain participants' progress in their studies.

### **Researcher-Developed Instrument: Reading Diary**

I developed a diary form on which participants recorded the reading events they engaged in during a designated week. The purpose of the Reading Diary (Appendix G) was to serve as one source of data about participants' current reading practices and was used as both a data source unto itself as well as a discussion-starter in group and individual interviews. Modeled on a diary used by Smith (2000), the diary was in chart form, with columns for participants to write in what they read, for what purpose, for how long, with whom, and with what degree of ease. The Reading Diary was distributed and explained during Group Interview 1. Participants were then asked to complete the diary for a seven-day period, at the end of which I collected the diaries, analyzed them, and prepared questions for discussion during the second focus group. Since researchers who have used reading diaries in previous studies have documented participant difficulties in remembering to fill in the diary (Smith, 2000), I had participants brainstorm strategies for addressing this issue and then reminded them during the week when I saw them on-site.

Table 3 provides a matrix of how the general data sources supported each of the research questions.

**TABLE 3****How Data Sources Relate to the Research Questions**

Research Questions	Data Sources				
	Individual Interviews	Group Interviews	Observations/ Field Notes	Document Review	Reading Diary
1. What are the identities guiding participants' involvement in adult basic education?	X	X		X	
2. What understandings do participants have about reading and the role it plays in their lives?	X	X	X		X
3. How are participants' perceptions of the relevance of reading-related instruction connected to their identity work and to the role of reading in their lives?	X	X	X		

**Ethical Considerations**

As a study involving human subjects, there were certain institutional and personal processes that I adhered to in order to ensure the ethical quality of the data collection.

First of all, I was as transparent as possible in sharing the goals of the research project.

Students were informed that the study was designed to explore the ways they use reading

in their lives. I made a presentation to the class on one day and then met with students

who missed that presentation individually or in group. In the presentation/ meetings I

discussed the purpose of the study, what would be required of them, and how

compensation would be addressed. I read the required Institutional Review Board

documents to them and solicited questions to ensure that they were understood. When

they had the opportunity to raise questions, some were concerned about whether or not I would share information with the teachers and if they would be identifiable. I assured them that I would only share some general themes with the teachers at the end of the study. I would not offer specific names or contextual information that would allow them to identify any particular student. However, I was also honest in explaining that if the teachers or anyone else chose to check out my dissertation from the university library, they might be able to identify students by the background information and examples provided. All but two students signed consent forms, showing their willingness to participate in the study.

Researchers who have conducted previous studies with adult education populations have recommended compensation for participants not only to foster retention in the studies but also out of ethical concern for the time students spend in data collection activities. These researchers point to compensation principles that are in play in studies in other fields (most noticeably in the medical field). I decided to provide compensation to participants in my study for the 7-8 hours they would spend in interviews, group interviews, and completing the Reading Diary. I offered compensation for their participation in the form of \$50 and had originally planned to distribute the compensation in three installments. However, the first participant asked if she could receive one lump payment since I planned to finish the interviews in December—she wanted the money for holiday shopping—and the others agreed this was a preferable approach. Since some of the interviews required two meetings, I paid the contracted sum of \$50 in December to all



participants and then compensated them another \$10 for the member check that occurred in March/April..

Another ethical concern presented itself during the group interviews. Students were not heretofore familiar with each other's information, and I had to be careful when summarizing past data as precursors to probing in the group setting. After the first group interview, I was concerned that some of the comments that had been made about other students and, at times, about their frustrations with one or other of the teachers might have been shared. In the next group interview, I emphasized the confidential nature of the group interviews. I was assured by one participant that, "Honestly, I do not give what happens in here another thought when I go through that door." Everyone laughed and agreed, and I never heard that there were any issues.

### **Data Analysis Procedures**

I had two overarching goals in analyzing the data collected in the study. The first goal was to understand the "dynamics" (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 207) of each individual case. The term "dynamics" here is important, because I wanted to be attentive to how various factors (i.e., identity issues, cultural models, and classroom experiences) *interacted* within the individual. Mishler (1986) warns of the dangers of "fragmenting" participant responses according to certain variables, maintaining that "the results are artificial aggregates that have no direct representation in the real world of communities, social institutions, families, or persons" (p. 26). The second goal was to look across cases in an effort to generate tentative explanations. Miles and Huberman (1994),

building off comments previous made by Silverstein (1988), claim:

we are faced with the tension between the particular and the universal; reconciling as individual case's uniqueness with the need for more general understanding of generic processes that occur across cases....Noblitt and Hare (1983), in considering cross-case work, suggest that it 'must have a theory of social explanation that both preserves uniqueness and entails comparison'" (p. 173).

Such an endeavor to honor the particular and the universal required a back-and-forth cycle of attending to each case and developing categories, rather than a sequential process of first understanding the cases and then looking across cases (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 208). To this end, I employed the following process in analyzing the data.

### **Preliminary Start Codes**

I developed a preliminary list of start codes, recommended for researchers who are using a clear conceptual framework (Miles & Huberman, 1994). In order to develop the list of start codes, I reviewed my conceptual framework and pulled out key constructs for which I would be looking. I was as detailed as possible, listing expected broad themes and their sub-categories.

### **Preparing the Data for Analysis**

To prepare for the analysis, all individual interviews except 3A and 3B (for which I typed participant responses directly into an electronic file) were transcribed by me or one of two transcriptionists. Since the transcripts were not to be used for any sort of discourse analysis, and since the transcribing involved three different individuals, I did

not develop a strict protocol for the transcribing process. My only directions were to keep uh's and um's to a minimum, to omit other false starts, and to use dashes instead of ellipses as much as possible. Even these minimal standards were difficult to sustain, so, upon receiving each transcript back from one of the other transcribers, I checked the transcript against the audiotape, making necessary corrections both in terms of the words typed and the punctuation used—and changing names to pseudonyms as needed. In an effort to convey the unique voices of the participants, I decided to retain the syntax that students used to express themselves. However, I did not attempt to retain the clipping of words (e.g., “ ‘em for them”) that characterized some of the participants' speech, mainly because transcribing these dialectic markers was not handled consistently across the transcripts. On checking the final transcripts against the audiotapes, I was struck by how the written words, although accurate, so poorly captured the emotionally-charged nature of much of the discourse that occurred during the interviews.

### **On-the-Spot Analysis**

I read over transcripts when they were completed and made marginal notes about emerging themes. If themes emerged that were different from the ones I had on the start code list, I added them to the list. I occasionally wrote memos at this point, but with being at the site three to four times a week, preparing transcripts, and typing up field notes, I found it difficult to find the time to process the data on anything but a superficial level until later in the study period. Instead, I usually made handwritten notes of follow-up or additional questions I needed to ask and took these with me to the site.

## Revising Start Codes

Following the close of the semester in mid-December, I turned my focus to an in-depth microanalysis of the data. The first step at this point was to revisit my list of start codes. My goal in making the start code list had been to guide my reading of the data, but in my first stage of analysis I had found that I tended to keep to the larger themes (e.g., *Identities Current*) and found that some of the sub-categories were irrelevant. After a couple of false starts in which I worked through a few data sources for two participants, I settled on broad themes instead of specific ones. For instance, in the original coding scheme I identified 10 sub-categories of Identities Current (IC) that I expected to see (e.g., IC-Family, IC-Work, IC-Community, etc.). I decided to collapse these into Identities Current and then let the data guide me; thus, codes ended up looking more like *Identities Current: Country Girl* or *Identities Current: Mama*. Other themes emerged as well that I had not included in the original start code list, so I added these to the list.

## Microanalysis

After determining my start codes, I created a Master Coding File for each participant. I created separate pages for each major theme. Then, I coded each data source, using the following process. First, I prepared the interview transcripts for coding. I saved each transcript as a separate, duplicate file, maintaining the original in its pure form. I then transformed all the text in the duplicate file into a particular color and saved it again. I was consistent in the color used for each data source, so that all 1A interviews had the same color, all 1B interviews had the same color, and so forth. After I had

prepared the transcript, I began coding the transcript. If I saw something that I wanted to code, which was probably 90% of the document, I copied and pasted it into the Master Coding File for the relevant participant (in the appropriate section), entered a tag at the end of the section that identified the data source, and then deleted that section on the data source itself. Thus, when I was finished coding a data source, all the material that I had not coded was left in the electronic file. I saved the file with the tag REMAINING. This process allowed me to quickly identify what I had not coded and to double-check those decisions once I reached the end of a transcript. It also allowed me to revisit the data source as I progressed through all the data in order to look for further examples of more grounded themes that emerged as possibly relevant to the research questions. This process happened with themes related to Work First/Social Services, Violence, Drug/Alcohol Addictions, Health, Attitudes on Race, On Being Poor. These emerged as grounded themes and were significant because they affect/reflect/are embedded within students' positional identities. I decided to play these out and found the uncoded sections in the REMAINING files easily accessible.

I decided not to try to code every line of the transcript. I made decisions about whether or not something was related to my conceptual framework, and some lines were not coded. These included conversations in the individual and group interviews in which the participant went off on a tangent on a topic, and I wanted to honor their need to talk and encourage elaboration, in general, so that when they were "on topic" they would engage in the same elaboration. The majority of lines not coded, however, are the interview questions themselves or responses on my part that I felt did not contribute to

more fully understanding the participants' perspectives.

After completing the interview transcripts, I turned to the secondary data sources: Field Notes and Observations. I tackled the Field Notes (FN) first. I read through these once and decided that some of these should more appropriately be analyzed as Student-Focused Observations, so I moved these to the Observations folder, making formatting changes to allow further analysis (types of texts, etc.). For the remaining Field Notes I did not color code the text, nor did I create a separate REMAINING file, since more lines would be remaining that were coded. Instead I copied and pasted relevant material into the MASTER document, tagging the quote with FN and the date (e.g., FN-9-06-06).

### **Pattern Coding**

Following this microanalysis of the Individual Interviews, the Group Interviews, and the Field Notes, I turned in earnest from descriptive and interpretive coding (Miles & Huberman, 1994) to pattern coding (though some pattern coding occurred earlier). Pattern coding involved finding overarching, conceptual themes that connected the current categories and subcategories related to each research question. For this analysis I created new files. The first step was always to understand the individual case first, and then I would move to a cross-case analysis. As I worked through the cross-case analysis, I would then revisit the individual cases to see how the process of working on the cross-case analysis affected the way I saw the individual case. At this stage, I relied heavily on techniques recommended by Miles & Huberman (1994), developing multiple matrices and occasional diagrams to aid in analyzing and interpreting data both within cases and

across cases. Lastly, to avoid arriving prematurely at final themes, I explored other plausible explanations and negative case analysis.

### **Member Checks**

At various points, I shared with each participant how I had understood the data they had provided me up to that point. In these preliminary member checks, I sought affirmation of any factual information shared but also reactions to the interpretations I was making. As discussed earlier, a more formal member check occurred in the last set of individual interviews.

### **Researcher As Instrument**

In qualitative research such as this, the researcher plays a key role as “research instrument” in both the data collection and the data analysis phases of the project (Marshall & Rossman, 1995; Poggenpoel & Myburgh, 2003). In order to ensure the trustworthiness of the conclusions, then, it is helpful to have a sense of the researcher who is making them—of her own “history-in-person” (Holland & Lave, 2001).

In brief, I am a White woman who grew up in the South in a middle-class family. I began my education career as a middle school teacher, teaching eighth-grade language arts in North Carolina and Georgia for four years, with a two-year break in the middle to earn a master’s degree in reading education. As a teacher, I gravitated toward reading and writing workshops (Atwell, 1987), and reading response theory (Rosenblatt, 1969), which I found theoretically sound for the students I taught. With marriage, the beginnings of a family, and a move to a new state (Virginia), I stumbled into adult

literacy. Over six years, I worked as a volunteer tutor for a community-based literacy program, as a part-time teacher and administrator for a basic skills program in a local community college, and as a state trainer in the areas of adult learning, participatory education approaches based on the work of Paulo Freire (1970), and strategic reading.

By the time of this study, I was working as an independent educational consultant in the field of adult literacy and basic education. My primary work was with the Equipped for the Future initiative at the Center for Literacy Studies at the University of Tennessee-Knoxville. Equipped for the Future (EFF) is a standards-based initiative that strives to align systems involved in adult literacy and basic education around skills required for adults to fulfill their responsibilities as agents in an ever-changing world. I was first introduced to EFF in its early developmental stages while I was in Virginia. I worked with them first as a practitioner-researcher in validating certain tools, as a program team leader for a field-test of the first round of proposed standards, as a trainer, and as a project coordinator for a national project that developed contextualized and adult-oriented approaches to providing research-based reading instruction (Kruidenier, 2002; NRP, 2000). In addition to working with the Center for Literacy Studies, I also provided training services for the Student Achievement in Reading project, sponsored by the federal Department of Education's Office of Vocational and Adult Education. This project offered professional development around the teaching of adult intermediate readers.

In interacting with adult basic education teachers and administrators in my work with both these projects, I was struck by how little teaching of reading was actually



occurring in the field with any but the lowest-level students. I was also intrigued by the systemic issues that surfaced in attempting to move beyond what Beder et al. (2006) describe as Individualized Group Instruction, in which individual learners sit in a classroom with other learners (as opposed to working only with a tutor) but work individually and independently in self-paced materials. Integral to the system are the adult learners themselves, who often resist at first more creative, connected, and participatory approaches to instruction. My interest in this study arose out of trying to understand why so many adult learners wanted to hold on to an approach to teaching and learning which educational experts maintain they should not want and researchers claim does not benefit them

Thus, I came to this study with certain biases—namely, *for* approaches to reading instruction that situate the learner within real reading events and which honor the “adultness” of learners served in adult basic education programs and *against* approaches that preference the presentation and practice of isolated skills. During the study I attempted to ensure that my understandings about learning and reading enhanced the interpretive process without prescribing the outcome. To do so, I employed certain safeguards, which I discuss next.

### **Ensuring Trustworthiness**

Qualitative researchers (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Mertens, 1998; Schensul et al., 1999; Strauss & Corbin, 1998) tend to agree that, though the standards might be different—and even the terminology—qualitative investigations should be scrutinized for

rigor, or *trustworthiness*, using the central concepts of validity and reliability. Issues of validity relate to the *credibility* of the findings, i.e., how closely they are related to participants' own perspectives, and *transferability*, or the extent to which the findings might be applied to other settings. Issues of reliability include whether or not other researchers can match the results to the data set (internal reliability) and whether or not they would even generate the same results in the researched setting or in similar ones (Schensul et al., 1999, citing Goetz & LeCompte, 1984, p. 210). Strauss & Corbin (1998) use the term *reproducibility* to discuss reliability, suggesting how it relates to qualitative research:

Given the same theoretical perspective of the original researcher, following the same general rules for data gathering and analysis, and assuming a similar set of conditions, other researchers should be able to come up with the same or a very similar theoretical explanation about the phenomenon under investigation (p. 266-267).

Considering the purposes of the proposed study and potential threats to research rigor identified in the literature, I identified relevant threats to this study. How I addressed these threats is summarized in Table 4.

TABLE 4

**How Threats to Trustworthiness Were Addressed**

Threats to:	Potential Causes	How addressed in the study
<b>Credibility</b>  (Internal Validity)	Mortality of participants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Condensed data collection period</li> <li>• Monetary compensation for student participants</li> </ul>
	False or misleading information provided by participants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Attempt to build participants' "trust and comfort" (Schensul et al., 1999; Lincoln &amp; Guba, 1985) with me by being visible in the classroom regularly and interacting with students over time.</li> <li>• Use my growing knowledge of the context and informal discussions with participants to form appropriate questions for interviews, using language with which the participants are comfortable. (Schensul et al., 1999).</li> <li>• Use multiple methods of collecting data from each participant related to each research question (Lincoln &amp; Guba, 1985).</li> </ul>
	Arriving at false or misleading conclusions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Triangulate data by using multiple methods and sources (Lincoln &amp; Guba, 1985).</li> <li>• Conduct member checks with both individuals and interview groups (Lincoln &amp; Guba, 1985).</li> <li>• Engage in negative case analysis (Lincoln &amp; Guba, 1985; Strauss &amp; Corbin, 1998).</li> </ul>
<b>Transferability</b>  (External Validity)	Observer effects, in which the researcher role in the setting seriously affects the setting or results, with no documentation of these effects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Observation notes that clearly delineate direct observations and meanings I attribute to these observations</li> <li>• Describe my interactions with participants and with the setting to enable the reader to draw conclusions about my role in the results.</li> <li>• Document clearly any perceived observer effects and ask participants during interviews and group interviews whether the behavior I observe is typical.</li> </ul>
	Lack of transferability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clearly describe the classroom context and each individual student through thick description in order to permit readers to make decisions about transferability (Lincoln &amp; Guba, 1985).</li> </ul>
<b>Reproducibility</b>	Unclear or incomplete description of the study's data collection and analytical procedures and instruments, to inhibit duplication of the process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maintain a written record of data collection procedures and of the protocols utilized (Lincoln &amp; Guba, 1985).</li> <li>• Describe my analytic strategies and make clear my chain of evidence (Lincoln &amp; Guba, 1985).</li> <li>• Maintain a written record of decision-making points via memos (Miles &amp; Huberman, 1994) and a researcher journal (Lincoln &amp; Guba, 1985)</li> <li>• Conduct an Inquiry Audit (Lincoln &amp; Guba, 1985), as part of the dissertation process</li> </ul>

### **Overview of Chapter IV**

In this chapter I described the qualitative approach used to collect and analyze the data for the study. The next three chapters present the themes and findings that resulted from this work. In Chapter IV, I address the first research question, focusing on providing an in-depth picture of each participant, her early family and educational history, her decisions to leave school and then return, and the identities she sought to shape in the process.

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **GUIDING IDENTITIES:**

### **FINDINGS FOR RESEARCH QUESTION 1**

#### **Orientation to the Chapter**

The purpose of the study was to explore how adult intermediate readers attribute relevance to reading-related instruction in light of who they are and who they want to be. Specifically, I sought answers to the following questions:

1. What are the identities guiding participants' involvement in adult basic education?
2. What understandings do participants have about reading and the role it plays in their lives?
3. How are participants' perceptions of the relevance of reading-related instruction connected to their identity work and to the role of reading in their lives?

The purpose of this chapter is to report on the themes and findings that arose from analysis related to the first research question. Similarly, themes and findings that address the second research question are presented in Chapter V and those that address the third research question are presented in Chapter VI.

Whereas I discuss the remaining research questions through a cross-case analysis in the subsequent chapters, this chapter presents each participant in such a way as to

allow the reader to more fully understand the identity work influencing participants' endeavors within the program, and thus better understand their felt need for reading instruction and the relevance of what they experience in the classroom. To this end, this chapter is arranged by participant, with a profile included for each. Each profile is divided into two parts. *Part 1: History-in-Person* is comprised of descriptions of the participant's early family life and school history (including her experiences with reading and her decisions to leave high school), her life after high school, and the events that occurred leading up to her decision to enroll in the Center. The purpose of this section is not to provide an exhaustive biography of the participant but to provide the context, the history-in-person (Holland & Lave, 2001), that gives meaning to *Part 2: Guiding Identities*. In *Part 2* of each profile I discuss the within-case themes that arose related to the identities guiding the participant's involvement in the adult education program.

In this chapter, I introduce the term *Guiding Identities* to refer to sets of identities, comprised of a pair of related current and pursued identities, which motivated participants to further their education. Although I had originally thought that I would discuss participants' identity work in terms of pursued identities only, analyzing the data presented several issues with that approach. For one, pursued identities were very closely linked to how participants already viewed themselves. These future selves were viewed by participants as either enhanced versions of current selves or envisioned selves that resisted current identities, so understanding the latter was key to understanding the former. Secondly, since the study spanned 7-8 months from the first interviews to the final member checks, it was sometimes difficult to differentiate between a current

identity and a pursued identity. What might have been a vague notion of a pursued identity upon enrollment was sometimes being at least partially realized by the end of the study. Indeed, identities were not always even stable fixtures that began and ended in time, but rather were recognizable visions of self that surfaced and diminished depending on the situation. Thus, it seemed more appropriate to discuss these ways of viewing the self as sets of Guiding Identities. The first identity in a set tends to be more current in nature, and the second identity seems to be more future-oriented, but these are perhaps best viewed as fluid counterparts of each other.

Following all the individual profiles, I present a discussion of the key findings to the first research question that emerged from the cross-case analysis. The key findings that are discussed are:

- **Finding 1:** Both pursued identities and current identities motivated participation in the ABE program and seemed to work together in related sets (e.g., Mama – Educated Mother). These related sets captured the idiosyncratic meanings of self fashioned within the sociocultural context of each participant’s life.
- **Finding 2:** Guiding Identities for participation in the adult education program were impacted most heavily by positional attributions related to being “an educated person,” which required at a minimum having a high school diploma.
- **Finding 3:** Being recognized as “an educated person” was seen as the way to enhance certain role-specific identities (e.g., as mothers, workers) as well as those figured by larger structural forces (gender, class, and region).

## Shelley

### Part 1: History-in-Person

During my first interview with Shelley, she responded lightheartedly to my request for her to “[tell] me a little bit about yourself” (S1A-A2):

Okay, well, I am 35. I am most definitely a Pisces (laughter), pretty down to earth. I have two kids that I work with, probably a whole lot more than what most parents work with because I’m at home when I’m not here. I don’t go anywhere, so that gives me a whole lot of extra time to spend with the kids. My son is 15, my daughter is 13. Right now I’m just dealing with the problem of going into teenage life with my kids, which makes it very difficult because they’re rebelling. (S-1A-S2)

Although Shelley’s first introduction of herself was in terms of age, horoscope, personality, and motherhood, her comments throughout the research period highlight identities related to her “country” (S1A-S66) lifestyle, her role as mother, and herself as a worker as guiding forces in her decision to enroll in the family literacy program. Analysis of Shelley’s comments about her early family life, her school history, her reading history, and her adult life prior to enrollment provide insights into the identity pursuits guiding Shelley’s participation in the adult education class.

### *Early Family Life*

Shelley grew up on a working farm in Appleton County, one that at different times raised dairy cattle, beef cattle, and pigs. Her grandfather, aunt, and uncle lived in an “old farm house” (S1B-S42) with Shelley and her mother. Her great-grandmother also lived with them until her death when Shelley was seven, and Shelley shared that



her “great-granny” (S2B-S31) provided her much of the nurturing that she would later crave from her parents. When I asked about her father’s role in her early life, Shelley described someone who was largely absent:

My dad was in prison. ‘Cause my daddy made moonshine, like all the people in Appleton County made moonshine. My daddy was one of them, and it just so happened that every time he would get caught, like with a still or something, and the judge would put him in jail, he would either not show up for his court date to go back into court or he would either go into jail and escape. Like, they might not give him but a couple of months, but he would escape, and he kept on escaping. He was kind of like--oh, I’m trying to think--just one of these, you know, old country hillbillies that kept on getting caught and arrested and escaping. And so, you know, the judge really got fed up with him because he kept on escaping and kept on getting out of the jail--the jail over here in town. But he would keep on escaping, and the judge would keep on adding to his sentence. So it got so bad to the point where he wound up in prison, ‘cause he wasn’t showing for his court date and he was escaping jail, so basically, that’s where Daddy was, was in jail. (S1A-S66)

Shelley spoke fondly of the relationships she had with her aunt and uncle, who were teenagers when Shelley was young. But at age 9 Shelley was sent to live with her father, who was out of prison and living in the thriving city of Durham. When I asked why Shelley went to live with him, Shelley asserted that her mother was drinking and felt that it was his turn to care for her. Shelley said very little about this time with her father during the interviews, focusing mainly upon how she learned what living in the “big city” was like and how people in the big city looked down on country folks like herself. At age 15, her father, also an alcoholic, entered detox, and Shelley returned to the farm.

Shelley talked about carrying the responsibility for cooking meals for the family, in addition to helping out around the farm. She remembered that her mother

worked third shift and provided materially for Shelley's needs: "She made sure that I had all my clothes, and I was always matching the fashion when I went to high school" (S1B-S39). However, Shelley felt that, because of her mother's work hours and unaddressed alcoholism, she and her mother did not have the kind of relationship she wanted to have. She explained:

It was more or less she was getting off work in the mornings and she would drink until she fell asleep. And then she would sleep until like 8:30, 9:30 at night, and then she would get up. And by that time, it was already time for me to just about go to bed. so it really wasn't any kind of mother-daughter relationship. (S1B-S44)

Shelley was an only child, which she thinks was most likely good for her.

I think that that's one of the reasons why I'm pushed as much as I'm pushed, or I push myself as much as I do to get out and go and do, (is) because I was the only child, you know. And I feel that if I'd had brothers or I'd had sisters, I wouldn't have been as determined as I've been, if that makes any sense. Because I think if I'd had a brother or sister, they may have been alcoholics or hooked on drugs or something like that, and I may have been more persuaded to have went their way than the way that I have gone. Or chose to live. So I think I've done pretty well, you know. I've really had to fight and to struggle. (S1A-S30, 31)

### ***School History***

Shelley's earliest memories of school were of a setting that she could not trust. She remembered stapling a boy's finger and being paddled by a teacher for the first time. This experience affected her trust of teachers in general.

S15: ....Whenever I had first started school, the teachers were still disciplining the students like that, and in this school, they were paddling, popping them, and stuff like that. I think that's one

reason why I quit high school.... They'd grab you and snatch you up or pop you or something like that. You know how they take the paddle and pop the palm of your hand and stuff. I think it caused me to lose a whole lot of trust with my teachers. Just not wanting to ask them anything.

A16: When did that start happening?

S16: As soon as I can remember starting school because I knew from the very first time I got whacked or I got hit with one of those paddles...To a little child it's kind of like "Oh, forget this. I had trust with you but I don't have any trust with you any more." (S1B)

Although in another part of an interview Shelley mentioned having good relationships with teachers, she felt this early experience affected her willingness to seek help from teachers when she needed it. She also questioned whether they were interested in her: "My high school teachers I feel were not really there when I needed help or to ask a question. My high school teachers only seemed interested in the students who were already on the right track, and had all their P's and Q's straight" (S3A).

Shelley remembered very little about learning to read in elementary school. What she did recall was that the teacher had students identify words in a sentence that they did not know. Shelley explained, "[T]hen I'd sound out the word and then I'd find out what the meaning of the words were and then I would read the sentence" (S1B-S12). The way to find out the meanings of words was to ask the teacher. Shelley recalls getting "aggravated a whole lot" (S1B-S18) in the early stages of reading: "I would get really mad if I didn't know what the word was...I would sit there by *myself*. I guess it's considering the fact that the teacher whacked me or whatever—I would sit there by *myself* and just try to do it myself" (S1B-S18). For

most of elementary school, though, she enjoyed the actual act of reading books. In middle school—and the introduction of the book report—she began to experience reading differently: “The reading part of reading a book was okay. That was fine. I did not have any difficulty in reading words or pronouncing my words or anything like that. It was just actually when it come to sitting down and making an outline, getting all structured and organized and what am I going to put first and what am I going to put next and what am I going to put last. It was just—you know. You know how you feel whenever you have to do a book report” (S1B-S5).

Things got worse in high school, where the teachers “perceived” (S1A-S123) readings differently than she did, and the word problems in math class were difficult to comprehend. During the interviews she spoke vehemently about despising history especially: “History is one of these subjects, amongst all your other subjects, where you really have to learn the names and the dates and all that. I just sucked at it. I was just plain awful at it” (S1B-S56). Interestingly, though, when I asked her if she had any favorite books from when she was in school, she mentioned only *Little Women*, *Gone With the Wind*, “any of those Laura Ingles Wilder books,” and *The Diary of Anne Frank*, all historical fiction.

A major theme in Shelley’s accounts of her school years is the responsibility she had for herself. In school, she hesitated to ask for help, but at home, she did not feel like there was anyone *to* ask. Shelley felt that her mother was unable to provide her with the structure she needed in school, leaving Shelley to her own devices in meeting the requirements of schoolwork.

S63: ...My mama was an alcoholic, and my mama worked third shift and every day when I got off the school bus, **it was just me**. I didn't have that guidance, I didn't have someone there saying, "Honey, do you need any help with your homework?" I had no one to ask. I'd just come home, and I was **by myself** and I had homework to do, and I had tests to study for, but I didn't have any structure.

A64: So was school hard for you?

S64: Yeah, it really was because I didn't have the structure, I didn't have the study skills, I didn't have anyone to teach me the study skills, or how to study or how to study for tests or anything like that. It was, you know, **all me**. (S1A; emphasis mine)

Shelley reported having "a lot of friends" (S1B-S40) in school but not being especially "popular" (S1B-S40):

I was really different. I didn't really--I had a lot of friends. They all thought I was an okay person. I've just always been myself, and I've never really tried to pretend like I was somebody else or act like I was somebody else. And it seems like if you're going to be really popular and have a lot of friends you've kind of got to get in that mode where you've got to be like they are. And I never really wanted to be in that mode, to be always like someone else. I just wanted to be me. (S1B-S40)

### ***Leaving School***

During a group interview, Shelley shared that one of the reasons she left high school was because of poor self-esteem—her grades were low and she did not feel successful. However, the event that led most immediately to Shelley's decision to drop out of school involved a romance. At age 16 she had fallen in love with her next-door neighbor, who was in his twenties. Her mother had not paid much attention until Shelley mentioned needing some money to buy him a birthday present. Her mother

asked how old he was going to be and was not pleased with the answer. Shelley started skipping school to be with him, until one day her mother caught her—and beat her. A neighbor called the Department of Social Services and a trial ensued. Shelley decided to lie on the stand, saying that it was her fault in order to protect her mother. Following this series of events, Shelley became very depressed and quit going to school. She left high school at the beginning of her junior year.

After she quit school, Shelley “just sat at home” (S1B-S52) for awhile and then took a job at McDonald’s. She secretly saw her boyfriend on occasion, but never engaged in sexual relations, because her mother had “told him that she would press charges and stuff like that” (S1B-52). But then she turned eighteen:

And when I was eighteen, I called him on the phone and he said that he had made plans with a friend of his to go to the beach, and I said, “Why don’t you take me?” And he said that he would but that he was taking another girl instead. So actually in the long run what happened was I ruined my life for him. I fell in love with him at a tender young age, being naïve, and I never realized that he didn’t love me the same. That’s how I quit. (S1B)

### *After Leaving High School*

Shelley mentioned having worked in fast food restaurants, in local factories, and as a certified nursing assistant. Over seven years at one factory, she worked three jobs: straightening women’s hosiery to be packaged, actually making the hose, and then inspecting the hose. After that, she completed a nursing assistant certification class at the local community college and worked as a nursing assistant for seven and a half years. She achieved a Level 3 certification. She left her last nursing assistant job three years prior to the study, after a patient died. Shelley had administered CPR to the patient and

thought she had saved her; however, the patient died before she arrived at the hospital. Shelley reported that this incident was “a little bit too traumatic” (S1A-74), and she was convinced that she did not want to continue in any type of medical profession. After that, her income came from working 60-80 hours a week at jobs such as babysitting and fast food restaurant work.

Shelley met her children’s father when she was nineteen and was with him for several years. However, he was addicted to drugs and alcohol, and they separated when her children were young. She received very little child support from him despite attempts “for ten years” (FN-12-14-06) to increase the payment, and she attributed her inability to force a higher payment to his family’s status in town. His parents owned a local business, and he lived in their basement after Shelley and he separated. Shelley admitted to “a lot of anger” (FN-12-14-06) that he had a relatively easy life with no money worries while she struggled to make ends meet. She was also troubled by his on-going cocaine habit and the effect it had on their now teenaged children when they visited him during visitations.

Six years ago Shelley met her current fiancé. She described her fiancé as supportive but not intrusive, especially when it came to her parenting. Although she did not have the kind of “mother-daughter relationship” that she would have liked, her mother lived in the area and they saw each other regularly.

### ***The Road to the Adult High School Program***

The death of Shelley's father two years ago set Shelley on a path that led her to enroll in the Adult High School Program. He lived in Florida, having moved there, according to Shelley, to support a new addiction, this time to OxyContin. Upon discovering that her father was addicted, Shelley had taken him to rehabilitation centers and "tried to find ways of helping him" (S1A-S27). However, she finally concluded that "he wasn't willing to help himself" (S1A-S27). She said, "I pushed him out of my life and refused to have anything to do with him. And when he died, I had all that guilt because I had not, you know, made amends with him. I had not said, 'Daddy, I'm sorry that I pushed you out of my life.' I didn't have any time to tell him that I loved him or anything like that, so it really hurt me a lot" (S1A-S22). Shelley reported that she became depressed and entered therapy. And then one day she had an experience that started her thinking about returning to school:

I was sitting there, and I'd started crying, like I'd done all the other times, you know. And, basically, I just went in the bathroom, and I looked in the mirror at myself, and I realized, as I was standing there looking in the mirror at myself, that I was killing myself. Not physically killing myself, but mentally killing myself. I was just wearing myself down so much, that, I just more or less just looked at myself and just thought, "(sigh) You know, you look awful. You know, you've GOT to get out of this house, you've got to go and do something!" So, when I sat down and I started thinking about what it was that I needed to do, school just come back to me in my mind because that was one thing that I did not accomplish in my life, you know, was the fact that I never finished high school. And, I had really spent a whole lot of time looking around at other people, comparing myself to them--and you're NEVER supposed to do that, but I was--and I would always look at so-and-so, and say, "Well, they're just as airheaded as I am. If they can go back to school, I can too." So basically, you know, that's what really led me to go back, because I just really wanted to force myself to believe in myself and to know that I could come back to school, so I just come back to school (S1A-40).



Shelley also came to the conclusion that her behavior was affecting her children.

She elaborated:

...that was the number one reason I decided to go back to school, because I wanted to force myself and push myself, because you only live one life. And I just want so badly and so much to make a change in my kids' lives, because my daddy wasn't never there in my life, to set an example to me to make a change in my life, you know? So I look at my kids and I think to myself, "Well, I love these two kids more than anything in this world, and I have GOT to do something to change the way that they feel and the way that they think. Because, basically, what I had done when my daddy had died was I got real skeptical about everything, about the whole world, and I had a lot of hate in me towards other people and the outlook that I had on life. And it started rubbing off on my children. I started noticing changes with the kids: you know, they were skeptical, they were hypocritical, they were judging everyone, they thought that they could read what was on another person's mind, what another person was thinking, what they thought of them. And they were not perceiving things in the way that I wanted them to perceive things, if that makes any sense. And I saw this, and I just knew that I had to stop myself, I had to quit looking at life as if life were against me. You know, and that goes on with a lot of anger too, because I have a lot of anger towards God for taking Daddy away from me, you know, and I just didn't want my kids to no longer have that attitude or to have the self esteem that they had for theirselves, so I figured that, if I were to get up, clean the house, quit sitting there on my butt all day, eating, quit having such a negative outlook on life and the way that people are around me, that my kids would see it and that my kids would realize, "Well, I can go and do what I need to do to accomplish in life." And, you know, I wanted to show them happiness and the way that I was being, and as depressed as I was, that wasn't happiness. (S1A-S44)

At about the same time, she was struggling to collect child support. Someone at social services told her that if she enrolled in Work First, the program would make sure she received her child support payments. Shelley enrolled in Work First and told the caseworker she wanted to "go back to school" (S3B-S7). She entered the Center. On a form that she completed her first day there, an item asked if she wanted to enroll in Adult Basic Education, Adult High School, GED, or ESL. She checked the box for GED and

wrote “maybe other after GED is acquired” (Literacy Training Information Form 8-16-07).

## **Part 2: Guiding Identities**

In this section I explore the identities that were guiding Shelley in her original decision to “go back to school” (S3B-S7) and to maintain her participation in the program. Shelley described herself in various ways throughout the data sources; however, the purpose of the study was to identify those salient practiced identities (Holland et al., 1998) that, either consciously or unconsciously, shaped Shelley’s decisions to enter the adult education setting and gave relevance to the reading-related instruction experienced there. Table 5 lists the ways she referred to herself in the present, and I will draw from these to discuss three sets of Guiding Identities. Each set is a pair comprised of a current identity and a pursued identity, which are integrally related.

**TABLE 5**

### **Shelley’s Terms for Her Current Selves**

Nominatives	Adjectives
“Pisces” “only child” “parent” “mama” “mother” “me” (i.e., “I am me.”) “my own person” “poor ol’ white girl that grew up in the mountains” “we’re country people” “country girl” “a down-to-earth person” “a neutral person”	“country” “air-headed” “smart” “poor” “very direct” “serious about work” “assertive” “responsible” “loving” “want everybody to like me” “straightforward” “overweight. A little.”

“ditzy little blonde” “one of the most honest people you’ll talk to” “a nice person”	“very judgmental about drugs”
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### *Country Girl – Beautiful, Smart, and Confident*

The first set of identities that seemd to be guiding Shelley’s participation was the current identity of a Country Girl and the pursued identity of being Beautiful, Smart, and Confident. Country Girl was an identity full of contradictions, in the way that Shelley experienced it. On the one hand, she valued this identity. In the first interview she shared, “I’m country, and I love animals, and I live out on a farm. I’ve got guinea pigs, I’ve got goats, I’ve got chickens, I’ve got rabbits, I’ve got horses, I’ve got dogs, I’ve got cats. You know, you name it and I’ve just about got it. And I love animals, and I love country life and country living” (S1A-S87). When making evaluative statements about others, the phrase “country girl” signaled a positive evaluation. She looked up to her aunt because “she was raised a country girl like me and, you know, she was plain and simple....That’s what made me look up to her because she was a good ole down-to-earth country girl and she had her morals and she had her values but she still got what she wanted” (S2B-S10). The values that she identified with being a Country Girl included living simply, being natural, and living close to the land.

Although a Country Girl was someone (specifically, a female) with values that reflected a simple life, this identity was imbued with positionality. Shelley was conscious of how “country” people like her were perceived by others, namely, “people from the city” (S1A-S23, S26; S2B-26). Having lived in the “big city” of Durham, she

claimed to know that they see country people as “illiterate” and “ignorant.” She resisted this positioning, arguing that “people from the city kind of misunderstand the people in the country, because we are *very* smart--we just tend to have a whole lot more common sense than we do book knowledge” (S1A-S26). In the figured world of city vs. country, Shelley attributed a lower standing to people of her ilk, a rank that she perceived as unfair and untrue.

Whereas Shelley contrasted “Country” with a “city” orientation, she did not juxtapose “Girl” with “boy/man,” which might be expected. However, Shelley’s other terms associated with being female--“ditzzy little blonde” and “airhead”--corresponded with how she talked about being from the country—it was related to intelligence. With these terms, however, she was talking about herself not as part of a group (e.g., “country people” (S2B-S26) but as an individual who matches a description. The ditzy little blonde and airhead terms seem to be synonymous and point to a person who can not figure obvious things out. For instance, in describing how she felt when she had to tackle word problems in her math coursework, Shelley said:

Like I have to read them over like two or three times. Like, “Ohhhhh!” You know, “*That’s* what that means.” You know, it’s kind of like my fiance has got this thing, and he likes to pick at me because I’m blonde-headed, and he likes to do all these blonde headed jokes. You know, and that’s kind of like how I feel when I’m reading like a [word problem]. “Ohhhhhh! *That’s* how you do it!” and I feel like a ditzy little blonde, you know like, “Oh, that’s how you do it!” ....I don’t want to feel like that ’cause it really makes me feel stupid when I feel like that. (S1A)

Although Shelley experienced her fiancé as supportive, she called up these experiences with him to illustrate the feeling of “stupid.” She did so jokingly—in fact, whenever she

referred to herself an airhead or as a ditzy blonde, she did so with a laugh. However, whereas she tended to embrace her identity as Country but felt that how it was figured by others was wrong, she did not talk in terms of the attributions related to being a ditzy blonde as being wrongly applied to her—she just did not want to be that way.

What Shelley wanted to be was Beautiful, Smart, and Confident. In her very next comments after describing how she does not like the feeling associated with being a “ditzy little blonde,” Shelley pointed to one of her teachers as the kind of blonde she did aspire to be:

S92- And [Nancy] looks like, you know, she would be like out here  
94: LIVING IT UP and having all these guys chasing after her, you know. And she drives, like, a red Corvette. And I look up to her though. I look up to her--she's like an idol to me, because she is so very smart and she's a teacher in class, but she's also a real estate broker, and I'm like sitting there going, “Wow! She's blonde-headed too! And I'm thinking to myself, “Gollee!” And she's out there and she's a-doing it! You know, so I look up to her as my role model because she's got the looks and the brains to go with it, you know, and basically, I know that I've got the looks, I just want the brains! I mean, I don't want to sound conceited--I mean, I'm not no beauty queen, but I'm not, you know, Ichabod Crane either! You know, I'm not the most beautiful thing in the world, but I'm not ugly. I've got my faults, but I want to have the looks and the smarts and be self-confident--you know, all that rolled into one. I think that that's like a bigger goal that I have set for myself besides getting my high school diploma. Hopefully, when I get my high school diploma I'll have the goal set for myself as having the looks, and having the brains, and being a whole lot more self-confident than what I am now. Because I'm still very, you know, uneasy of myself at times—(S1A)

Shelley seemed to think that her high school diploma would alleviate the unease she experienced in being positioned by others as stupid because she was from the country and because she was an attractive female. She did not want to lose either identity. She

was proud of her looks, and, like her aunt and her teacher Nancy, she had no intention of giving up being country. Instead, she wanted to add education to her regional identity and to her looks to off-set how she was viewed by others and, consequently, how she viewed herself. In her last interview, Shelley seemed to sum up her thinking: “I’m country but I just don’t want to be stupid” (S3B-S2).

### ***Mama – Educated Mother***

“My kids bring the most joy in my life. Any parent will say this, but it’s true. My kids are the number one reason I strive to achieve the way I do.” (SDRQ-18)

When Shelley entered the program, she was the mother of a 15-year-old boy and a 13-year-old girl, and she was very clear that being a “mama” took precedence over everything else. At one point, she asserted, “My kids are my life” (S3B-S2). When we were discussing early on when to conduct the interviews, she shared that she probably would not be her best on Monday mornings because she tended to stay up late on Sundays to be with her fiancé to make up for making her children the priority the rest of the time. She explained that during the week and weekends, her children “come first” (FN-9-15-06). She described her son as being “naïve” (FN-9-15-06), so she watched him carefully over the weekend. When he finally went to bed on Sunday evenings, she would then spend a little time with her fiancé.

I use Shelley’s term Mama to describe this overarching identity that was revealed in the data. I identified three sub-themes related to this identity: *relationship to own history*, *adapting*, and *shame*. The first sub-theme, *relationship to own history*, addresses

the way in which Shelley figured her own role as Mama as distinct from what she experienced from her own parents. She seemed to hold her own history with her parents as a symbol of the kind of parent she *did not* want to be:

I never had a mama, you know, and I never had a daddy, I've raised myself, and one of the promises I made to myself about my children was that I was not going to allow them to be put in a situation like that, to where they felt like they did not have a mama or a daddy. (S1A-S80)

And then later:

With my kids, with Drake and Leesa, I think that I've done pretty well with them. I think they're pretty straight-shirt. I don't think that either one of my kids comes to school with any real, real, real worry, so much to where it's blocking their capacity to learn. They might be sitting in there goofing off, you know, talking to the other kids and everything. But I don't think they have never had to go to school and worry, "What am I going to eat today?" Or "Is my mama going to be so drunk today that she's going to be asleep?" And those were things that I did think about. And I thought about, "How's my mama going to pay for this" or, you know, I worried about grown-up things, I think. Besides just trying to be a kid and trying to learn and things. (S1B-S53)

It is apparent that Shelley strived to be the kind of parent that she herself did not have access to. To that end, she was ever-vigilant about "trying to adapt" (S1A-79) to her children's developmental needs. In the first interview, she explained that she was "just dealing with the problem of going into teenage life with my kids, which makes it very difficult because they are rebelling" (S1A-S2). She continued:

You know they're in that stage to where they no longer want to confide in their mama, they want to go to their friends and talk to their friends about, you know, their things and stuff. So I'm trying to learn a whole new complete way of speaking to them, a whole new language of speaking to them because they are teenagers, because they are getting into adolescence. Their hormones are flying

around every which way, so it's a very difficult time in my life I feel that I'm going through. (S1A-S3)

In order to cope with her children's adolescence, Shelley restricted their activities with friends and encouraged their extracurricular activities at school. She was especially watchful of her son, not allowing him to go out with friends until he agreed to call her to let her know where he was. She explained:

I run my house very strict and my children very strict, and I don't take any crap from anybody. If you were to meet me not here [in the Center] but somewhere else, I would be a little bit different because I'd be a whole lot more serious, and I would probably be going full speed trying to get everything done and this, this, and that and Drake's football and Leesa's softball. Did I mention that she was mascot of the school? (S1B-S97).

Besides being involved in extracurricular activities at school, Shelley's daughter was consistently on the A/B honor roll. Shelley was noticeably proud of both of her children, and though adapting to their adolescence continued to be difficult, she evaluated her self-as-Mama, for the most part, in positive terms: "I don't know where I got the strength," she said, "And I don't know if I've been the best mama in the world, but I've done the best that I can do, and that's all that anybody can do, is the best that they can do" (S1B-S54).

However, there is one aspect of her mothering that bothered Shelley prior to entering the adult education program—the fact that she could not always help her children with their schoolwork now that they were in high school. She gave an obviously painful example of how her son often responded when she tried to help him with math.



“Well, mama, that’s not how they showed me in class.” [he said.] “Well, mama, why don’t you just take a break and go and fix you something to drink. And I’ll try to see if I can’t finish this myself.” That makes me feel bad, you know, because it’s kind of like my son is trying to take care of his mama, and he’s worried about his mama getting stressed. And I don’t want my kids to do that. When I get eighty years old, they can worry about me, you know? Right now it’s not their responsibility to worry about mama. You know, it’s mine, and I love my babies. (S2A)

Although she spoke most often of her difficulty in helping her children with their math homework, at one point she also talked about how she felt when reading, in particular, was involved:

S76 It’s like you’re standing there and you feel completely helpless with your child that you love so much and you see so much beauty in and you want her and him to grow up and just make the absolute best of anything they can make in this whole world of theirselves, and you can’t even explain to them what a word means or what a certain sentence means like in a paragraph or something like that. It’s aggravating. It’s very aggravating.

A77 Is it a matter of not being able to explain it or that you’re not sure yourself?

S77 Well, there is just a mixture of both things. I don’t want my child looking at me like, “Gee, Mommy, you’re stupid.” You don’t want that. Of course, they don’t either but they expect me as the adult to know this stuff. You know and it’s very stressful. (S1B)

Being a Mama to teenagers seemed to have given rise to the desire to become an Educated Mother. I identified two sub-themes related to this pursued identity: *making her children proud* and *modeling the importance of education*. The first major sub-theme is Shelley’s desire for her children to be proud of her, or at least not ashamed of her. In

her figured world of mothering, mothers were to be “one step ahead” (S3B-S2) of their children and were to be able to provide academic support that their children can count on:

Being an Educated Mother is very, very important to me. I want my kids to know that I’m one step ahead all the time! That they can’t pull the wool over my eyes. I want them to feel comfortable to ask me about homework. I want them to be comfortable themselves that I’ll know the right answer and not be standing there thinking, “Oh, she’ll give me the wrong answer, and I’ll go in and get it wrong tomorrow anyway.” I want them to have the confidence that I can do it.” (S3B-S2)

Because she was unable to provide these things when she first entered adult education, Shelley felt her status was in jeopardy. But it is evident from her comments that she saw participation in the adult education class as something she must undertake in order to, in the long run, have her children look at her as she desired:

S: ... Because my children right now, (laughing) I’m on the same grade level as they are right now. I’m okay with it! You know, and after class every day, when I’m sitting there waiting on my babies to get off that school bus, and they come through the door and they look at me and they say, “(taking on her child’s voice) Did you ride the little yellow school bus today?” You know, I just joke around with them and go on with it and be happy and...

M: The short bus?

S: Yeah. And yes I do sit and ask my son questions about algebra and things like that. Because I have two very smart kids that just happen to know a little bit more than me. So--

F: Might be good in a way.

S: ...eventually I’ll know more than them and they can look up to their mother and be proud of their mother and so on and so on...(GI1-187-192)

Shelley projected her desire to be held in esteem as a mother well into the future.

Imagining her children as adults, there were things she wanted them to be able to think about her—or not think about her. For instance, she did not want them as adults “being ashamed of their mother for never trying or never, you know, doing anything to better her life” (S1A-S22-23). She pictured her son having to introduce her to his fiancée:

S: When my son meets a woman he wants to get married to, I want him to be able to bring her to an Educated Mother....People are a whole lot more interested these days in talking to an intelligent person. Someone who hasn't graduated high school, doesn't really know anything about life. Without an education, what good are you? (S3B-S3)

Shelley even imagined what her grandchildren would say about her:

A: Describe an Educated Mother to me.

S: That's not just an Educated Mother, it's an Educated Grandma. My grandkids one day are going to be saying, “I have an educated grandma.” (S3B-S3)

Shelley envisioned herself being a person that not only her children but her grandchildren will be proud of. And she felt that her own pursuit of education was an important lesson to her children.

that's one of the main reasons why I've decided to go back to school because I want to show to them how important education is, you know, and I want them to realize that regardless of how old you are, you can always go back to school. And the number one thing is just to show to them that education is the number one thing that they should be thinking about, that should be their number one priority. (S1A-S3)

What is your main purpose for completing your education?

--To prove myself that I can do this. Also to **show my children how important education is**. I plan to “try” to go to college after I graduate, also. (S-Orientation Assignment; emphasis hers)

Besides encouraging them to focus on education, Shelley had other intentions as a role model. Because she herself had reacted so strongly to the positioning that occurred as a result of *not* having a high school diploma, Shelley wanted to ensure that her children were not so positioned:

I want to try to set an example for my kids. That’s really important to me because Appleton County is a small community, and there’s a whole lot of people out here that quit high school when they were young, that just automatically have that low self esteem, and they pass it on to their kids, and their kids have that low self-esteem, and I don’t want my children to have low self-esteem for themselves. I want them knowing that just because we’re living here in Appleton County, somewhere over yonder (laughs), you know, that we’re not, you know, what you would say, illiterate, or ignorant, or you know. (S1A-S22-23)

Just as she sees power in education to help her “do something” with herself (S1A-S22-23), Shelley maintained, “[M]y number one priority is to be able to make sure that I’m not only educated but to make sure that my children are, number one, educated, so that they can make it on into college and really make something out of themselves” (GI3-208).

### ***Worker Who Provides – Worker Who Profits***

Unlike with the other participants, a third set of Guiding Identities emerged from Shelley’s interviews. During my first conversation with her, she expounded upon the benefits of an education and what it meant to her, vocationally:

Because you're not going to get anywhere without an education. You're not going to get a good job. You'll be stuck in a factory somewhere working, and considering that Appleton County is mainly made up of more factories than office jobs, you know, I don't want to be put in that big, big percentage of factory workers. I want to be working in an office somewhere. (S1A-S4)

To Shelley, an education meant positioning oneself for a “good job,” which was not in a factory but in an office. Whereas another participant talked about the physical demands of factory work that deterred her, Shelley had something else on her mind:

I want to be able to profit, you know, besides spending my whole check each week paying bills and just not having anything left over. I want to be able to pay my bills and still have money that I can put in the bank or money that I can use to go on vacation or to do things with my kids, or stuff like that. And I have a fiance that is a factory worker, so I look at how hard he works and I know I just don't want to have to work like that, 'cause that's like you know, you're working, and you're kissing butt but you're not making any profit off of it working in a factory. (S1A-S4)

Shelley envisioned herself as a Worker Who Profits, who did not live hand-to-mouth and make a subsistence wage. She had been a Worker Who Provides, working well over forty hours a week to make ends meet, and she rejected that identity for her future.

I'm going to work to enjoy my life. I'm not going to work to just pay bills—I'll let them go down the drain. I've seen people work themselves to death just to pay a power bill, and why do they do that? I'm not going to do that. If I'm going to get a bachelor's degree, I've earned the right to have a little fun and earn money to do things. I'm not going to scrape by, I've already done that.” (S3B-S2)

A Worker Who Profits seems to be someone who makes enough money to permit funding not only the daily necessities of life but also fun leisure activities. A Worker Who Profits also works at a job she “enjoys” and can “be proud of” (S3B-S2). That job

was “certainly not McDonalds” (S3B-S2), but Shelley was not sure what it would be. She explained, “Right now my focus is on getting my high school diploma and going to college. Then my brain will be focused on what kinds of courses to take. I really don’t think I’m educated enough yet to say, ‘I’m going to be this, I’m going to be that’ (S3B-S2). Although Shelley was rather vague on the details of what she would do as a Worker Who Profits, she did know that whatever it was entailed graduating from college—a high school diploma was not enough.

## **Megan**

### **Part 1: History-in-Person**

Megan described herself in the following way: “I’m a mom. I’m energetic. I’m willing to learn. I’m going to school. I’m a good cook. I’m a good mom. And Tom said I’d make somebody a really good wife! I’m exciting, fun to be around” (M3B-M5). In this section I explore pertinent aspects of her life prior to entering the adult basic education program to provide a context for better understanding the identity work that ultimately brought her to the Center.

### ***Early Family Life***

Megan was born and raised in a small town near Appleton and was the youngest of five children. Her father was one of thirteen children and attended school until the fifth grade. Her mother had a tenth-grade education, and Megan described her as being “very smart, especially in math and English” (M1-M6). Megan loved to spend time

with her father, which was difficult since he worked two jobs. However, he made time for a special ritual: “We would go fishing every Saturday from the time I was probably five or six years old. We went to the dam, to the river. I was a Daddy’s girl and a little tomboy” (M3A-M1). Her relationship with her mother, though, was more volatile. Her mother accused her of being “too much like my daddy,” and Megan remembered arguing with her mother regularly. But, says Megan, “My brothers and sisters argued with her too. It was her way or the highway” (M3A-M1). When Megan was thirteen years old, her parents divorced. Megan lived with her mother until she was 21 but continued to have a relationship with her father, who lived nearby.

Of her siblings, Megan was closest to a sister who was 11 years older and was “like a mom” (M1-M6) to her. It was her sister who taught Megan to read, using items from the kitchen to teach letter sounds and reading children’s books to her. Megan’s parents never read to her, which she attributed to their spending their time trying to provide for five children, one of whom was chronically ill. Once she learned to read, Megan read frequently to her older brother, who was her “idol” (M1-M6). Her brother suffered from a heart disorder most of his life, and Megan remembered her parents spending much of their time at the hospital when she was growing up. When he was just 21 years old, her brother died, and Megan described feeling this loss deeply.

Grandparents also figured prominently in Megan’s early life. Megan described her father’s mother as being “very old—born in the 1800’s,” who “always had interesting stories, about haunted houses and things” (M3A-M1). Her mother’s parents lived at the end of their road, which had been named for the family. Her grandmother and

grandfather were bootleggers, and Megan recalled seeing containers of moonshine as she was growing up: “I saw a lot of it. But I didn’t know why the police wanted to catch them! I thought it was creek water until I ran across the still. I knew it was illegal, but everybody did it! My grandpa served time for making moonshine” (M3A-M1).

### ***School History***

Megan started school at age six and shared mostly fond memories of her elementary school years. She distinctly remembered particular teachers in each grade and reading activities she engaged in as a student in those classes. For instance, she remembered that Mrs. Chance frequently read out loud to her second-grade class and would ask them such things as, “What did you think about it?” and “What did it mean to you?” Mrs. Chance also wrote predictable sentences on the board (e.g., “Today is \_\_\_\_\_. We will go outside and play today.”). Students would take turns reading these sentences out loud and then everyone would copy them. Megan recalled working on vowels and consonants in third grade and that spelling was more difficult than reading.

One of Megan’s favorite teachers was her fourth-grade teacher, a teacher whom Megan’s older brother and sister had despised. Her mother tried unsuccessfully to get Megan out of his class, but Megan ended up “loving him” (M1-M6), saying that she learned more from him than any other teacher. She remembered having problems learning long division that year, and he was attentive and effective in helping her. For the most part, Megan enjoyed reading in elementary school, but she did not like to read in



front of the class. She said the teachers seemed to know of her reluctance to read out loud in front of other students and instead would ask her to read to them at their desks.

Although Megan had many clear memories of her elementary years, she did not remember very much about her middle and high school years. She attributed this lack of memory to experiencing several traumatic losses during this time: her parents divorced and both of her remaining grandparents passed away. A favorite uncle also died. Following the divorce, her mother worked third shift trying to make ends meet. Megan helped out with the house work and supplemented her mother's income by picking up odd jobs. Megan reported that, as a result, she slept very little and had little interest in school.

Megan did remember that she enjoyed reading in middle school because it took her away from her problems. She especially appreciated the opportunity to read what she wanted, which was usually mysteries and "thrillers" (M1-M7). One teacher set up a Book Club--students earned patches for each book they read and completed a book report about--and Megan was proud of earning 100 points. Favorites included Laura Ingalls Wilder books, the *Flowers in the Attic* series, and a book called *Sunshine*, which a teacher gave her to mitigate her "fixation on thrillers" (M1-M7). Megan enjoyed some of the literature she read for class, especially *Romeo and Juliet*, but she attributed her interest in the play to the way a particular teacher taught.

One highlight in Megan's middle school years seems to be a Health class that she excelled in, "because it was something I was interested in" (M2C-M65). She remembered:

I got an A in Health when I was in school. And I remember us having to do the muscular system and the bone structures and doing the skeletal system, where you have to write down all of the bones. And I forgot how many of those there was and it took me like 3 days to figure out. I would write down the ones that I knew, and then I'd have to go back through the book and look. And [older sister] told me, "Think of a song. Make you up a song. Just think of (singing) "Your head bone's connected to--". [I said] "That's a good idea, but the femur and the tibia and the fibula? I can't make up a song like that!" She said, "Yeah, you can. Come here and I'll help." And we started writing down the words to the song, and we started filling in the--. And I did it! And then I did the muscles, and I got a 100 on both tests.

High school brought a heavy working schedule and a growing disinterest in school. At one point in an interview, I asked Megan if she had enjoyed English in high school, because she mentioned she was finding her literature book in the ABE class interesting. She replied:

No. I went to sleep, I think. See, I got up at 3:30 in the morning and picked up eggs for my neighbor. And so I was tired when I went to school, you know. I went to bed at 10:30, 11:00, and got up at 3:00 and in the chicken house by 3:30. So when I got to class, I needed toothpicks to hold my eyes open. (M2C-M56)

As for her other subjects, Megan claimed she "never understood science" and wondered, "When are you ever going to use that?" (M1-M7). She took only basic math courses, mainly because she did not see herself going to college. She explained:

Unless you were going to college, they did not ask that you do algebra and geometry. All you had to take was basic math, which was fractions, division, multiplication, addition, subtraction—those things. What you would use in your daily life. And I didn't take it because I knew that my family couldn't afford for me to go to college. I knew that I wasn't even going to be able to finish school. (M2A-M26)

As far as reading for her classes, Megan remarked that it “wasn’t difficult” because she could pronounce the words she came across. She continued, however. Despite the reading not being difficult, “I just didn’t understand it” (M1-M7).

### *Leaving School*

In her first interview, Megan shared that she left school at age 16 because her parents were divorced and her mother “couldn’t make ends meet” (M1-1). Later, in a group interview, she explained further:

238 M: You know, it was a situation where my mom was, like, “I know that you need this, but I can’t get it right now, because this is what I’ve got to pay this month.” And so, I started working for my neighbor. I worked in two houses. I cleaned houses, I watched kids, I did everything I could do. And then I finally told Mama, “I’m just quitting.” And she said, “No, you’re not!” And I said, “Well, I am. Because you can’t afford to buy me a car. You can’t afford to pay my car insurance. You can’t afford to buy me those Levis that I want to wear. And you can’t afford to buy me my Nike shoes that I want to wear. So guess what?” (G11)

239 ST: You quit and got outta there. (M: Yep.) (G11-238-239)

### *After Leaving High School*

After leaving school, Megan focused on work, finding employment in a local poultry factory and in tobacco fields until she was old enough to get other types of jobs. In her mid-twenties she married. Her husband worked in the construction industry, and, on occasion, Megan and he had to spend several months at a time in cities as far away as Florida for certain construction contracts. During most of their thirteen-year marriage, however, they lived in Appleton County. Megan worked as well, and after their divorce,

supported herself. By the time she arrived at the Center, she had worked in two furniture factories, a nursing home, a local poultry factory, and a candle production company. Work in the poultry factory was especially difficult for her, because of her allergies and “bad knees.” She reported that she contracted pneumonia four times during her work there.

### ***The Road to the Adult High School Program***

When Megan was laid off from her last job, she became involved with a man named Hank and became pregnant with her son Kyle. Hank wanted Megan to stay home with Kyle because there was “too much sickness, too many bad habits” (M1A-M53) in day care. Megan said she was willing to “let Hank make that rule” (M1A-M54) because she realized that, since she was in her late 30’s, Kyle was likely the only child she would ever have, and “there were a lot of things that I didn’t want to miss by putting him in daycare” (M1A-M54). Furthermore, Kyle was born prematurely and was very ill and hospitalized for much of his first few months.

Hank had been abusive when he drank earlier in their relationship, but after Kyle was born, Hank started doing drugs and became increasingly violent. As the violence escalated, Megan described having to make a decision about her future:

M54 I had no choice but to see the big picture. You know, this is what your life is going to be if you stay here—if you keep yourself in this situation, this is what your life is going to be.

A55 You said that you had no choice, but some people do have a choice, and they choose to stay in that situation.

- M55: Well, I did for a long time—until my child was born....Me choosing to stay in a bad situation--that is a bad situation that is being done to *me*. But choosing to stay in a bad situation and my child there--I'm doing that to my child, and that's not going to happen!
- A56 Okay.
- M56 He is going to be brought up right, and brought up in an environment where there are no drugs. There is no violence. And the only violence that he's going to see will be on TV or something that he sees out in public somewhere, it's not going to be something he sees at home.
- A57 Mmm Hmm. Did you have somebody that you were talking to about this? Did you have friends or somebody that encouraged you to take this stand, or did it all come from within you? Or was it a mix?
- M57 Well, I have a sister, an older sister that is in church, and she's a very Christian person. She puts a lot of her belief in God and what God can do for you. I'm not as religious. And, she had stressed to me, "You go to God and God will help you with these problems." Well, I went to God. And I saw no changes in my life. Everything stayed the same except for me reading my Bible and me praying and me asking God to help me through this. And things stayed the same. The words were not giving me what I needed. So I had to put action in the place of the words. I had to do something.
- A58 So what did you do?
- M58 I chose not to be hit any more. I chose not to be cussed any more. And I chose for my child who was 16 months old at the time not to see this any more. So I took a warrant for [Hank]. And I did tell him prior to the last episode of him hitting me, that if he ever struck me—I wasn't his punching bag. I didn't deserve that. I was a good mom. I took care of our home. I cooked for him. I cleaned for him. The only thing I asked of him was not to spend our money on drugs and not to come home drinking and doing drugs in the home with our child. And that's what I was being beat for—because of the arguments that came up from the drugs and the alcohol and the money getting gone from our account. And Hank was making good money at that time. And I was seeing where he was spending five hundred, six hundred, seven hundred dollars a day on cocaine.
- A60 Goodness.

M60 And there was things that Kyle needed, things that I needed, things we needed that we were having to do without for him to continue his habit. And I knew that there had to be something better, even if it meant continuing to do without things. But I knew that there were steps that I could take that would eventually—in the long run—make things better. (M1A)

Hank was sentenced to five months for his last assault on Megan, and Megan had to provide for Kyle on her own. She had thought about “com(ing) back to school” (M1A-M61) after Kyle was born but did not know there were places that provided child care. Once she realized that Hank was going to jail, Megan was convinced that “it would be my place to be the person that Kyle depended on. And the only person that Kyle depended on. And that I had to make my life better and do it for him” (M1A-M66).

After looking for a job, Megan was discouraged by the fact that only the poultry factory would hire individuals who did not have a high school diploma. She had also heard that she could become a Certified Nursing Assistant without a high school diploma, but she needed to refresh her skills in order to take a certification test. She approached the Department of Social Services (DSS) about how she could further her education and find a job. She ended up enrolling in Work First so she could have some income while she went to school. DSS recommended she enroll in the Center because they provided childcare, and Megan began her first adult education experience. On her enrollment form, she indicated that she was interested in her GED and wanted to go to the community college upon completion of the program. She told the teacher she was also interested in preparing for the C.N.A. test and wanted to get a phlebotomy license (M1-4).

## Part 2: Guiding Identities

In this section I build off Megan’s personal history to discuss her senses of her selves—how she thought about herself as a person, both now and in the future. In coding Megan’s data, I found that she referred to herself in a variety of ways, using nouns and adjectives. These are listed in Table 6. I identified two sets of Guiding Identities that appear to subsume many of Megan’s descriptions of herself and explain her participation in the adult education class. In the next section I discuss each of these in turn.

**TABLE 6**

### Megan’s Terms for Her Current Selves

Nominatives	Adjectives
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Mama</li> <li>▪ Good mom</li> <li>▪ Type of person who tries to help out other people</li> <li>▪ An old dog [learning new tricks]</li> <li>▪ Hands-on person</li> <li>▪ Good listener</li> <li>▪ Observer</li> <li>▪ Not someone who sponges things</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Independent</li> <li>▪ Hard-headed</li> <li>▪ Unhappy</li> <li>▪ As country as country can be</li> <li>▪ Not as dumb as she tries to make me feel like I am</li> <li>▪ Dyslexic in some way, shape, or form</li> <li>▪ Energetic</li> <li>▪ Willing to learn</li> <li>▪ Exciting, fun to be around</li> </ul>

### *Good Mom - Someone That Kyle Can Depend On*

At the time of our first interview, Megan was 40 years old, and Kyle was a few months shy of two years old. Megan told me that Kyle was probably the only child that she would ever have and that he was the priority in her life. She identified herself as a Good Mom (M3B-M5), and the interview and group data is replete with references to

Kyle and her responsibilities to him. With the birth of Kyle and the subsequent escalation of Hank's violent and addictive behaviors, Megan realized that she wanted a different life for her son. To provide that life, she felt she needed to be a certain kind of person, a certain kind of mom that seemed to have some qualitative differences from the Good Mom she already was. She needed to be Someone That Kyle Can Depend On—and, to do that, she needed “a better education and a better job” (M1A-M67). She had considered “going back to school” (M2C- M67) when Kyle was born, and then again several months later when her sister-in-law suggested Megan enroll in the Center to “do something for you” (M1A-M61) but it was not until she realized that it was up to her be Someone That Kyle Can Depend On that she enrolled in the program. Three themes related to this guiding identity set emerged from the data: *providing for Kyle's physical and emotional well-being*, *providing for Kyle's material needs*, and *conflict between current and future identities*.

One characteristic of Someone That Kyle Can Depend On is that this person provides for his physical and emotional well-being. As a Good Mom, Megan did this as well. She sought out medical care when Kyle was ill at three-months-old, staying with him and supporting him in the aftermath of a surgery. She was persistent in finding out what caused a variety of symptoms he had on a regular basis and was ever-vigilant in reading product labels to protect him from a laundry list of chemicals and food additives to which he was allergic. She provided for his meals and kept him safe at play. Prior to pressing charges against Hank, Megan gave him a litany of reasons why she did not deserve to be beaten, including that she had been a Good Mom. But it seems to me that it



is at this point that her new identity, one that had been introducing itself periodically, actually began to crystallize for Megan. For instance, earlier, while keeping watch over Kyle following his surgery, she had glimmers of this new identity.

M66: [W]hen he was in the hospital, when he had his surgery, that was the first time that I realized: if Hank isn't going to be here for me, when my child is in surgery, and a very sick—very, very sick child-- if he's not going to be here for me, then he'll never be here for me, and he'll never be here for Kyle. (M1A)

From that point on, the significance of her life with Hank—and the effect it would have on Kyle—become evident.

M56: Me choosing to stay in a bad situation, that is a bad situation that is being done to me—but choosing to stay in a bad situation and my child there--I'm doing that to my child, and that's not going to happen. He is going to be brought up right, and brought up in an environment where there are no drugs. There is no violence. And the only violence that he's going to see will be on TV or something that he sees out in public somewhere, it's not going to be something he sees at home. (M1A)

What seems qualitatively different in her two related identities is that she seemed to be drawing from her emerging identity as Someone That Kyle Can Depend On when she removed him from Hank's influence. Someone That Kyle Can Depend On protected Kyle from drugs and violence. And she was concerned about his emotional well-being as well. Both surfaced noticeably again when Hank was released early from prison (“the judge was his friend” [M3A]) and won visitation rights. An acquaintance of Megan's alerted her that, on his first day out of prison, Hank had called her asking for drugs. She continued to hear that Hank had returned to drugs, and Megan was concerned about what

kinds of things Kyle was being exposed to when he started to spend weekends with Hank, especially when his sleeping behavior changed and he became more clingy immediately after the visitations began:

M36: Kyle has not been sleeping well and he wakes up at three in the morning and he wants to stay up an hour. He wants to go to Mama's room and lay on the bed with Mama; Mama hold him. And this has been going on since he's been seeing his Dad. And that's how I know that it's affecting him and not in a good way. And that's affecting me because I know that there's something wrong, and I really don't--. You know when you have a two-year old that is starting to do things that he's never done before, you know there's a problem but he can't tell you what it is and that hurts so bad. It hurts me so bad because here I am 40 years old. I don't have a Mom that I can talk to and say, "Mama, this is what's happening, what could be going on?" (M1B)

Megan explained that since she did not have a mother to go to with her questions, Megan solicited input from the Center daycare staff and received the validation she needed that her instincts were on target. At her request, they prepared documents about Kyle's behavior change that they had noticed in the Center for her to use in court, and by the time of my final interview with Megan, Hank had lost his visitation rights and Kyle's odd behaviors had all but ceased.

Someone That Kyle Can Depend On protected Kyle from drugs and violence, but this aspect of the identity transformation, as Megan experienced it, seemed to be a shift in consciousness that she had already accomplished before entering the program. There were other qualities that she sought to develop in order to fully realize her identity as Someone That Kyle Can Depend On, and these she felt required enrollment in the adult education program. The most salient of these characteristics was economic in nature: the

person that Kyle depends on buys him what he needs when he needs it. When describing what she meant by “making a better life for Kyle,” she offered insight into the economic impact of this guiding identity:

A67: So when you say you want to make a better life for Kyle, what does that mean? What do you want for him? What kind of life do you want to make for him?

M67: I want him to have what he needs as far as (pause) a person that he can depend on. A person that he KNOWS he can depend on, that’s going to be there no matter what. To have the things that he needs. When he needs a new pair of shoes, that I can go get him a new pair of shoes. That I don’t have to say, well, I’ve got to put this much money back this week, and this much money back this week, and I’m not going to be able to pay this, because I’ve got to get him—I want to be able to do what he needs me to do when he needs me to do it.  
(M1A)

This concern for being able to make purchases echoed her previous accounts of leaving high school and deciding to leave Hank, both key turning points in her life.

In order to provide for these material needs, Megan believed that she needed “a better education and a better job” (M1A). Having worked in a variety of factory jobs, Megan sensed that she could offer more monetarily with a different kind of job. She had wanted to be a nurse growing up, but rejected this possible future for herself because she learned from her sister who became a nurse how time-demanding it was, and she “want[ed] to have as much quality time with Kyle” (M2C-M68) as she could. She thought that being a Certified Nursing Assistant was a good choice “because I enjoy working with people...and I like helping people and I’m one of those people that puts other people above myself” (M1B-M64). She found out this kind of job did not require a

GED or high school diploma and saw it as a stopgap—providing income while she pursued other longer term ventures. Upon entering, she was also interested in being a phlebotomist and learned from the teachers that she would need a high school diploma, not a GED, to pursue that career. After participating in an on-line personality test that highlighted a compatible career as a juvenile probation officer, she expressed excitement about that possibility as well, wanting to do some research about what it entailed.

Throughout her deliberations, Megan seemed to be in conflict over whether she needed to be someone that Kyle can depend on *now* or someone he can depend on *in the future*. In her first set of interviews, Megan introduced this conflict as a possibility, suggesting that in order to provide more fully for Kyle down the road, sacrifices would need to be made in the present:

M60     ....And I knew that there had to be something better, even if it meant continuing to do without things. But I knew that there were steps that I could take that would eventually—in the long run—make things better. (M1A)

She entered the program in May wanting to get her GED and to prepare for the tests she needed to pass to become a Certified Nursing Assistant. With teacher prompting, Megan decided after entering the program that she wanted to pursue her high school diploma instead of the GED. The teachers also told her that her math skills were not where they needed to be in order for her to enroll in the C.N.A. preparation class at the community college, so she needed to work through a workbook designed around the kinds of math needed for the C.N.A. test. After trying to work both in textbooks for her high school credits and in the workbook for her C.N.A. preparation, Megan balked. She resisted

work in her textbooks, telling me in September, “I want to finish my C.N.A.’s and I was putting too much on myself” (M1A-M81). In discussing her teacher’s reaction, the conflict that Megan was experiencing between her short-term and long-term abilities to provide for Kyle’s needs surfaced:

M51: [Teacher] has her expectations of what she wants, I think, from each person.... And I have my own expectations of what I need to do. And she thinks your diploma and your GED is the most important, you finishing school is the most important thing. Well, it might be, to a doctor and a nurse, who makes thousands and thousands of dollars a year. But to someone who makes \$236 dollars a month, they have to concentrate on making money tomorrow, not four years down the line. You have to concentrate more on what you have to do to put money on the table, to put food on the table, to put clothes on your child’s back. You have to do that today, because you don’t have any help, you don’t have a husband who’s a doctor and you’re not a nurse and a teacher, and--I don’t think she realizes that. You know, she told me, “You need to concentrate on your diploma.” No, I don’t! I need to concentrate on getting my C.N.A.’s so that if I don’t receive child support, I can get out and get a job, and then on days when I’m off, or afternoons when I’m off I can come in here and study for my GED and my diploma. (M1A)

Despite her conviction in September that she needed to prepare for her C.N.A. qualification so she could get right to work, Megan was doing very little work in her C.N.A. materials three months later. Instead, she was working in English grammar and had her sights set on her high school diploma. It seems that a second set of Guiding Identities had crystallized for her and, for the moment at least, it had bolstered her inclination to take the long-view of becoming Someone That Kyle Can Depend On. This second set of identities will be discussed next.

***Flawed Megan – Improved Megan***

A3: How long have you been doing that [Tai-Bo]?

M3: I started doing it back actually right after [me] and his Dad split up. I wanted to start improving and -- working on Megan.

A4: What else are you doing to work on Megan?

M4: School. (M1B)

These statements by Megan and others suggest that Megan sees her current self flawed in some way, or at least in need of improvement. Whereas the introduction of the pursued identity Improved Megan occurred amidst an exchange about her interest in exercise and fitness, it actually signaled a broader pursuit. In the Pursued Identities Activity, Megan chose the card with Improved Megan on it immediately after choosing Someone That Kyle Can Depend On. When I asked why, she responded, “I wanted to better myself, and I still want to do that. To better my education so I can go further in life, do more things, have the opportunity to do more things” (M3B-M3). Her education was vital to this pursuit, and, by “education” it was clear that Megan meant a high school credential. For instance, in her first interview, she stated, that she joined the class in order to “make me feel better about myself—just knowing that I have an education, and can go to college.” Going to college is an outcome of getting “an education,” not a prerequisite. The practical value of earning a high school credential—i.e., the ability to get a job in order to fully be Someone Kyle Can Depend Upon—morphs now into something harder to concretize. Megan said it would help her “feel better about myself”(M2A-M17) and “raise my self-esteem some” (M2A-M15) to get a high school credential; however, based

on the data as a whole, she seemed to be understating the significance of what the accomplishment would do for her. Especially telling was a comment she made about an Orientation class, in which the teacher posted a list of names and asked what they had in common. The correct answer was that they had all dropped out of high school and then gone back and earned a high school credential. From my questions about what she learned in the session, the following exchange occurred:

A10: What else did you learn?

M10: All of the stars and people we have heard of all of our lives that never finished school, and went back and got their GED's and diplomas.

A11: How'd that make you feel?

M11: It made me feel better, you know, to know that they're all people that actually done something with themselves even though they didn't finish school, and then later on in life did go back and finish.

Apparently, because Megan did not have a high school credential, she had *not* “done something” with herself. She felt she was diminished in some way by her lack of education. At one point, she resisted this positioning as lesser, getting angry when she was told that her skills are low:

Having a high school diploma will make me feel better about myself, because when I first started here, according to *them*, I had a sixth-grade education. [Teacher didn't tell her. A Work First caseworker said that Kate had written “6<sup>th</sup>-grade” on a form, indicating her math level. When Megan heard, she turned red (angry), because “I knew better.”] I thought that was bull shit! I know I'm smarter than a sixth-grader! It's been 20 years since I've been in school, so a lot of stuff had to come back to me, but I've also had to learn a lot of new things that they didn't even have back then. They shouldn't put people in categories like that—like 4<sup>th</sup> grade, 6<sup>th</sup>-grade, and stuff. That's degrading. (M3B-M3)

Megan seemed intent on counteracting this “degrading” positioning by performing well and proving what she knew. Passing the GED tests, which had been her goal upon entering the class, was now not enough. She decided she wanted the real thing:

M15: .... And I’m not sure I even want to go into phlebotomy, but I want my diploma. That’s something I think will lift my self-esteem some.

A16: Why? Why will it do that?

M16: Well, it will make me feel better knowing that I know more. When somebody’s doing something and they say, “Megan, do you know how to do this?” I can say, “Yeah, I do.” You know? “Yeah, I know how to do that.” I’ve been asked in class a few times, “Do you know how to do this?” “No-o.” ....

A17: And you think if you passed your GED you would be able to answer those questions?

M17: I might. But it’s, it’s,—that’s not what I want. I want my diploma [not my GED]. I want to be able to say, “I have my diploma. I have *all* of my credits. I didn’t just go in there and take a test”— and it’s got a little bit of everything on it. I only lack 6 credits getting my diploma, and that’s going to consist of a lot of work, but I feel like when I do that, I’m going to feel better about myself. Knowing that I’m not just learning a *little* bit, enough to get by, you know, enough to pass that test. I’m going to know it (pounding on table with pencil). Because I have to do each book, every page of the book. My English, my science, my math—I’ve got to do every book. I’ve done one of the reading books, and it was like this thick (shows with fingers), and I only got a half a credit for it. And that really bugged me, you know, because I did really good in the book too. Actually, all my tests except for like four were hundreds. (M2A)

At first read, I thought this exchange had to do with Megan’s desire to do things well.

She stated at one point in a discussion of the on-line personality test that she took, “When I do something I want to do it with excellence” (M1B-M51). But in the context of other comments made throughout the interviews, it is clear that something else is motivating



Megan besides a personality-based drive for excellence. In the following exchange, it starts to become clear what that motivation is. Megan is talking about work in her grammar text:

A32: What do you think is important for you to learn from working in this book?

M32: Proper English, so I don't sound like an idiot when I talk to someone.

A33: Is it just about when you talk? Can you think of any other....?

M33: Oh, it'll help Kyle too! If I speak proper English to him, he will learn proper English from me, and then when he gets in his English books, he'll know that you don't say, "Over yonder." We're from the country, and a lot of people that are around us speak that way. I noticed that since I started seeing Tom that I speak differently. I don't choose my words....I say things like he does.

A34 Easy to do—to start talking like whoever you're around. So is he more country, less country?

M34: Oh! More, more, very much more. And I always thought that I was as country as country could be. You know, I was raised in Austin. And my dad says, "It's not Ahstin. It's Awstin. And I said, "Daddy, there's no way on earth. It's A-u-s-t-i-n. Ahstin". And he said that here lately that I've been talking like someone from up North, like a Yankee, because I have started pronouncing my words properly instead of putting ef's in there, and er's in there where they don't belong.

Megan does not want to be perceived as "an idiot." Nor does she want to be someone who "just gets by" and has not "done something" with her life. Her country talk and her lack of a diploma signal to others that she does not measure up to the cultural model for being educated. This Flawed Megan wants to become an Improved Megan-- someone who can answer people's questions, someone who is a "certified" knowledge-

bearer. There is also an overlap with her identity as Someone That Kyle Can Depend On: “I don’t want him to be ashamed of me. I want him to be proud of me. When people ask him about me, I want him to be able to say that she left school but she went back to school and made good grades” (M3B-M3). Megan wants to be someone that Kyle can depend on *not* to embarrass her son with her lack of education.

This discussion of the value of the high school diploma is somewhat complicated by the fact that Megan did not even consider pursuing her education until after her son was born. “I never missed finishing school until I had Kyle” (M3A-M1). If she experienced shame as a result of her status as a drop-out, why did it not seem to manifest until she was 40 years old? Further statements confirm that we are dealing here with something related to positionality. First, she stated that she “wanted to be a mentor to him” (M3A-M1), and “I wanted to show Kyle that if I can do it he can do it--if I can do it at 40” (M3B-M3). Getting a high school credential is obviously something Megan valued, though when she entered the program she saw the GED as being equivalent to the diploma. By December, the high school diploma became the preferred goal. The data support a conclusion that, prior to having a child and enrolling in Work First and the Center, Megan had not experienced negative positioning in a way that demanded a response. Her main reason in joining the adult education class at the Center was to get a job in order to realize herself as Someone That Kyle Can Depend On. However, once she learned what her assessment scores were, in the “degrading” terms that were used by the teachers and caseworker, Megan began to consider herself flawed in some way. Not only

did she need a high school credential to provide for her son, she now needed the real thing—a credit-based high school diploma—to prove her worth to society at large.

## **Paulette**

### **Part 1: History-in-Person**

When I asked Paulette to describe herself, she introduced herself in the following way, “I live with my husband and my eighteen-year-old daughter. I drive a truck for a living, which I enjoy. My hobbies are knitting, crocheting, reading when I have time, and I’m going to school to try to get my high school diploma” (P1A-P1). As with Shelley and Megan, I explore in this section relevant portions of Paulette’s personal biography that provided the context for her enrollment in the adult basic education program.

#### *Early Family Life*

Paulette grew up in the large city of Charlotte and lived there until her late teens. She was one of five children and fell “next to the baby” (P1A-P102). Her parents divorced when she was in third grade, and she lived with her mother for about a year. Her father then received custody of Paulette and her siblings, and her mother moved away. Since her father was a truck driver and “he stayed on the road all the time,” Paulette says, “[M]y grandma practically raised us—my Grandma and Grandpa. We still lived in separate houses, but we would go back home for our snacks or sleeping or we’d stay with them sometimes” (P1A-P63).

Paulette did not remember her father reading much at all when she was growing up, but he did have a high school diploma. She remembered her grandfather doing a considerable amount of reading, “mostly about cars and lawn mowers and stuff like that because he was a mechanic” (P1A-P65). She remembered that one of her older siblings would read to her “whenever they felt like it” (P1A-P104), which was rarely, so she did not recall particular books or stories from that time. She did, however, remember that when she entered kindergarten she already knew how to write her name and knew how to say and write the alphabet.

### *School History*

Once in school, Paulette remembered learning to write in lower-case letters and learning to read “four-letter words, the three-letter words or even the two-letter words” (P1A-P99). She did not recall much about instruction, other than “reading the chapters and doing the work at the end of the chapters, or studying a spelling book” (P1A-P108). She talked most about the spelling book, at one point explaining, “[W]e had to learn spelling words, which, that was hard for me because some of the words was really hard. I couldn’t understand them, and I mostly failed my spelling classes” (P1A-P108). In discussing her problems with spelling work, Paulette introduced one of the more prominent themes that arose from her data—that of being a “slow learner.” The following exchange offers insight into how she came to think of herself in this way:

P109: ....I’d have to have help with some of the activities in the book. To me, I thought I was a slow learner. I couldn’t comprehend what they were doing.

A110: You thought that in elementary school?

P110: Yes.

A111: Did somebody tell you that you were a slow learner?

P111: Yes.

A112: Who told you?

P112: Teachers.

A113: They said you were a slow learner.

P113: Yes.

A114: And why did they say that to you?

P114: I don't know. They told me I needed to be in special classes because I couldn't--I kept up with them most of the time but when it come to a little bit harder stuff, that slowed me down.

A115: What made something hard?

P115: Reading. (P1A)

Although at one point Paulette mentioned math in the discussion of her special education classes, she recalled that for the most part, the focus of those classes was reading. The students in the special education class read easier books. Interestingly, Paulette talked about how the students “did books” instead of read books: “We did books they gave us. It was just—I don't know—it was easier for me in the lower grade books” (P1A-119). Paulette also recalled that the teacher taught students how to “break down words,” but that she “just couldn't do it,” for self-ascribed reasons: “I didn't understand it at that time or didn't want to learn it” (P1A-P121). Paulette did not read on her own at home during her elementary years, but she asserted that she enjoyed reading: “I just liked

reading—if I did have someone read them to me” (P1A-P123). She liked to have people read her children’s story books, particularly Walt Disney stories.

With the help of the special classes, Paulette felt that she kept up with the other students for the most part until middle school. Then, she said, “I don’t know what it was, I just couldn’t read well” (P1A-P105). Whereas in her earlier years, Paulette was ambivalent about school, after sixth grade school became a hard place to attend. She explained:

P125: Things really got hard in middle school because I was still in special classes for my reading and there was other classes, you know, I went to regular classes for my math or my home economics and stuff like that. And I was somewhat of a, I don’t know if you’d call it, a nerd. I was not a nerd but you know, just a low-class person. Everybody always made fun of me because I had--I don’t know if it was the way I dressed or I just didn’t want to go to school then. It made me feel low.

A126: Did they actually call you names and pick on you?

P126: Yeah. And it made me feel bad. And I just didn’t want to go to school. I didn’t want to be around nobody.

A127: Did they pick on you for your reading or was it just...

P127: It was because of my reading, yeah.

A128: Oh, it was.

P128: “She can’t read.” “She’s dumb.” “She’s stupid.” “She’s retarded.” That’s what they would call me. When I would come out of that special class, I’d hold my head down, and it made me feel bad.

A129: Did you believe them?

P129: Yeah. I did at the time.

A130: Did you have anybody trying to build you up? At home?

P130: At the time, my Daddy was remarried and my stepmother would help me build it up but not--It didn't work enough to where--I was still down. "I don't want to read. I don't want to learn. Everybody makes fun of me." I didn't want to go to school. I'd skip most of my classes. (P1A)

This pattern of avoiding school continued into high school. Paulette would go out with her friends to the football field and smoke or go bike riding with friends. She felt that her special education classes in high school were minimally effective:

They would help somewhat but, no, they wasn't helping that much because I felt I needed a one-on-one person to help me. And you've got one instructor for one classroom that's got twenty-some kids in it. It didn't help me. They'd just hand me a piece of paper and say, "Here." If it was a crossword puzzle, I'd do it. I'd sort of look at the other papers because I didn't understand it. Just tried to get my work done. (P1A-P137)

### *Leaving School*

Paulette left high school when she was in eleventh grade. At the time she was living with her first husband in his parents' home, and both of them were working at McDonalds. Paulette worked second shift, making "good money," and school became "too much of a hassle" (P3A-P14):

I was working part-time, too, and back then when you were in high school, eleventh and twelfth graders could leave early if they had a job. They could take two or three classes and leave early and go to work. And I had a good job. I was making two to three hundred dollars a week. And I said, "What do I need school for, I'm working, I got a job." So I quit. (P1A-P144)

### *After Leaving High School*

Soon after leaving high school, Paulette became pregnant. She stopped working and stayed home with her son until he was four years old. In order to bring in extra money, she baby-sat the neighbor's children on occasion, supervising their outdoor play, doing activities with them, or showing them cartoons. She mentioned reading aloud to the children as well, making sure that she chose easy books to read. She also recalled having to read some directions on medicines, which she did not find difficult.

After two years of marriage, Paulette and her husband divorced, and her husband ended up with custody of their son. Paulette moved to Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, to be nearer to her mother and to make some money. While there, Paulette met and married her second husband and eventually moved with him to Appleton County, where he lived. They had a son and a daughter together; the son was born with a "cleft palette and all that" (P3B-P7). Paulette divorced her husband, who was sent to prison for a crime which Paulette did not discuss in detail. Because her son needed special medical care that she could not afford, Paulette allowed her ex-husband's mother to adopt him, but she kept custody of her daughter. Paulette soon met and married her third husband. She spoke in the interviews very little about this husband, other than to say that he was a heavy drinker who died from a heart attack soon after being hospitalized for a suicide attempt.

Prior to entering the Center, Paulette had worked at a number of jobs. Before leaving school, she worked in a fast food restaurant as a cashier and occasionally as a baby-sitter for the neighborhood children. While in Myrtle Beach, she worked two jobs – hotel housekeeping during the day and as a cook in a donut shop at night. Once she was



in Appleton County, Paulette worked in a knitting factory, a furniture factory, a sewing plant, convenience stores, and as a certified nursing assistant.

### ***The Road to the Adult High School Program***

After the death of her third husband, Paulette stopped working. She explained that she was depressed and was under the care of a psychiatrist. She “lived on a lump sum insurance payment” related to her husband’s death for about a year and then started getting “low on money” (P3B-P6). After working part-time at a service station, she decided she needed more income; however, she could not find a job because she did not have a high school diploma, which was required everywhere she inquired. She applied for food stamps, and the Department of Social Services sent her to the “unemployment office” (P1A-P29) to help her look for work. She was told that, unless she could find a full-time job herself, she would have to go back to school. Since she did not have any children that required daycare, Paulette had a choice of three adult education programs to attend. Another woman in the room was planning on going to the Center, so Paulette decided to follow her.

Paulette described being reluctant at first to join the class: “I felt a little self-conscious about it, you know. Me being my age. I thought, ‘I don’t want to go to school. I’ll just go out and find me a job and that’s it.’ But when I first came here and I seen some older people here, that made me feel better. I just stayed” (P1A-P35). When the enrollment form asked what she intended to do after she completed her program of study, Paulette marked, “Get off public assistance” and wrote in the blank provided for Other

that she wanted to obtain her Commercial Driver's License (Literacy Training Information Form, 1-9-03).

## **Part 2: Guiding Identities**

In this section, I discuss the sets of current and pursued identities that are guiding Paulette's participation in the adult high school program. Table 7 lists the ways in which Paulette referred to herself during interviews, and what was striking to me was how rarely she referred to herself at all. The terms that are listed came from targeted questions (e.g., What are three words you would use to describe yourself? How do you describe yourself as a reader?). If not verbose, Paulette was consistent in how she talked about herself, and two sets of Guiding Identities emerged from the data.

**TABLE 7**

### **Paulette's Terms for Her Current Selves**

Nominatives	Adjectives
Truck driver	Soon-to-be-smart
Not a great reader	Afraid of reading sometimes
Slow learner	Always busy, constantly going

### ***Slow Learner - Great Reader***

As mentioned in Part 1, Paulette's experience in elementary, middle, and secondary school was fraught with her designation and acceptance of an identity as Slow Learner. She was assigned to special classes by her teachers and was assigned special

terms by fellow students. Her Slow Learner label as a child and her positioning as “dumb,” “stupid,” and “retarded” (P1A-P128) were still with her and served as the impetus for her pursued identity as a Great Reader. As I discuss more in Chapter V, all the participants had understandings of reading, learning, and intelligence that were intertwined, but Paulette’s were especially so, to the point of being for the most part indistinguishable. Note the way she described being smart in the following exchange:

A71 What does soon to be smart mean?

P71: Soon to be smart? Because I’m reading. I’m going to read and read and read and learn and teach myself these words, so I can be smarter.

A72 What does being smart mean? What does that mean to you?

P72 Being smart is to have no problem with reading. You can pick up a magazine or a newspaper and know every word you read.

On the one hand, Paulette described reading as being necessary to become smarter (P71), but then she defined being smart itself as having no problem with reading (P72). This apparent discrepancy is reconciled, however, when other comments are brought to bear—namely, that Paulette is a firm believer that the best way to become a good reader is just to “read, read, read” (P1A-P83). In this context, reading more equals becoming a better reader and becoming smarter, because they are in essence the same thing.

But smart does not always equal being a good reader. When pressed, Paulette identified other areas that help to define “smart.”

A75 ...is reading the only thing that you need to be smart?

P75 Well, math, too.

A76 Okay. Anything else?

P76 You need to be smart in cooking sewing, even driving now days. (P1B)

The context provided by other comments suggests that Paulette was actually talking about two kinds of “smart” here: what the group came to call being “booksmart” and having “common sense” (GI2). Booksmart had to do with the kind of intelligence and ability that was related to reading; common sense had to do with knowing how to do more practical things. Paulette described “booksmart” as “You can read something and it will stay with you” (GI2-416-417). She described herself as having common sense:

A8: You discussed with the others the difference between being “booksmart” and having common sense. Which do you have?

P8: Common sense. I know more things than what the book tells me. Things like driving, taking care of someone, cooking—common sense about cooking. I think I can get more out of me than from reading it in a book—like when it comes to cooking, driving, or, like I said, taking care of somebody. Or even planting a flower. The other day I get a magazine in the mail—it was like a flower magazine, it was telling how to plant a flower. I tossed it! You just throw a bulb in the ground! You don’t need to read about that! (P3B)

Paulette seemed to value common sense over being booksmart in this statement, but there are several other statements they seem to conflict with the sentiment expressed here.

When I asked her whether she would rather have common sense or be booksmart, Paulette replied, “I want to be booksmart” (GI2). When I asked her what she meant when she described herself as soon-to-be-smart, she said, ““Booksmart. I just want to read better. I just want to pick up a book, read it, and understand it. Instead of having to read a paragraph two or three times to get to where I can understand it” (P3B-A11).

Two sub-themes from the data emerged related to why being “booksmart”—becoming a Great Reader—was so important to Paulette, and these cut across a variety of domains. These are *frustration* and *embarrassment*. First of all, Paulette often experienced frustration when she read. The task of reading was so arduous that Paulette found herself, often as not, giving up: “I want to read better, and there’s some books I do pick up that I want to read, and I’ll get frustrated and I’ll throw it down and I won’t pick it up no more” (GI2A-345). Most of the time, the problem was with words: “Just like Megan said, you know, there’s some big words in that history book, too. You can sit there and try to pronounce them words. You can forget it. I just want to throw the book through a wall sometimes” (GI3-218). And because she became frustrated, Paulette tried to avoid reading that was difficult for her:

Well, I’m reading a novel now, and the words are a whole lot easier, except some words. I’d like to read, like Feathers said, mysteries, Stephen King’s. I mean, they’re really hard books to read. And I’d like to pick one up and just start reading it and know every word in it—no problem—and get through that book without having to put it down and not understand a word of it when I’m trying to read it. ‘Cause some of the words are really, really hard and you don’t understand them. If you’re reading a book, and you’re having to look up every other word, it’s not gonna make no sense to you. (GI2A-303)

She mentioned another book she would like to read, one by an author she saw on a talk show. She even checked the public library and found out there were two books by the author available. But she had not checked it out yet: “I want to learn to read better before I read it. They have two books by her and right now I want to learn to read--like I said just read better before I start checking it out. Because they are fairly thick books” (P1B-P48).

Besides feeling frustration, Paulette also experienced *embarrassment*. So much so that the expectation of embarrassing herself led to a fear of reading something in public. “I get embarrassed at that because I go to read a word and thinking that is the word, but it’s not because I have problems with similar words” (P1B-P54). Paulette spoke of being embarrassed in community agencies and even by her own daughter:

P69 What I mean by that is when I go to a so-called business office--don’t matter which one it is, like, let’s say Social Services--and they hand you a paper and ask you to read it. I’m afraid to read it because I’m afraid I might not know none of the words on it and I’m afraid to ask them, “Could you read it for me because I don’t understand it?” So I don’t. That’s why I’m afraid to read sometimes when I’m in a public place. (P1B)

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P55: Even my daughter corrects me when I’m reading. I’ll sit and read to her something out of a letter or something like her Grandma sends her or sends us, and she’ll have to reread it because I didn’t read it right. I want to open a letter up one of these days from my Grandma or my step-Mother or my Mother, and I want to learn it where I can read every word without no problem; without anybody saying, “No, that’s wrong. It’s this.” Instead of somebody correcting me. I think that would be a whole lot better that way. (P1B)

It seemed to matter to Paulette that others judged her reading and found her wanting—and she wanted to “show them.” In talking about how good she wanted to get at reading, she said, “If I go out on the street, and somebody comes up to me and asks me to read something, I want to show them I can read it” (P3A-P13). Earning her high school diploma would also be a marker: “It will mean that it won’t embarrass me no more when I have to read something in public. It will make me feel a whole better” (P1B-P55). It

would also “show them I can do it” (P3A-P13). When I asked who she wanted to show, Paulette specifically mentioned her daughter and future grandchildren.

Like Shelley and Megan, then, Paulette operated within a figured world in which education was afforded certain status. Unlike them, Paulette talked less about education per se and more about reading, in particular. Getting her high school diploma proved she was a Great Reader, and that’s what she wanted people to know about her. Of course, being a Great Reader also signaled other assumptions that could be made about her intelligence—about her booksmarts—and those were valued as well.

### ***Employed Worker - Worker With Options***

Unlike Shelley and Megan, Paulette had been in the program for several years prior to the study. When she first entered the program, her focus was on getting a full-time job. She had discovered the existence of the Center at the employment office, where she had been sent by the Department of Social Services when she applied for food stamps. At the time, she held a part-time job but was unable to obtain full-time employment. She explained, “At the time, I really needed a job, and no one would hire me because I didn’t have a high school diploma. And I wanted to better myself and get my high school diploma so I could get a better job, a better paying job” (P1A-P49). However, about a year and a half prior to my first interview with her, Paulette did find a job that did not require a high school diploma. Her brother-in-law worked for a company that subcontracted mail-carrying services for the post office. His employer needed more drivers and agreed to hire Paulette, as long as she worked on getting her commercial

driver certifications so she would be able to drive a variety of trucks. By my last interview with Paulette, she had obtained her Level C and Level B certifications and was preparing for her Level A test. On the one hand, Paulette's current job fulfilled a "dream" (P3A-P3) of hers: "My daddy was a truck-driver. He passed away about two, three years ago, and I've always wanted to be like my daddy. And I want to follow in his footsteps" (P3A-P3). However, she did not see her job as being stable and wanted to continue working on her high school diploma so that she could position herself to be employable in the event she lost her current job:

The goals that brought me into the class was to get my GED so I, or a high school diploma, that's what I'm trying to get--in case my job goes down I'll need a high school diploma. 'Cause I've already been looking in the paper, and most jobs has GED or high school diploma, and I have to have it. And, my boss man is really, really, really old. *Old* man. And he's not able to get around, and my job might run out. He might fold under and say, "Hey, I'm tired, I'm old, I can't do this no more." So, I need a high school diploma. (P2A-P5)

Thus, besides carrying symbolic weight, the high school diploma was a very practical tool to realize a vision of herself as a worker who could be flexible in finding work.

### **Discussion of Key Findings for Research Question 1**

In this section I discuss the cross-case themes that serve as findings for the question: *What are the identities guiding participants' involvement in adult basic education?* Although the in-depth profile permitted an exploration of the guiding identities of each participant (summarized in Table 8), examining the patterns that surface across the cases allows a more robust understanding of what kinds of identity work



brought these adult intermediate readers into an adult education setting. There are three key findings discussed in this section.

**TABLE 8**

**Summary of Guiding Identity Sets for Each Participant**

SHELLEY Current - Pursued	MEGAN Current - Pursued	PAULETTE Current - Pursued
Worker Who Provides - Worker Who Profits  Mama- Educated Mother  Country Girl- Beautiful, Smart and Confident	Good Mom - Someone That Kyle Can Depend On  Flawed Megan - Improved Megan	Employed Worker - Worker With Options  Slow Learner- Great Reader

**Finding 1. Both pursued identities and current identities motivated participation in the ABE program and seemed to work together in related sets (e.g., Mama – Educated Mother). These related sets captured the idiosyncratic meanings of self fashioned within the sociocultural context of each participant’s life.**

Pursued identities were projections of selves into the future that ultimately spurred participation in the adult education class. These pursued identities turned out to be rather abstract notions of self and were given meaning and strength through the integral linkages they had with participants’ current identities. Current identities provided a certain motivational impetus in two ways: by serving as the base from which

the pursued identity was launched and by providing a clear point of reference when the pursued identity itself was vague.

The current identity served as the base from which the pursued identity was launched by acting either as an identity to resist or an identity to elaborate. *Identities to resist* included Megan's sense of herself as a Flawed Megan and Paulette's identity as a Slow Learner. These identities were used as self-directed symbols (Holland et al., 1998) of what they did *not* want to be in their future, and the pursued identities that emerged from them (i.e., Improved Megan and Great Reader) were their mirror image. The negative social positioning imbued within the current identities was contested and negated—i.e., reversed, as in a mirror—in the images they had of and wanted for themselves in the future. *Identities to elaborate* included Shelley's Worker Who Provides and Mama, Megan's Good Mom, and Paulette's Employed Worker. The associated pursued identities (i.e., Worker Who Profits, Educated Mother, Someone That Kyle Can Depend On, and Worker With Options, respectively) were ones that captured enhanced versions of current senses of self. Participants wanted to keep these identities more or less intact but add to them in significant ways. Shelley's current identity as Country Girl had elements of both types: Shelley resisted the way Country Girl was perceived by others but yet treasured what it meant to her. She resisted others' designations and wanted to be Beautiful, Smart, and Confident as a way to buttress the value she thought should be afforded to her Country Girl identity.

Besides launching the pursued identities, the current identities also motivated participation by serving as a reference point when the vision of the pursued identity

became blurry. For instance, Shelley desired to be a Worker Who Profits, and, although she knew what that meant in terms of personal fulfillment and income, she was not clear about what kind of job or career she might have as a Worker Who Profits. She did know from being a Worker Who Provides what kind of life that entailed, and she used these experiences as self-directed symbols to motivate her to stay focused on her education. Sometime the current identity provided a reference point for affirmation: Megan was a Good Mom already, and she drew comfort from the fact that she was able to provide love and laughter for her son, even if she was unable to provide other (material) things for him. In similar ways, aspects of Shelley's Country Girl and Mama identities and of Paulette's Employed Worker identity acted to affirm themselves as capable and worthy individuals, even as they were pursuing new expressions of being.

Whether in regards to current or to pursued identities, the ways in which the three women involved in the study spoke about themselves throughout the data collection process evoked a different way of discussing their "identities" than I had originally anticipated. Better Mom and Good Worker were in line with my assumptions; Country Girl and Someone That Kyle Can Depend On were not. The way the identities were ultimately articulated, though, seemed to capture the way the individual had "played jazz" (Holland & Lachicotte, 2007, p. 135) with the social and cultural models she had to work within. Rather than being prescribed or dictated, these identities, with varying degrees of intentionality, were constructed as unique responses to the often powerful forces that shaped them.

**Finding 2. Guiding Identities for participation in the adult education program were impacted most heavily by positional attributions related to being an “educated person,” which required at a minimum having a high school diploma.**

The very fact that participants had entered an educational setting signifies that they saw being educated as key to the identity work in which they were engaged. It became clear, however, that it was not just the state of being educated that was significant; perhaps equally so was the status of being an “educated person.” Shelley first introduced this term as “educated people” in her last interview when she was describing what it meant to be an Educated Mother. She explained that being an educated person (and mother) is about having a college degree and “being sophisticated. It’s--you’re tasteful, you’re reserved, you know your stuff” (S3B-S3). Shelley’s words signaled an operating cultural model about being educated that was shared, with some degree of variation, by the other participants. Levinson and Holland (1996) explain that “[a]nthropologists have long recognized the existence of culturally specific and relative definitions of the educated person (e.g., Hansen 1979:28, 39, 44; Borofsky 1987; Lave in press) ....Distinct societies, as well as ethnic groups and microcultures within those societies, elaborate the cultural practices by which particular sets of skills, knowledges, and discourses come to define the fully ‘educated’ person” (p. 2). Bartlett and Holland (2002) explain that the educated person is figured in Brazil, for instance, as someone who “has acquired considerable book knowledge” and/or as someone who behaves with “manners and proper comportment” (p. 14).

For the three women in this study, the key characteristic of an educated person was that she possessed some kind of credential that signaled that she was indeed “educated.” For Paulette and Megan, the credential was a high school diploma. For Shelley, it was a college degree. Without this credential (however it was understood), each of them experienced something akin to “literacy shaming” (Bartlett and Holland, 2002; Fingeret and Drennon, 1997). Shelley seemed to express what each of them knew unquestioningly: “Without an education, what good are you?” (S3B-S3). However, Shelley was also the most cognizant of the social structuring that revolved around education, contesting how she was positioned by others while at the same time assimilating the stigma of being uneducated to such an extent that it affected her deeply:

I’m a country girl and I’m not ashamed to say that I’m a country girl. I’m proud of how I grew up and my roots and the things that I experienced in my life. I’m not ashamed. I’m not ashamed of my Momma or my Daddy because they were alcoholics. And I came back to school for *me*, for the way that I feel on the inside about *myself* not because I think that I need to improve myself. You know, and that angers me to hear anybody in this world say--to look at another person and say-- just because they quit school, or just because they may have gotten pregnant at an early age, to look at them and say, “Oh, look at how poor and pitiful they are. They’re so uneducated.” You know, “They’re never going to get--”. Because really all people are the same. All people put their pants on the same. And there’s no such thing as one person being better than another. And that’s something that my great-grandma showed me and taught me. (S2B-22)

In addition to her other markers of low status, Shelley perceived that she had been figured by others as “uneducated” and, thus, additionally, lesser. She fought this imposed positioning again and again, acting in interviews as if she did not care and insisting that “all people are the same” (S2B-S22), that “every single one of us are equal” (GI3-298), and that you just need to “be yourself or you can’t be anybody” (S2B-S20).

This was a consistent theme, whether she was talking about people from different races, advice she gave to her children, or about herself. It is a prime example of the orchestration of voices—those of her great-grand-mother versus those that judge—in an attempt to fashion her own identity. The voice of her great-grandmother had done much to offset the negative positioning that being a “poor ole county girl,” who had children early, and whose own parents were alcoholics, afforded her, yet it had not erased it. Shelley had so internalized the negative positioning of the figured world of the uneducated person that she judged herself, and found herself wanting. She believed her statements like “You just come back to school for you. You don’t come back to school because you think that’s going to impress anybody” (S2B), but impressing the part of her self that had absorbed and adopted the judgments of others was the daunting task she had set for herself.

For Megan, her pursued identity of an Improved Megan was a resistant vision to her sense of self as a Flawed Megan, who was flawed mainly in terms of how she felt she was viewed in a culture that figured the educated person as one of greater rank and status than the undereducated. Entering the program and being told she was at the “sixth-grade level” forced Megan to confront her status in a way that she had really only begun to do when Kyle was born. Like Paulette, she wanted to “show them,” and she realized her original goal of obtaining a GED would not carry the symbolic weight she thought she needed to cast herself as an educated person. She changed her goal to earning a high school diploma. In fact, all three women had entered the program with the GED on their minds and then switched to the high school diploma after conversations either with the

teachers or with representatives at the “unemployment office.” The GED would not tell the world what they wanted to tell it and, thus, transform them into the persons they wanted to be; only a high school diploma would do the job, and then maybe a college degree.

**Finding 3. Being recognized as “an educated person” was seen as the way to enhance certain role-specific identities (e.g., as mothers, workers) as well as those figured by larger structural forces (e.g., gender and class).**

The identities motivating participation in the program were figurative identities (Holland et al., 1998), in the sense that they captured culturally-imbued notions related to their roles within certain domains, namely the family and the workplace. All three women understood being a mother as requiring “maternal omnipotence” (Luttrell, 1997, p. 104), reflecting a similar cultural model for mothering that Luttrell discovered in working with urban, white women from Philadelphia and rural, black women from North Carolina. They felt solely responsible for the well-being of their children, and their sense of self in their mother role suffered when they were unable to meet this expectation. They especially felt their worth as mother slip a notch or two when they could not support what they felt to be the educational needs of their children as fully as they desired, and especially when their children noticed. They felt their authority and deserved respect as mother was undermined. All participants saw education as the way to enhance their status as mother.

Similarly, participants believed that adding education into the mix would affect their role as worker in the domain of the workplace. “Factory” work was contrasted with “office” work, and these simple terms were used casually to reference a simplified version of how the world of work operated. In essence, being an “uneducated person” relegated one to factory jobs: jobs that required manual labor, were unfulfilling, and paid little. Being an “educated person,” however, meant “sitting in the office making *fine* money” (Paulette; GI2A-347). The women in the study believed that, if they could just obtain the education they needed, they would have access to the “office” jobs they so coveted.

In addition to the figurative identities related to motherhood and work guiding participants’ pursuit of education, participants expressed identities that were more positional in nature and outside of specific adult roles. This is explicit in Megan’s pursuit of an Improved Megan and Shelley’s aspiration to be Beautiful, Smart, and Confident and embedded within Paulette’s desire to be a Great Reader. These positional identities had to do with power and status they experienced mainly in relation to being poor and being women. Speaking from the feminist poststructural perspective, Tisdell (2002) emphasizes that examining each of these alone would miss what examining the intersection of them in each person’s life permits. Megan mentioned repeatedly the “\$236” she had to live on each month once she pressed charges on her boyfriend (with whom she resided) and had to move out. Whereas she had worked for over 20 years prior to having Kyle, she now found that not having a high school diploma and having to pay for child care made employment almost impossible. She received help for housing



through funds provided through Housing and Urban Development (HUD) but still found the \$236 from the Work First program inadequate to make her monthly payments.

Furthermore, because she was poor and was required to be in class every day in order to obtain her Work First payments, she found advocating for herself legally in pursuit of child support and her custody battle imperiled. She had to rely on pro bono legal services, which meant her cases did not receive priority, and she had to make appointments around her class schedule, which further limited her access.

At different times Megan spoke of having to borrow money to purchase gas in order to go to her aunt's funeral, of not taking her son trick-or-treating because she had no gas money, of having to borrow money from her father for the first time in her life in order to purchase another car after hers broke down completely. Shelley shared similar situations, summing up after a particular bad spell, "You know as well as I do, that if you're poor, you're just going to stay that way" (FN-12-14-06). She was convinced that the only answer was to get a college education, yet she was unsure how she would pay for it—especially since she was hoping her children would be able to go to college. Perhaps because Paulette was working during the time of the study and had no interactions with DSS, she spoke hardly at all about her financial circumstances. However, her rare mentions of economic concerns from her past, namely having to give up a child because she could not afford to take care of him, speaks volumes about the interrelationship between gender and poverty and sheds an interpretive light on Paulette's need to proactively position herself for on-going employment.

However participants fractured themselves to talk about their selves, the way out or up was education. The women bought into the dominant cultural model that education is the vehicle through which lives are improved and new persons are made. After I had identified the sets of Guiding Identities for each participant in the analysis stage of the study, I engaged in an interesting exercise to see how notions of education and the educated person played out with each of the identified sets. Indeed, becoming and educated person was the answer to the equation:

SHELLEY: Mama + Educated Person = Educated Mother  
 Worker Who Provides + Educated Person = Worker Who Profits  
 Country Girl + Educated Person = Beautiful, Smart, and Confident

MEGAN: Good Mom + Educated Person = Somebody That Kyle Can Depend On  
 Flawed Megan + Educated Person = Improved Megan

PAULETTE: Employed Worker + Educated Person = Worker With Options

The value-added of being recognized as an educated person as a part of each identity that mattered to them was significant. An important footnote here is that the addend of Educated Person was not necessarily the only new component that participants felt needed to be added to their current identities in order to fully realize the pursued identity. For instance, the identity of Healthy Person could be thrown into the string to produce an Improved Megan, because this was the original context in which Megan introduced the term for her pursued identity. In every case, however, the addition of the Educated Person—with both its symbolic (in terms of cultural capital it wielded) and practical (in terms of serving as a gateway to jobs) implications—was a key part of the equation.

Only Paulette's identity set of Slow Learner –Great Reader failed to fit unproblematically into the form of the equation. In one sense, Paulette's pursuit of being a Great Reader was integrally tied to her more limited range of literacy practices when she originally entered the program. It was similar in this way to the pursuit of beginning readers to be recognized as "literate people" (Fingeret & Drennon, 1997). In other ways, however, it reflected Megan and Shelley's pursuit of being recognized as an Educated Person. A Great Reader, as Paulette talked about it, was not just someone who read well; she was someone who had a high school diploma and knew a lot. In essence, how Paulette described her pursued identity of a Great Reader was itself an expression of being an Educated Person. Whereas for the other participants, being an Educated Person enhanced other identities that were more salient to them, for Paulette becoming an Educated Person was not an add-on. It was itself the essence of the identity work.

### **Overview of Chapter V**

The focus of this chapter has been to elucidate the role of identity work in the motivations of participants to return to an educational setting. The purpose in exploring participants' current and pursued identities was to get at the core motivations that are driving participation so that the meanings ascribed to that participation could be interpreted within that frame. In Chapter V, other theorized factors in how participants might attribute relevance—how learners understand reading and the role it plays in their lives—are explored in order to see if indeed they are pertinent in attributions of relevance and, if so, how.

**CHAPTER V**  
**READING IN LIFE:**  
**FINDINGS FOR RESEARCH QUESTION 2**

**Orientation to the Chapter**

The intent of this investigation was to explore the relevance that adult intermediate readers attribute to reading-related instruction in the ABE classroom in terms of who they are and who they want to be. Specific questions guiding the study were:

1. What are the identities guiding participants' involvement in adult basic education?
2. What understandings do participants have about reading and the role it plays in their lives?
3. How are participants' perceptions of the relevance of reading-related instruction connected to their identity work and to the role of reading in their lives?

Understanding the identity work that brought the three participants into the program was the first step in answering this question, and I discussed this work in Chapter IV. The purpose of this chapter is to present the findings for the second research question.

Whereas Chapter IV presented each individual participant as a case, this chapter is aimed at a cross-case analysis, exploring themes that play out across all the individual cases.

During the analysis, it became clear that the role of reading in participants' lives varied in significant ways, depending upon whether they were talking about reading that occurred outside of a school setting or inside such a setting. Hull & Shultz (2002) use the terms "in-school" versus "out-of-school" to discuss differences in literacy practices, so I have adopted the same nomenclature for this chapter. In the first section of the chapter, I examine out-of-school reading practices; in the second section I examine in-school reading practices. Using a literacy-as-practices sociocultural lens, I explore both what participants did visibly with reading (e.g., where they were when they read, who was with them, what they read) and the underlying meanings (e.g., purposes, values, and taken-for-granted ways of doing things) related to these activities. In the last section of the chapter, I discuss in more depth the following key findings:

- **Finding 4:** The types of texts and purposes for reading in out-of-school reading practices were markedly different from those related to in-school reading practices.
- **Finding 5:** The cultural model of out-of-school reading was different in key ways from the cultural model of in-school reading.
- **Finding 6:** Participants identified their limited vocabulary as being a barrier to understanding text, but they did not think to expect or request vocabulary instruction.
- **Finding 7:** The participants in the study were strategic readers, both in school and out of school, but they viewed strategy use in negative terms.

- **Finding 8:** Participants' past and current out-of-school reading practices influenced greatly their perceptions of themselves as readers, prior to entering class. Once in class, their in-school practices led them to refine their self-evaluations.

### **Out-of-School Reading Practices**

My purpose in including in the study an examination of participants' out-of-school reading practices was to use the findings to inform my understandings of participants' self-perceived notions of the role reading played in their lives. I speculated that how participants engaged with reading out of school—and their understandings of that engagement--would impact the extent to which they viewed reading as being something that needed to be a focus of their instruction in school. The data used in the analysis of the out-of-school reading practices were from individual interviews, group interviews, and the Reading Diary.

Barton and Hamilton (1998) suggest two ways to talk about a “reading practice.” One approach is to look at the larger social practice in which reading is being used—for example, Paying Bills or Reading to Children. The other way is to focus on the texts themselves—for example, Reading Bills or Reading Children's Books. Because I did not observe the out-of-school practices myself and because the data was “fuller” around the second, text-focused approach, I found this approach ultimately to be the most useful for my purpose. However, even though I framed reading practices around the text-type, I did explore the underlying purposes, values, meanings, and relationships involved, which were not attended to in other studies that qualify their use of the text-based frame for

discussing literacy practices (e.g., Purcell-Gates et al, 2002; Bingman & Ebert, 2000).

The most salient findings related to this purpose came when I looked at a combination of the *types of texts* read, for what *purposes*, and with what *strategies*.

### **Types of Text**

To identify the types of texts that participants read, I started with the items listed on the Reading Diary, which students kept for a week. I then analyzed the transcripts from the second Group Interview, in which we discussed reading in the lives of participants. Finally, I reviewed all the remaining interview data for types of texts mentioned by participants and added additional mentions to compile the final list. In keeping with Barton and Hamilton's (1998) approach to studying literacy practices, I first looked at texts in terms of where participants were when they read texts. After the initial analysis, I was struck by the minimal mention of work-related items. Yet I knew that all the participants had rich work histories. I wondered what kinds of texts they had needed to read and for what purposes—and how successful the participants thought they had been with these. I followed up in the last set of individual interviews with a question asking participants to recall each job they had worked in and think about all the texts they had to read for that job. In the end, three out-of-school domains in which participants accessed written text emerged: home, community, and work. Table 9 lists all the texts mentioned in all three domains of outside reading.

I doubt that these lists are exhaustive or all-inclusive. What they do provide is further evidence that individuals whom policymakers and funders perceive to lack

proficient literacy skills, engage nevertheless in a broad array of reading practices (Heath, 1983; Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines, 1988; Merrifield et al., 1997; Bingman & Ebert, 2000).

To fully understand what participants were able to do with these texts, however, I found it helpful to look at their purposes for reading each.

**TABLE 9**

**Texts Read Outside of School**

Home	Community	Work
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bills</li> <li>• Brochures</li> <li>• Cereal Box</li> <li>• Certification Preparation Manuals</li> <li>• Checkbook</li> <li>• Children’s Books</li> <li>• Children’s Homework</li> <li>• Clock</li> <li>• Cookbook</li> <li>• Creative Writing Assignments</li> <li>• Dictionary</li> <li>• Direct TV Guide</li> <li>• DVD Jacket</li> <li>• Information Books (Sex Ed, Parenting, Knitting)</li> <li>• Legal Documents (Insurance, Lease)</li> <li>• Magazine</li> <li>• Medical Dictionary</li> <li>• Newspaper (Local)</li> <li>• Novel</li> <li>• Poetry (self-written)</li> <li>• Personal Letters/Notes</li> <li>• Prescription Labels</li> <li>• Product Labels (Names, Directions, Ingredients, Recipes)</li> <li>• Recipes (Own Collection)</li> <li>• Religious texts (Bible, Wicca texts)</li> <li>• Sales Flyers/ Coupons</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Billboard</li> <li>• Church Newsletter/Prayer List</li> <li>• Magazine</li> <li>• Menu</li> <li>• Music/Hymn Books</li> <li>• Newspaper (Local)</li> <li>• Novel</li> <li>• Product Labels (Names, Ingredients)</li> <li>• Road Signs</li> <li>• Sales Flyers/Coupons</li> <li>• Social Service “Papers”</li> <li>• Store Signs</li> <li>• Sunday School Books</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Certification Preparation Manuals</li> <li>• Certification Tests</li> <li>• Children’s Books</li> <li>• Color Names</li> <li>• Dictionary</li> <li>• Directions At Work Station</li> <li>• Disciplinary Forms</li> <li>• Envelopes</li> <li>• Flyers/Posters On Upcoming Events</li> <li>• Food Labels</li> <li>• Forms</li> <li>• Love Letters</li> <li>• Medical Charts</li> <li>• Medicine Labels</li> <li>• Menus</li> <li>• Names Of Chemicals</li> <li>• Newspaper (Local)</li> <li>• Numbers/Lists Of Numbers</li> <li>• Paycheck</li> <li>• Policy Handbooks/ Manuals</li> <li>• Recipes</li> <li>• Register Tape</li> <li>• Retirement/Pension Plans (e.g., 401-K)</li> <li>• Scales</li> <li>• Signs</li> <li>• Time Clock</li> <li>• Work Orders</li> <li>• Written Notes</li> </ul>



## Purposes

To analyze the purposes for which the adult intermediate readers in the study read, I used the framework of social functions proposed by Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines (1988), which was an elaborated version of what Heath (1983) used in her own study. Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines (1988) identified 6 categories of purpose for which individuals read. Table 10 provides an overview of the definitions of each.

**TABLE 10**

**Purposes for Reading (Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines, 1988)**

<b>Purpose</b>	<b>Definitions</b>
Instrumental Reading	Reading to gain information for meeting practical needs, dealing with public agencies, and scheduling daily life (p. 125)
Social-Interactional Reading	Reading to gain information pertinent to building and maintaining social relationships (p. 132)
News-Related Reading	Reading to gain information about third parties or distant events, or reading to gain information about local, state, and national events (p. 137)
Recreational Reading	Reading during leisure time or in planning recreational events (p. 139)
Confirmational Reading	Reading to check or confirm facts or beliefs, often from archival materials stored and retrieved only on special occasions (e.g., birth certificates, social security cards, school report cards, personal attendance records for work) (p. 147)
Critical/Educational Reading	Reading to fulfill educational requirements of school and college courses; reading to increase one's abilities to consider and/or discuss political, social, aesthetic, or religious knowledge; reading to educate oneself (p. 152)

Two variations were suggested by the data. One was the addition to the Critical/Educational category of the reading of material in order to teach someone else (e.g., one's child). For instance, both Shelley and Megan read to their children in order to teach them either about reading or content related to the subject of the book (e.g., sex education).

The other addition was of a whole category: Religious/Spiritual Reading. Although the Critical/Educational category included reference to religious knowledge, it did not seem to capture the reading of prayer lists, hymn books, Wicca spell books and other material for the purpose of actually participating in a religious or spiritual practice, whether with others or individually. Thus, I added a seventh category, described in Table 11.

**TABLE 11**

**Additional Purpose for Reading**

Religious/Spiritual Reading	Reading to participate in a communal or individual religious or spiritual practice; reading to deepen/expand own beliefs and understandings related to these practices
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In attempting to categorize participants' purposes for reading, I found Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines' (1988) own description of the difficulty of doing so relevant:

It is important to emphasize that the categories ....do not necessarily reflect the real world, nor do they reflect the (con)textual tying together that takes place in everyday life. We may say that reading cases in criminal law is "confirmational" because one is reading to check or confirm facts about the law in archival material, while at the same time it may be "social-interactional" as one reads to help a fellow prisoner with a particular case. It is undoubtedly "critical/educational," as one's understanding and ability to discuss the cases one is studying are enhanced by reading, and in another sense it is "instrumental" in that it is reading to gain information for meeting the practical needs of everyday life....Thus, in focusing upon the categories, an openness of meaning is essential, for at any one time multiple interpretations are possible for any specific activity, and the possibilities for different interpretations are created over time. (p. 124)

What I found interesting is that much of the overlap in categories was defined by the specific reading events and not by the general text-type itself. For instance, at one point *reading an information book* was a Social-Interactional activity for Shelley because it

was part of a larger practice of reading together in the evenings—which she characterized as a “mother-daughter thing” (GI2B-101). However, the choice of the particular book *Me, Myself, and I* served a Critical/Educational purpose, i.e., to teach her teenager about puberty. For Megan, reading the information book *Sensational Sex* with her boyfriend served Recreational and Social-Interactional purposes whereas reading about colic in a parenting book served a primarily Instrumental purpose. Purpose, then, was situated within a particular context of text, actors, intent, and meaning and could not be predicted from the type of text itself. Table 12 summarizes all the participants’ purposes for reading identified in the study.

Although participants engaged in a variety of reading practices for a variety of purposes, the majority of the purposes related to immediate and practical needs. A full 71% of all out-of-school reading purposes were Instrumental. The next most prominent category was Recreational reading, comprising 24% of participants’ reading. Megan and Shelley reported reading novels regularly prior to entering the program, while Paulette began reading novels since joining. The third most frequent purpose for reading was Critical/Educational, which represented 17% of all the reading purposes. Each of the participants had prepared or was currently preparing to pass certification tests either as a Certified Nursing Assistant or as a certified commercial driver. Some of this preparation had taken or was taking place both in the workplace and in the home. Table 13 provides participant examples of each of these categories.

**TABLE 12****Summary of All Participants' Purposes for Reading**

Domain	Instrumental	Social- Interactional	News	Recreational	Confirma- tional	Critical/ Educational	Religious/ Spiritual
Home/ Community	36* / 60**	6 / 60	3 / 60	22 / 60	1 / 60	13 / 60	5 / 60
	60%	10%	5%	37%	2%	22%	8%
Work	36* / 42**	2 / 42	2 / 42	2 / 42	0 / 42	4 / 35	0 / 35
	86%	5%	5%	5%	0%	11%	0%
Total	72 / 102	8 / 102	5 / 102	24 / 102	1 / 102	17 / 102	5 / 102
	71%	8%	5%	24%	1%	17%	5%

\*Derived by adding together all reading practices (defined by type of text read) which fell into this category per participant and then adding the totals together. Some reading practices were placed in multiple categories, per comments by participants.

\*\*Derived by adding together all the reading practices (defined by type of text read) listed for each participant. Again, since some reading practices were placed in more than one category, the total percentage does not add to 100.

Although an analysis of the actual texts themselves that students read outside of school was not included in the study, comments from participants and my own familiarity with the texts raises a striking phenomenon. Texts read for these Instrumental needs, which comprised 71% of all out-of-school reading purposes, tended to be short chunks of text, ranging from words/word lists and/or numbers (e.g., product names, room numbers, ingredients, menus, signs, prayer list, amount due) to short phrases and sentences (e.g., billboards, dictionaries) to brief paragraphs and/or enumerated sequences (e.g., product directions, recipes, how to plant a bulb). Connected text of multiple paragraphs comprised a relatively small percentage of the reading materials they regularly confronted. It was when texts became lengthy, complex, and laden with content with

**TABLE 13**

**Participant Examples of the Three Most Dominant Out-of-School Reading Purposes**

Participant	Instrumental		Recreational		Critical/Educational	
	HOME/ COMMUNITY	WORK	HOME/ COMMUNITY	WORK	HOME/ COMMUNITY	WORK
Shelley	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Read cereal box nutrition label to find the number of calories in a serving</li> <li>▪ Read article on plant care in a magazine to see if there was something she could use</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Read policy handbook to learn rules and practices</li> <li>▪ Read numbers and identifying labels on packages and yarn spindles to find the right box or correct color of yarn</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Read a newspaper feature article on local bear hunters to satisfy her curiosity</li> <li>▪ Read <u>Gone with the Wind</u> with her daughter to share a favorite book</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Read children's books to youngsters while babysitting to entertain them</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Read <i>Me, Myself, and I</i> to help daughter learn about gender issues</li> <li>▪ Read daughter's homework assignments to make sure she's on the right track</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Read Certified Nursing Assistant textbooks to prepare for exam</li> <li>▪ Read test questions and instructions for C.N.A. test</li> </ul>
Megan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Read product label directions to prepare frozen dinners</li> <li>▪ Read signs in grocery store to look for sale items and to find the aisle with rice</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Read directions to start machines at furniture factory</li> <li>▪ Read about each department to share in employee orientations as trainer in factory</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Read Direct TV guide to see when a repeat show of her favorite soap opera came on</li> <li>▪ Read horoscope in newspaper to see what the day's predictions were</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Not mentioned</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Read children's books aloud to help her son with oral vocabulary</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Not mentioned</li> </ul>
Paulette	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Read cook books to find recipes for meals</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Read register tapes at McDonald's to reconcile with</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Read how-to books concerning her hobby of</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Read children's books while babysitting to amuse herself</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Read preparatory manual to qualify for a</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Read Certified Nursing Assistant Manuals and</li> </ul>

Participant	Instrumental		Recreational		Critical/Educational	
	HOME/ COMMUNITY	WORK	HOME/ COMMUNITY	WORK	HOME/ COMMUNITY	WORK
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Read sale ads “to find cheaper stuff”</li> </ul>	cash drawer <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Read recipes in a donut shop to make donuts</li> </ul>	knitting to learn how to make a pattern <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Read Laura Ingalls Wilder’s books to enjoy</li> </ul>	and the children	Class B Driver’s License <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Read local newspaper articles “to try to learn to read better”</li> </ul>	workbooks <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Read Certified Nursing Assistant test questions</li> </ul>

which participants had little familiarity (e.g., financial information, certification materials, legal terms) that all participants experienced difficulty. Otherwise, only Paulette described reading as typically being “hard” (GI2A-303) outside of school.

### **Strategies for Out-of-School Reading**

Analysis of the strategies participants used in managing reading tasks revealed two principal themes: *initial engagement strategies* and *problem-solving strategies*. Strategies for initial engagement included choosing texts which would be technologically (Reder, 1994) accessible and/or which would service certain identities. For instance, Shelley liked to read books out loud with her daughter in the evenings. I asked her at one point what she did when she came across a word she did not know. She responded that she never read a book with her daughter that she had not previewed and felt she would know most of the words. Similarly, Paulette had made the conscious decision not to read a book by a psychic she had seen on a television show even though she was very interested by what the psychic had to say. Once she found that and some other books by the author at the library, she realized that the words would be too hard, so she decided to wait until she could read better to check out the book. When she had babysat children, she had chosen easy books, on the “preschool and first-grade level” (P3B-P14) to read to them. She also reported that she was waiting until she *could* read about political issues before actually reading about them and voting. Megan tried to read a novel by an author and became frustrated with the way he wrote, so she decided never to read anything by that author again. Sometimes, participants chose the easier parts of texts to read. For

example, Paulette would read medicine labels, but only the directions, and Shelley read the policy manuals at each of her jobs, but only the sections she cared about, such as the dress code and the absentee policy.

Another sub-theme under initial engagement strategies included varying the reading approach depending on the purpose. Participants mentioned “skimming” (P1B-P37) and “skipping around” (GI2B-14) as approaches they used to find something interesting to read, especially when reading magazines and newspapers. They also turned to the specific section of interest (e.g., want ads, court dockets) with familiar texts (e.g., newspapers). Megan was the only one who mentioned using the index, but she seemed to use it regularly to look up information related to parenting. Another approach was to read a text straight from beginning to end, which they did primarily with poems, children’s books, and novels.

The second theme, *problem-solving strategies*, denoted those strategies that participants used when they encountered difficulties during a reading event. Two types of problem-solving strategies were described: word-level problem-solving approaches and text-level problem-solving approaches. When participants talked about difficulties, they were usually speaking about word-level issues. Word-level problem-solving approaches were employed either when participants did not know how to pronounce a word or when they did not understand the meaning of the word. When pronunciation was the issue, approaches included “look(ing) at the word” (M1B-A27-M27), “break(ing) it up (or down)” (GI2A-283-284), “sound(ing) it out” (GI2B-334), skipping it, or, if they felt comfortable with a person nearby and did not have identities to protect, asking



someone. Shelley used two unique strategies when reading aloud with her daughter. If she happened to come across a word she did not know, which was rare because of her care in selecting the book, she would make up a word that seemed to make sense in the sentence and keep reading. If her daughter was reading aloud and came across a word that she did not know, Shelley sometimes encouraged her to sound it out but usually just told her the word. However, if neither one of them knew the word, they would jokingly insert the word “Chupaloopa” (from *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*) and keep reading (S3B-S13).

When word meaning was the problem, the first strategy for participants was usually to ask someone they trusted who was nearby and then to try one or a combination of the following: skipping the word and continuing with reading to see if the word was important, or using a glossary or dictionary. In instances where they encountered multiple difficulties with words, they tended to abandon the text. Megan especially would also criticize the writing and blame the author for using words “the normal person doesn’t know” (GI3-163).

Sometimes participants had to address issues in comprehension that involved more than an unfamiliar word or phrase. These text-level issues arose sometimes with material in the workplace and in the community when reading about finances. Shelley had trouble understanding the materials one company gave her about 401-K plans, and Paulette experienced difficulty with the same kind of materials but also mentioned memos or notices about upcoming work events. In these situations, both women relied on listening to or watching others, usually covertly. Paulette spoke of having difficulty

reading banking information and material from social services and asking for the material to be explained. Paulette also relied on the hands-on application to help her understand recipes she had to learn when she worked in a bakery. The repetition of making the recipe and watching others helped her accomplish her cooking tasks. Other text-level issues arose when reading materials to prepare for various certification tests, such as the Commercial Driver's License (CDL) tests or the Certified Nursing Assistant (C.N.A.) test. They employed different strategies, with Shelley tending to wait until the hands-on demonstration in her C.N.A. class to make sense of what she had read in the text, Paulette trying to write out answers to questions posed in her CDL text, and Megan soliciting help from her boyfriend.

### **Cultural Model of Out-of-school Reading**

The reading practices discussed so far in this chapter serve to demonstrate the ways in which participants engaged in and with reading in their everyday lives outside of school. Through participation in these sociocultural practices, the women had drawn upon the cultural understandings available to them to develop taken-for-granted assumptions for what reading meant in the contexts of their homes, their communities, and their workplaces. It was important to examine these to gain insight into how and from what basis they were attributing relevance to their reading-related instruction. To explore participants' understandings of reading in these contexts, I used the lens of cultural models (Gee, 1992, 2001, 2004; Holland & Quinn, 1987; Rogers, 2004a), attending to simplified storylines, images and metaphors, and folk theories or

propositions that participants shared about “reading.” In looking for these, I discovered that only one metaphor was used in all the data to talk about reading. Students were much more likely to suggest taken-for-granted propositions about reading, what Quinn and Holland (1987) term “proposition-schemas” (p. 24). These are not cultural models themselves but components of cultural models, which, when pieced together (per Quinn & Holland, 1987), construct a simplified storyline that more directly reflects what they mean by “cultural model.” Themes for this section, then, are in the form of propositions. Because theorists who have used cultural models caution that, since cultural models denote broad, prototypical strokes of what things mean, idiosyncratic variations from person to person are to be expected, I was also attuned to these variations and describe any that existed under each proposition.

***Proposition 1. Adults read to get things done and to enjoy life.***

Supporting the conclusions presented in the previous section about the role of reading in participants’ lives outside of school, participants themselves spoke about how adult reading was “more realistic” (GI2B-312) than children’s reading. They made strong connections to the role of reading in helping them act as agents in their own lives. Megan expressed the role of reading in enabling adults to act independently: “Without being able to read, you don’t know what you’re eating, you don’t what you’re watching, where you’re going. You *have* to be able to read to survive in life, or you have to depend on somebody else (GI2-315, 316). The importance of reading was tied to practical tasks,

such as following the cooking directions on a package, choosing items in a grocery store, avoiding ingredients that cause allergies, managing money, and getting a good job.

Somewhat surprising, though, was the contribution of reading to participants' enjoyment of life. Important here is not just the notion that a particular reading event was enjoyable, but that, overall, reading enhanced their lives in some discernable way. The value-added of reading varied for each participant. Shelley talked about how reading supported the development of imagination and kept loneliness at bay. Megan viewed reading as something that took her away from her problems. And Paulette saw reading, when she did it well, as warding off embarrassment. Reading was not just about getting things done but about making life more pleasurable as well.

***Proposition 2. Adults make decisions about what to read.***

The data is full of references to participants taking up texts and putting them down in response to their own desires, interests, and purposes. For instance, Megan reported liking horror and mysteries, books with action. She stayed away from "love stories" (M1A-M26). But not all horror stories served her needs, as evidenced by the book on vampires she started reading and then abandoned when the language and vocabulary became too difficult. Shelley liked to read romances, biographies, and historical fiction. She "loved"(GI2B-12) to read the newspaper and follow the drama that played out in feature stories and court dockets. She did not like to read "histories," so she did not. She liked to read with her daughter and chose material that would teach important values and lessons. She did not want to be perceived as unintelligent, so she

chose material that used vocabulary she could comfortably read. At work, she did not find it necessary to read the whole policy manual, so she made choices about what sections to read. In Paulette's case, she read the *Little House on the Prairie* series because it tapped into a simple, country way of life. She tried a Stephen King book one time because she also liked mysteries, but when the vocabulary became too difficult, she put it aside. She liked to read the newspaper, but only for the want ads and to see what was going on around town. She did not like to read about the war, so she did not. When describing their out-of-school reading, then, participants put themselves in a decision-making role, choosing what to read and/or what parts to read.

***Proposition 3. Being able to pronounce words and understand their meanings is important in making sense of text.***

Participants were consistent in their mentioning of words and how vital words were to understanding what they were reading. Shelley and Megan both felt comfortable with their ability to pronounce most words, though Megan did not like to read “words with a lot of letters” (M1-M8). Their biggest difficulty with pronunciation in out-of-school reading came in reading the ingredients on products that they bought. To combat this difficulty, they had constructed a folk theory: unpronounceable ingredients were to be avoided. Megan explained, “If I can't pronounce it, it can't be good” (GI2-179), which Shelley echoed: “If I can't read them, why would I want to eat them?” (GI2-180). For Paulette, however, difficulties with pronouncing words loomed large, causing her to suffer in status with her daughter and to suffer embarrassment in public. And even when

she could pronounce words, she frequently did not know what they meant. At different points in the data collecting process, Paulette used similar phrasing and a similar storyline to talk about reading, and the words played a major role:

I'm not a great reader. I can read enough to get by with. But I'm working on doing better in my reading. The more I read the better I'm getting because I have to pronounce a lot of words or look it up in the dictionary if I don't understand it. (P1B-P1)

A good reader will sit down with a good novel, and read every page, page by page by page, and not miss one word, without having to grab a dictionary and look up a word. (GI2A-383)

[About being a "Great Reader"] Be able to pick up a medical book and know every word in that book, and understand every word in that book without having to get a dictionary to look it up. Like I do all the time. (P3B)

In addition to being able to pronounce the words in text, all three women emphasized understanding the meaning of words. Because they tended to self-select what they read, the women in the study managed to a large degree the vocabulary they were exposed to. However, they still encountered unknown words, especially Paulette, and when they talked about what made something difficult, vocabulary was a major focus of their talk.

***Proposition 4. Fast reading is usually acceptable.***

Shelley and Megan spoke on multiple occasions about having to learn to read more slowly for their academic reading, implying that before coming to school, it had served them well to read quickly. Megan explained that in her out-of-school reading, she tended to read rapidly, whether she was reading the directions on a package or reading a

novel. However, there were times she would slow down—for instance, when she misread the directions and ended up with a outcome different from what she expected or when she was at a key point in the plot and needed to follow what was happening. Shelley indicated that she tended to read quickly because she was impatient and became bored reading too long at any one time. Paulette valued reading fast, considered it an appropriate way to read in out-of-school reading, but she herself was not able to read quickly.

***Proposition 5. Having to use strategies is cause for negative emotions.***

All the participants were strategic in their reading in out-of-school contexts; however, the way they talked about the effect on the identities that were important to them was striking. Negative emotions--such as embarrassment, frustration, and irritation—often accompanied their use of problem-solving strategies, especially when these occurred in public or with individuals integrally tied up with their guiding identities. As mentioned in Chapter IV, Paulette experienced these negative emotions perhaps more strongly than any of the participants—or at least they were talked about more frequently. The help-seeking strategies she employed to get through reading tasks (e.g., asking her daughter to read a personal letter to her, asking social worker to read documents to her) came at a price, reinforcing her Slow Learner identity and causing her Great Reader dreams to take a hit. She saw the use of these strategies as a marker of how she was not the person she wanted to be. When other people were not around when Paulette was using a strategy, embarrassment was replaced with frustration. A prime

example is when Paulette wanted to “throw a book down” (GI2A-344-345) when she tired of applying strategies to make it through.

Shelley and Megan also struggled with negative emotions. For Shelley, employing a problem-solving strategy with her children threatened her sense of herself as an Educated Mother, so she tried to avoid situations in which she would experience that threat of embarrassment. She also expressed irritation just with the inconvenience of having to apply a strategy at all, saying that sometimes she was “just too busy” (S3-S13) and did not want to take the time to grab a dictionary. For Megan, irritation was the dominant result of having to apply a strategy. She was most irritated with texts comprised of long words. Unlike Shelley and Paulette, though, Megan’s negative emotions were most usually projected outwardly—to the author—and not inwardly, towards herself: she criticized the writing and the author’s style, not necessarily her own abilities.

***Proposition 6. Decisions about what one does with the contents of a piece of writing require evaluation of the writing.***

In out-of-school reading participants evaluated what they were reading based on their own folk theories about how different texts are written. For Paulette, fiction was not true; everything else was—maybe. In one sense, texts of a certain type were suspect and Paulette preferenced her own knowledge over what the text said. For instance, at one point Paulette remarked:



P: “I think I can get more out of me than from reading it in a book—like when it comes to cooking, driving, or, like I said, taking care of somebody. Or even planting a flower. The other day I get a magazine in the mail—it was like a flower magazine. It was telling how to plant a flower. I tossed it! You just throw a bulb in the ground! You don’t need to read about that! (P3B-P8)

It sounds here like Paulette is dismissive about what the knowledge expressed in print had to offer to the knowledge she has gleaned from experience. But then she continues:

P: Well, I did read part of it. It said if you want to get rid of ants, put out uncooked grits. When they eat it and then drink it, they’ll explode. I couldn’t believe it. But it was in a book, so it must be true.

A: Do you think that what you read in a book is likely to be true?

P: Not everything is true—I read some fictional stuff and those aren’t true.

A: Newspapers?

P: Yeah, most of that’s true. (P3B-P8)

It seemed to me that when Paulette had background experience to inform her decision-making, she was willing to question what she read—she knew about bulbs. However, when she did not have that experience to draw from, as with exploding ants, she tended to trust the text.

Shelley and Megan, though, were more critical and had a sense of the person behind the text. Being an author meant being human, and humans could be argued with and critiqued. As mentioned earlier, Megan was comfortable critiquing how different authors wrote, identifying favorites and dismissing others. She deduced that the lawyer background of the author John Grisham impacted the convoluted way he wrote, so she made the necessary sacrifices on her part to make it through the text (i.e., using a

dictionary) because she valued what he had to say. This kind of critique occurred whether she was talking about such things as novels or whoever was behind the naming and printing of ingredient lists on products. Shelley was not so much critical as circumspect. She explained during a group interview how she talked with her children about reading the Bible:

- S: Well, I believe it's very important to read the Bible to your kids because I think that they need to know. But the Bible--I always try to explain to the kids that --when they first found the Bible hundreds and hundreds of years ago, it wasn't in English. It was in Hebrew and Arabic, and these people that found that Bible had to translate all the words and everything else. So, I try to explain to them that there may be a possibility that not every word in the Bible--
- M: --is written in stone.
- S: Yeah, is just not absolutely, to the T, correct, because they had to interpret all of it.
- M: It's like, when you tell somebody something, when they tell it to somebody else, it's not going to be exactly the way that you told it to them. Because there's going to be things left out, things added to it.
- S: Right. So I feel if I tell my children about the Bible and the fact that it was in Hebrew and Arabic when they found it and that they did have to interpret, I think that is sending the message to them that they shouldn't just take everything literally. (GI2B-225-229)

Like Megan, Shelley believed that human fallibility affected the production of written materials, and that this fallibility needed to be considered when deciding how to interpret what was read.

## **In-School Reading Practices**

Whereas the out-of-school reading practices of participants seemed best introduced in terms of the types of texts that were read, their in-school reading practices are introduced in this section within the context of the larger classroom practices being enacted. After I identify and describe these practices, I present themes related to the *types of texts, purposes, strategies, and cultural model of in-school reading*. A discussion of the relevant differences between in-school reading and out-of-school reading follows.

### **Identifying In-School Reading Practices**

As I mentioned in Chapter I, I defined *reading-related instruction* as any program activity, whether inside or outside the classroom, that 1) involved reading written text and/or 2) included any communicative act (e.g., discussion, presentation, writing, drawing) about a written text. To analyze the reading-related instruction that occurred in the class, I first listed all activities that met the criteria described in the definition. I identified 13 activities which were either observed directly or mentioned in interviews: Orientation, Required Coursework, Viewing of 411 Videos, Creative Writing, 1-2-3 Magic, Motherhead, Parents and Children Together (PACT), Planning for Class Activities, Career Website, Personality Test, Substance Abuse Speaker, Bookmobile, and Town Meeting.

I then noted whether or not these activities might be characterized as “practices” or “events.” Drawing upon Barton & Hamilton (1998), I characterized an activity as a “practice” if it was a regular and repeated reading-related activity in the classroom with

“associated values, attitudes, feelings, and social relationships typically enacted” (p. 6) by the participants. I characterized an activity as an event if it occurred only once during the data collection period and, thus, did not enable me to get a sense of the larger social practice being enacted. I felt it was important to characterize reading-related instruction as practices or events because the data revealed an obvious distinction between the two. Furthermore, the regular and repeated activities, i.e., practices, also carried with them shared understandings among participants that had developed over time, and I thought it important to pursue more in-depth questioning about these once they were identified. I identified ten reading-related practices and three reading-related events. Table 14 identifies these and shows which of the three research participants participated in each.

The table also indicates the five domains that these activities fell within: academic-oriented, parenting-oriented, work/career-oriented, health-oriented, and program-oriented. Four of the activities fell within the academic-oriented domain, four within the parenting-oriented, two within the work/career-oriented domain, one within the health-oriented domain, and two within a program-oriented domain. The latter included activities related to Town Meetings, held monthly to share program-related information, and group planning of class meals, parties, and field trips. Eight of the ten activities identified as practices occurred within the academic-oriented and parenting-oriented domains, with all three of the activities identified as events falling within the work/career-oriented and health-oriented domains.

**TABLE 14****Observed Participation in Reading-Related Instruction**

Domain	Reading-Related Practices	Reading-Related Events	Who Participated		
			SHELLEY	MEGAN	PAULETTE
Academic-oriented	Orientation		X	X	
	Required Coursework for High School Diploma		X	X	X
	411 Viewing		X	?	?
	Creative Writing (elective)		X	X	
Parenting-oriented	1-2-3 Magic		X	X	X
	Motheread		X	X	X
	PACT			X	
	Bookmobile		X	X	X
Work/Career-oriented		Careers website	X		
		Personality test		X	
Health-oriented		Substance Abuse Speaker	X	X	
Program-oriented	Planning for Class Activities (meals, parties, field trips)		X	X	X
	Town Meetings		X	X	X

**Descriptions of Reading-Related Instructional Practices**

In this section I describe the major reading-related instructional practices identified in the data. In order to provide information about the particular practices which are referenced in later sections, I provide more in-depth description of the reading practices than I offered in the discussion of out-of-school reading practices. The majority of the data revolved around four of the ten practices identified, so these are the ones I present in some depth, sharing an overview of the “way things were done.” Two of these

are from the academic domain (Required Coursework for High School Diploma and Creative Writing) and two are from the parenting domain (Motherread and 1-2-3 Magic). Following a discussion of these four practices, I provide a summary of the remaining practices.

### ***Required Coursework for High School Diploma***

Upon entering the program, all three participants were counseled to pursue their High School Diploma, instead of the GED. Whereas preparation for the GED would have entailed working in GED workbooks from various publishers, pursuing a High School Diploma required that students choose a subject to work in from a required list, work through the textbook(s) or computer program required for that subject, complete all required activities, and score 80% or higher on all chapter tests.

Students could choose up to two subjects to work on at a time and worked independently in their books or with software, asking for help from a teacher or me when needed. They often solicited help from other students as well. When students had completed all the assignments in a chapter as well as any review activities provided, they would ask for the chapter test. Except for the computerized tests, these took the form of a laminated handout and required students to write their responses on notebook paper. These were then checked by the teacher, who wrote in the answer if students missed items. If a student scored less than 80%, the teacher met with the student and, when the student desired more work, provided additional practice with the chapter content. After the student had studied and/or completed some more assignments, the student could

retake the test. The teachers maintained a sheet of paper with all the required activities and tests listed and entered student scores as they were obtained. When all activities had been accomplished satisfactorily, a certificate of credit for the course was placed in the student's folder, and this course was added to the High School Diploma tracking form for that individual.

### *Creative Writing*

In addition to the required credits High School Diploma students had to earn, they could also choose electives to take. A popular elective was the Creative Writing course, which was taught by one of the administrators in the program. It was the only small group activity offered or observed during the fall semester. Anywhere from five to nine students participated during each class. Students could sign up for Creative Writing I, and upon completion, take Creative Writing II for another credit. Since the CWII class began in late November, I was unable to observe this class. Knowledge I have about this class is based on interview data and the class syllabus.

The students who participated in the Creative Writing course met together every Tuesday and Thursday for one to one-and-a-half hours in Francine's office. Students sat around two small tables that had been pushed together. After a few minutes of general chit-chat about how students were doing and where missing students were, Francine would ask who had brought something to share. Most students would have something to share, though every time I observed the class, students were sharing different assignments. All students had to complete a required set of writings, but due to absences

or time management decisions, students did not complete these on the same schedule. Francine started each sharing session with individuals who were ready to share the most recent assignment and then, if there was time, invited students turning in past assignments to read. Assignments included poetry, short stories, chapters of longer works students were working on, memory writings, rewriting stories from different perspectives, or finishing a story read aloud.

The sharing process involved one student either reading his or her piece aloud or having Francine read it aloud. Students often opted for Francine to read their work aloud, saying they liked how she read with such expression. Once the writing had been read aloud, the person to the right critiqued the piece, the most common comments relating to how much they liked it or how descriptive the writing was. These comments were always positive, other than when a listener might admit to being confused and ask for certain sections to be read again. Most of the writings were personal in nature, with many of them revolving around the themes of memories, love, violence, and death. The critiquing session following each reading often evolved into general discussions about the theme, with students sharing their own experiences on the topic. The result was that students learned a considerable amount about each other's life circumstances, both past and present.

The only person who ever offered a suggestion for improvement was Francine, who managed to include usually just one recommended revision among several positive comments. A discussion usually ensued, with the student talking about how they felt about the recommendation, and then Francine would leave it up to the student if and how



the revision would be made. When everyone had critiqued the paper, Francine added it to a pile that always lay in front of her on the table. (Later, she would read each of these papers carefully, making further revision and editing suggestions). Another person would volunteer to read and the process would repeat. After everyone had shared their writing, Francine would often share something that she had written, and students would critique it using the same process. Before leaving, Francine would lead a brief discussion about the next assignment and the lesson would end.

### ***Motheread***

Students regularly engaged in what the class referred to as “Motheread,” in which a children’s book was read aloud to or by the class and discussed in terms of its life themes. The teachers had been trained in the Motheread instructional approach by Motheread, Inc., a North Carolina-based literacy organization.

Motheread usually occurred once a week. The books chosen often dealt with general parenting themes, but on special occasions (e.g., Halloween, Thanksgiving, and Christmas) holiday-oriented children’s books were used. Either Kate, Nancy, Francine, or Beatrice and Francine together would lead a Motheread lesson. Basic features of a lesson entailed reading the title and author/illustrator, providing a little background on either the author or the book, reading the story aloud, discussing the major theme(s) of the book that the teacher had already identified, and completing a follow-up assignment.

The read-aloud of the book was usually accomplished by having students take turns reading a page, moving around each table in round-robin fashion. In one observed

lesson, however, there were not enough copies of the book for students to share, so the teacher read the story aloud to the class. If a student did not want to read aloud, they could say, “Pass,” and the person beside them would pick up the reading.

Features that occurred in some but not all of the lessons I observed included the teacher sharing other texts (e.g., poems, letters) related to the theme of the story, adding a motivational hook (e.g., writing something you were thankful for and adding it to a pot for the *Stone Soup* book), and a teacher-led question and answer session on the events/themes in the story.

### ***1-2-3 Magic***

Another regular activity that students engaged in was referred to as “1-2-3 Magic.” 1-2-3 Magic is a published program in child discipline, developed by a clinical psychologist. The teachers and students, however, used the term more broadly to refer to a parenting education session that shared information and resources on parenting, in general, in addition to using the 1-2-3 Magic materials for discussion around child discipline. 1-2-3 Magic was held once a week, usually on a different day than Motherread. A teacher from the state’s preschool initiative, which was a partner in the family literacy program, covered a set curriculum of topics, such as parental goal-setting, children’s self-esteem, and child predators. Parenting information was shared in a variety of formats, including videos that came as part of the 1-2-3 Magic materials, children’s books, forms, class-generated lists, and handouts.

The session tended to follow one of two formats. In one, the teacher engaged students in a group read-aloud of a children's book and then asked the students how the reading related to parenting. After a brief discussion, she would then segue into the topic she wanted to focus upon and involve students in an activity. In the second format, she presented the information directly, usually through showing the 1-2-3 Magic video, and then led a brief discussion about the content.

### ***PACT***

PACT referred to "Parents and Children Together," a typical component of family literacy programs. At WFRC, it involved adult students who had children in the day care section of the center. Students were supposed to spend the first 30 minutes after their arrival playing or reading with their child(ren). Parents arriving with toddlers between 8:30 and 9:00 would also have breakfast with their children, and a teacher might read a story aloud while parents and children sat around the table. Usually, though, PACT time was a one-on-one affair between the parent and child.

### ***Bookmobile***

Once a week, a bookmobile from the county library came to the Center. At a designated time, learners would leave the classroom for ten to fifteen minutes to visit the bookmobile. This was considered the parent education activity for the day, so students had a sign a sheet of paper to document that they had participated in the activity.

Students were encouraged to check out books to read with their children, but they could also choose novels, videos, and magazines for their own enjoyment.

### ***Viewing of TV 411 Videos***

Less regular than the practices mentioned so far, the viewing of *TV 411* videos entailed the teacher showing students a published video in the *TV 411* series. In the lesson I observed, the teacher introduced the activity by saying, “I don’t think we’ve seen this one yet,” and reading the back of the box to students. After saying, “Let’s take a little TV break,” she started the video. In twelve minutes, the video covered adding apostrophe *s* vs. *s* apostrophe, getting a library card, a question asking what an antonym is (to be answered later in the video), an interview with Jimmie Vacca about how he learned to read and write in prison, and the definition of the word “ironic.” Most of the students watched the video, though some, including Shelley, only looked up occasionally from their work. Although I observed only one lesson, Shelley indicated in an interview that they viewed a *TV 411* video several times during the data collection period, following a similar format. Neither Paulette nor Megan ever mentioned *TV 411* Viewing in their comments.

### ***Orientation***

Attending a three-hour Orientation was a requirement for participation in the program, and students received one elective credit for participating. Both Shelley and Megan participated during the data collection period, but Paulette was exempt since she

had already been in the class two years before it was implemented. The session was presented every two or three months by an instructor from the community college, who met with students who had joined the class since her last visit.

In the Orientation session that I observed, the students met in the computer lab around the middle table. Each student received a rather thick stapled packet that contained the materials for the session. The first hour involved a discussion of goal-setting and creating a study space at home. In the next hour, the instructor directed students' attention to two pages that presented reading strategies. A few minutes were spent talking about reading strategies—skimming and SQ3R (Survey, Question, Read, Recite, Review) were covered quickly—and then students took and discussed a learning styles inventory. At the beginning of the third hour, students returned from break to find a list of celebrities on the chart paper at the front of the room. The teacher asked the students what these people had in common and led them in a discussion about the fact that all of the individuals dropped out of high school and eventually earned a GED. She then facilitated some activities to illustrate the point that, in order to get their high school diploma, they would need to pay close attention to details and look at things in a new way. Before leaving, the teacher directed students to a Self-Discovery Reflection sheet and to a handout of eighteen ways to be successful in school. Students were required to complete written assignments related to these and turn them in to the classroom teacher in order to receive the elective credit for the course.

### ***Town Meeting***

Town meetings were held once a month, and all students were encouraged to attend. A lunch was usually provided to encourage participation, and a token gift was “won” during a drawing from a hat of all the names of attending students that day. At the beginning of the meeting, Beatrice handed out a typed agenda and asked for a student volunteer to lead the group through each item. At relevant points, one of the teachers would address certain issues or lead a discussion about the issues. Common and repeated discussion points related to details for upcoming field trips, changes in the schedule due to holidays, reminders about how to handle food and medications in the child care center, review of the attendance policy, and issues that students wanted to raise for discussion.

### ***Planning for Class Activities***

Planning for specific events often occurred outside of the Town Meeting. These mainly revolved around special meals that were being held at the Center. For instance, at Thanksgiving students made stone soup (after reading the children’s book by the same title), and Kate led the group in making decisions about what to bring. At Christmas, the Center sponsored a covered-dish lunch, and Kate led the class in deciding on the menu and who was bringing which dish. The planning always involved the chart paper and easel, for Kate to capture students’ ideas.

## Types of Texts

After identifying the in-school reading practices, I then identified the types of text read by participants during each. Table 15 provides a list of all the texts used in the four major practices in which participants engaged. The vast majority of the reading occurred in high school textbooks or in the computer-based program. The second most frequently read material was student-produced work, either students' own answers to questions in the textbook, own notes and study aids, or the poems, stories, and essays they or their classmates composed for the Creative Writing class. The third most frequently read material was children's literature. In all, the range of types of reading material read in the classroom was significantly more restricted than what participants read outside of school.

**TABLE 15**

### **Types of Texts Read By Participants in Primary In-School Reading Practices**

<b>Reading Practice</b>	<b>Types of Texts Used by Participants</b>
Coursework	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High school textbooks (Math, U.S. History, English Grammar, Literature)</li> <li>• PLATO algebra program</li> <li>• C.N.A. Study Materials</li> <li>• Dictionary</li> <li>• Self-created flashcards</li> <li>• Own notes</li> <li>• Own responses to book-based activities</li> <li>• Tests</li> </ul>
Motheread	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Children's books</li> <li>• Written directions</li> <li>• Lists on chart paper</li> <li>• Written questions</li> <li>• Student responses to written assignments</li> </ul>
1-2-3 Magic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Children's books</li> <li>• Checklists</li> <li>• Self-assessments</li> <li>• 1-pager "How-tos"</li> </ul>
Creative Writing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Own poems, stories, essays</li> <li>• Other students' writings</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teacher comments</li> <li>• Children's literature (used as prompts)</li> </ul>
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## Purposes

The Critical/Educational purpose best characterized participants' purpose for reading in the classroom. The other purposes (Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines, 1988) manifested much more rarely and less consistently across all three participants. Instrumental reading occurred in the classroom during 1-2-3 Magic, when participants focused on information that they could use as parents. It also included the reading that occurred in order to figure out what to do for assignments (i.e., reading directions) and policies at the Center itself. Other examples of Instrumental reading occurred when guests came to the classroom or on field trips. Three events that occurred during the study provided more Instrumental reading: Megan participated in a computer-based personality inventory which provided her practical information about possible careers, Shelley participated in a computer-based career exploration demonstration for a similar purpose, and Shelley and Megan both heard a substance abuse speaker who shared a brochure with the participants. Social-Interactional reading was most (and only) evident in the sharing of writings that participants did related to Creative Writing. Shelley and Megan valued learning about the other students as they read poems, stories, and essays either directly about their lives or impacted by their lives, and the sharing of writing spurred a sharing of lives that built bonds among the students and between the students and the teachers. I did not document participants engaged in any News-Related, Recreational, or Confirmational reading at all during my time at the Center.



### **Strategies for In-School Reading**

Unlike with out-of-school reading, participants did not have as broad a range of strategies for initial engagement. They did not choose their own texts to read and, thus, had to read whatever they were given. Their input was selected in terms of what subject they wanted to study next and, after being assigned a book or computer program, participants might be asked how the text was working for them, but I did not see any evidence that they were ever able to choose between texts. Because teachers told them where to start in textbooks (usually at the beginning), I found no data that indicated skimming and skipping around, like they tended to do in out-of-school reading. One initial engagement strategy they did apply was *getting a sense of the text*. This was accomplished by flipping through pages sometimes when they first started a chapter to see what it looked like or how long it was, but it was not in order to make decisions about what to read or where to start reading. On one-page handouts or tests, this might take the form of glancing it over to get a sense of what was on the page. The data, though, is actually quite sparse on mention of any of these. Students tended to start reading textbook chapters, children's books, handouts, directions, and tests from the beginning.

One new theme which arose in the initial engagement strategies was *making a plan*. Making a plan was only discussed in terms of Coursework reading, and it was not always conscious. Once participants had been in the class awhile and figured out a process that worked for them, they each used the same process from chapter to chapter, book to book, computer section to computer section. Paulette knew that she was going to read the chapter first and then go back and take notes. Megan took notes when she began

a chapter, so she would take out notebook paper and a pencil or pen and prepare to take notes. She planned to take notes directly from the margin notes provided in the text which indicated important terms. Shelley took out pencil and paper just in case she read about a process for doing a math problem that she needed to remember. Another new theme was *focusing*—participants tried to get in a frame of mind to pay attention to what they were reading. Then they read slowly to help them concentrate on what they were reading.

As for *problem-solving strategies*, participants utilized both word-level and text-level strategies, just as they did with out-of-school reading. Their word-level strategies were the same as what they used in out-of-school reading: looking at the word, sounding it out, skipping it, asking someone, or using a dictionary. Because the Critical/Educational purpose for which they usually read also required them to know specific content area terms, an additional word-level strategy was *making notes on important terms*. These notes were usually highlighted in some way as margin notes in the text. Megan explained her process:

M12: Mainly what we do is we go through, and anything in the yellow box we write down for our notes.

A13: How do you know that?

M13: Because it's in bold, it's bold. It's for us to--like, the collective nouns, the compound nouns, and the nouns, and then it gives you an example beside of it, and we write that down for our notes.

A14: Did one of the teachers tell you to do that? How did you come to do that?

M14: Well, that's what I did when I was in school. Anything that was in bold

print, usually I wrote it down. Anything that it gave an example, I wrote it down for my notes.

A15: So when you say, “*We* write this down,” are you thinking--. Do all the students in the class do that?

M15: Well, I talked to a couple of the other girls, and they said that that’s the way they did it also.

A16: Okay. But you don’t have to, the teachers don’t require it?

M16: Well, they tell you that it’s better for you *to* do that, because you can look back and anything you have highlighted is something that you need to remember. So you can kinda look back and see things that you’ve highlighted and study that. (M2C)

Text-level strategies included re-reading (at a slower pace for Shelley and Megan and at a faster pace—once she had worked out all the words—for Paulette), which was not all that different from what was occasionally required with out-of-school reading. However, the Critical/Educational nature of the majority of their reading also introduced strategies besides answering questions, which Shelley and Paulette were familiar with from their earlier certification preparation work. A major new addition was taking notes to help them understand and identify key content. Whereas Megan was familiar with notetaking from high school, Paulette was not. When Paulette enrolled in the Center, one of the teachers recommended she take notes, and Paulette thought, “What’s it going to hurt?” (P1B-P19). She tried it and found it a useful strategy. She learned some notetaking strategies on her own, though. In an observation one day, I noticed that she was creating quite an elaborate set of study guides, so I asked her to tell me about her process during the follow-up interview:

- P75: I write down all my definitions. That is one of my study guides. And then in the front of the chapter it has identifying your goals-
- A76: Your “Goals for Learning” or something like that.
- P76: For the chapter and it tells you what you’ve got to know before you take the test. I go through the chapters after reading what it says and find out what it says and I write it down and that will be part of my study guide. That helps me to get through the test much better than having to just go through the book and do the review, hand it in and get a test. I’ll fail it every time if I don’t do what I do to write the definitions and...
- A77: How did you figure that out? This process. How did you learn that? Did somebody show it to you?
- P77: I learned it on my own. I got to reading it and...I took a test one day and I got to looking at it and I said, “This is the same thing that was in the front of the book that tells you what you’ve got to learn before you take the test.” And I knew I’d failed the test because I didn’t know it. So I handed it back in. I said, “Let me study some more.” So that’s when I went back and looked at that, went back to the chapter, found what I needed to know, wrote it down, studied it. Got the test back, done my test, handed it in. I made a 90-something. And I knew from that point that hey, this is what you’ve got to learn and from then on I’ve been doing it. (P1A)

Other text-level strategies besides re-reading, taking notes and answering questions included: re-focusing, highlighting, making study guides, attending to text features, and considering how more than one person (especially the teacher) might answer a question.

### **Cultural Model of In-School Reading**

I turn now to the cultural models of in-school reading that participants seemed to have constructed, both from their previous school experiences and also from being in the adult education class. In my very first interview in the study, Megan introduced the notion that the reading that she encountered in the program was not the same as what she

was used to. She talked about thinking she was “okay” (M1-M4) with reading when she enrolled, that she had always thought of herself as being “a reader” (M1-M4). However, she goes further: “Since I’ve started, reading here has some confusion to it.” She described it as a “different kind of reading” (M1-M4). A comparison of the common proposition-schemas which comprised the participants’ cultural models of reading for out-of-school and in-school reading demonstrate how different this reading was. Table 16 is provided as a reference for the discussion that follows.

**TABLE 16**

**Comparison of Proposition-Schema for Out-of-School Reading and In-School Reading**

Out-of-School	In-School
<i>Propositions</i>	<i>Propositions</i>
1. Adults read to get things done and to enjoy life.	1. Adults in school read primarily to meet the requirements to earn a high school credential.
2. Adults make decisions about what to read.	2. Adults in school read texts that the teacher selects, based upon what is needed for completion of the required curriculum.
3. Being able to pronounce words and understand their meanings is important in making sense of text.	3. Being able to pronounce words and understand their meanings is paramount in making sense of text.
4. Fast reading is usually acceptable.	4. Slow reading and concentration are crucial to reading success.
5. Having to use strategies is cause for negative emotions.	5. Getting the right meaning requires a “soft head.” <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Too much strategy use during reading may indicate a disability.</li> </ul>
6. Decisions about what one does with the contents of a piece of writing require evaluation of the writing.	6. Decisions about what one does with the contents of a piece of writing require consideration of what the teacher or textbook thinks is the right answer.

***Proposition 1. Adults in school read primarily to meet the requirements to earn a high school credential.***

Whereas in their out-of-school reading, participants thought about reading in terms of not only helping them attend to the responsibilities in their lives but also to enhance their life in some way, their cultural model of in-school reading had a very focused, unified intent to it—to get through the required coursework. Each course completed earned them a credit or partial credit towards their high school diploma, and course-related reading was what they talked about unprompted when they talked about reading.

Interestingly, Megan and Paulette both spoke of books they had “done,” not read. “Done” meant completing and receiving credit for the course for which the text was used. When I came across the following passage in the data, I could imagine a big checkmark being placed beside each of the texts Paulette recited as having “done” since she had been at the Center:

In my reading I’ve done Lewis. It was a government book. I’ve done economics. I’ve done physical science, biology. I’ve done English I, II and III. I’ve even done a few extra books because the instructors thought I needed some more skills on my English. So I’ve done a few extra books on it. I had a hard time of learning the verbs, adjectives and stuff like that. It was really hard. Right now all I lack is my U.S. History and my English IV and I will be graduating, hopefully, by August. Hopefully. (P1A-P48)

In the next example, Megan takes the same approach, keeping track of books she needs to do and those she has already done: “Because I have to do each book, every page of the book. My English, my science, my math—I’ve got to do every book. I’ve done one of

the reading books, and it was like this thick, and I only got a half a credit for it” (M2A-M17).

***Proposition 2. Adults in school read texts that the teacher selects, based upon what is needed for completion of the required curriculum.***

Participants expected the teachers to choose what they read in class and expected that what they read would be directly related to the curriculum. Participants complained about the materials in terms of interest or difficulty, or, in math, having to complete the whole book instead of just “refreshing” themselves (M1A-M82), but they clearly expected the teacher to tell them what to read and took it for granted that they should comply.

***Proposition 3. Being able to pronounce words and understand their meanings is paramount in making sense of text.***

Megan and Shelley talked about the relevance of knowing the meanings of words even more in discussions of their in-school reading than they did in their out-of-school readings. Just as with her out-of-school reading, Paulette felt that her difficulties in pronouncing words impacted her reading at the Center, causing her frustration, taking up time, and interfering even with test taking:

*Excerpt 1:*

That’s the way I feel. I mean, you know, I can use some help of pronouncing some of the words. Just like Megan said, you know, there’s some big words in that history book, too. You can sit there and try to pronounce them words--you

can forget it! I just want to throw the book through a wall sometimes. (Paulette; GI3-218)

*Excerpt 2:*

A27: Is that textbook hard for you to read--the history book that you're reading right now?

P27: Yes. There's a lot of big words in there. I have to break them down. It's going to take me awhile to get through this book because it's really, really--some of the words are really hard. (P1B)

*Excerpt 3:*

A22: And did you have any trouble reading the test at all?

P22: There were some, a few words that was kinda hard, but I had one of the teachers to help me read the words. (P2A)

By the second group interview, I had noticed the role that getting the words seemed to play in the participants' notions of being a good reader, so I followed up with a direct question about it during the group interviews. Here are two excerpts from the two group interviews where we had this discussion. One exchange includes Belle and Paulette and the other includes Shelley and Megan:

*Excerpt 1:*

A: If I get all the words right—if I can read all the words...

B: You're a genius.

A: ...does that mean I'm a good reader. [B: yes] Is there anything more to it, or is it just getting all the words?

(pause)

P: I think it's...(pause). If you're getting all the words, yeah you're a great reader. (GI2A-408-412)



*Excerpt 2:*

A: So you each mentioned words. If you can get all the words right—if you can read all the words—is that all you need to be able to do to be a good reader?

S: No.

M: No, you have to be understand the words that you're reading also.

S: Yeah.

A: If you can pronounce them and you can understand the meaning of the words, is that all you have to do to be able to read?

M: No.

A: What else is there?

S: (sigh) You have to know....Ask that question again. Did you say, "If you understood what the words meant, when you was reading them, is that all you need?"

M: Yes. [as if answering the question]

S: I would say yeah. I mean, if you understand it. (GI2B-346-355)

Pronouncing and understanding words was, again, a primary factor in reading. In other conversations, participants talked about strategies they used to learn and manipulate the material, but success at initial reading was due most directly to knowing the words on the page in front of them.

***Proposition 4. Slow reading and concentration are crucial to reading success.***

Whereas pace of reading did not seem to matter much in out-of-school reading, it seemed to matter considerably in in-school reading, and it was tied up with a new concern for concentration. Shelley and Megan decided that the fast reading they tended

to do outside of school did not serve them as well once they enrolled at the Center. In the next excerpt, they reflect on how pace of reading and ability to focus are intertwined.

*Excerpt 1:*

Sh: Well, before I came back to school I would read too fast.

M: Speed read.

Sh: And would not pick up all the words that I was reading. Would not, you know, understand all the words that I was reading. But since I started class, I go a whole lot slower and I can concentrate on the words, you know, and understand what they mean. (GI3-140-143)

*Excerpt 2:*

M16: I've slowed down. I used to, you know, zoom through. I've learned that you learn more if you read slower.

A17: How did you learn that?

M17: When she started me in the reading book, that was part of my diploma, it would ask you--it would give you like a paragraph and then it would ask you what was the main topic. What was the main thing that you got out of this? Sometimes I would have to go back and reread it because it would talk about several different things and I wasn't sure which one was the most important; which one they was really wanting you to--so I had to learn to slow down and take in more of what I was reading instead of just reading it and going on, you know, trying to get it done. That's what I do when I read like John Grisham or Stephen King or something like that. (M1B)

Megan goes on to say that with exciting or tricky plot lines, she does tend to slow down, but slow reading is not a key characteristic of out-of-school reading. Paulette still tended to read slowly because she could not read any other way, but she read slowly in a different way. She felt she needed to "do [her] best" (P3A-P13) and "concentrate" (P3A-P13; GI2A-371-374), a concept she did not raise when talking about reading outside of

school. A slow pace and focused reading are essential features of the kind of reading that is done in school.

***Proposition 5. Getting and remembering the right meaning requires a “soft head.”***

***(Too much strategy use during reading may indicate a disability.)***

One of the most robust findings in the study is that notions of in-school reading are intricately linked with notions of learning (whereas this was not the case with out-of-school reading). A good reader was talked about in terms of her inherent learning abilities: whether she had booksmarts or common sense, whether she had a soft head or a hard head. The two sets of terms described two dimensions of learning. “Booksmarts” and “common sense” were used to talk about the *kinds of information* one already knew and was apt to learn easily; “soft head” and “hard head” referred to *how easily one could learn*. Learning easily was valued, and getting what was learned to “stick” (GI3-144) was the goal of learning. “Booksmarts” and “soft head” often went together and could be interchanged, as in the following excerpt from a group interview:

A: So tell me again what booksmarts is, are.

P: You can read something and it will stay with you.

F: You pick it up [sound of snapping fingers to indicate “in a snap”].

P: Yeah, you pick it up fast.

A: Is this the softhead thing that Belle mentioned...

P: Yes.

... ..

A: Do you think good readers ever have to go back and read it, like, when they're doing their U.S. History...

P: Oh, yes.

A: ...do you think a good reader would have to go back?

P: Yes

F: A good reader? No. Some of them would, but a lot of times, no.

A: You think they would just read it straight through, go to the questions, and just answer the questions [snap] like that?

P: They'd get it.

F: That would be a soft head. (GI2A-408-432)

Paulette's first comments in the excerpt tie booksmarts immediately to reading, and show that reading is not a term that references multiple purposes. Reading is about learning, and being booksmart is about reading/learning easily, because of that soft head you have.

There was general agreement that a soft head allows one to "sponge" (GI1-297) what one read and makes things "stick" (GI3-145). There was also general agreement that if you "don't sponge" (GI3-470), you have to work hard to learn. But if you have to work too hard, there might be something wrong with you.

M: It's not that I don't want to or I don't feel that I'm trying hard enough. It's just that I'm not sure that I'm capable of learning this stuff again. You know, that's something that you and I talked about, there are people with learning disabilities. And I'm not someone who sponges things. You know, some people? When they learn something? It sticks with them.

A: (pointing to Belle) Like her soft head? You know, she talked about having a soft head?

M: Right. Right. Well, my head's real hard too. I mean, it really is. I don't sponge things. I mean I can sit down and I know how to do something and

I can do all the problems you give me right then. And tomorrow I can wake up and go back and look at that and I say, “How the heck did I do that?”

A: How many of you have had that feeling before?

P: I’m that way. (GI1-297-301)

Megan has been talking about learning, in general terms. In the next excerpt, Paulette connects what Megan has described to how having a hard head affects her reading:

P: It’s like in that history book. You can read a chapter in that book and go back and do your review and you don’t remember *nothing*. You don’t even remember nothing you read. That’s the way I am. I have to go back and I have to look at every page before I can even find anything.

S: Isn’t that kind of like a normal thing, though, for everybody-

F: Can we sign up, for, like disability?

S: ...I mean when they learn something they’re gonna--You’re not gonna remember everything that you learn anyway-

P: Do we have Alzheimers?

S: -you know? I mean, you’re not going to remember everything.

M: I think it’s like--Someone that knows it pretty well told me that I have certain symptoms of ADD. That’s Adult Deficit Disorder...

A: Attention deficit disorder?

M: Right.

...

M: And, see, they don’t give you any kind of test like that when you walk through the door. Everybody’s given one test. It’s like everybody’s supposed to have the same mind. And everybody don’t. And you know, when I started school, they didn’t even know anything about ADD. And I think that should be one of the first things they test you for when you start to an adult high school, to an adult program, especially if you’re over the

age of 20 years old. Because they didn't know anything about that when I was in school. They didn't know anything about learning disorders. (GI1-278-315)

What is evidenced in this excerpt is an introduction of the notion that applying strategies just might signify a disability. It became clear from analysis of the data that participants did indeed operate with the assumption that if you did have to apply strategies too much, there might be something wrong with you. What qualified as “too much” varied by participant. Shelley maintained a broader range for “normal” than the others, but there was still a concept of normal and not normal. Having to re-read a little, focus more, slow down, look up words on occasion, look back for answers—these were acceptable strategies and use of them may have indicated she was not a “perfect” reader, but it was not a cause for concern. This may have been because, ultimately, Shelley’s use of strategies was successful—she achieved her reading purpose. In Paulette’s case, however, she experienced such difficulty that sometimes she was not successful. She wanted to “throw (the book) down” (GI2A-345), but it was not really the book she was angry with. She seemed to be angry with herself because she was such “slow learner” (P1A-P40) and “not a great reader” (P1B-P1).

Megan was in the middle of the two, tending to accept strategy use as a necessary component of anybody’s reading, but at different times early in the interview schedule attributing specific difficulties she had either to something being wrong with her eyes, an undiagnosed learning disability, or Attention Deficit Disorder. Towards the end of the interview schedule, after she had been in the class for awhile, she seemed to have moved

toward Shelley's end of the continuum, considering her issues to be within the normal range.

***Proposition 6. Decisions about what one does with the contents of a piece of writing require consideration of what the teacher or textbook thinks is the right answer.***

For Megan and Shelley, there was a significant difference between their out-of-school reading and their in-school reading, which when experienced in the present, sparked memories of their reading in high school that they had largely forgotten. In the following excerpt from the data, Shelley connects her current difficulty with an experience she had in high school:

“I knew I needed to work on my reading [in the adult education program]. You know, the aspect of pronouncing the words and saying the words, I'm fine at. ...It's perceiving it the way I need. To perceive it—it's not there, I don't think. Like if I'm reading like a history chapter, and it's about the war, I'm not going to perceive it in the way that the teachers would probably like for me to perceive it because I'll just-- You know when you're reading to yourself, you have your own imagination and you tend to learn the way that YOU perceive it. You know? So I've always had a hard time at perceiving things in the way that the teachers would kind of like want me to perceive it, because I know that when I took my U.S. history in high school, the teacher and I had a really hard time with that because it was like--I think it was about slaves and slavery, and all I wanted to think about was “Oh how bad those poor slaves were treated,” you know, and my teacher was trying to get me to learn, like, the dates and stuff and everything, and I was like, “Look at how those poor slaves were treated!” (S1A-S122-123)

Megan experienced a similar problem. Megan described herself as having “always been a reader,” enjoying horror and mystery novels since high school. She noted, however, that since she had started the class “reading here has some confusion to it,” that it was a “different kind of reading” from what she was used to as an adult (M1-M4). For

instance, identifying “importance,” a common skill taught in literature textbooks, was a little tricky:

M28: No, it’s just like, I was reading something one day, and I was like--they [the textbook] asked me a question, and I said, “I don’t understand what they want me to give them.” You know, what they want? So I handed it to N [another student]. I said, “N, do you understand what--?” and she looked at it, and she said, “Well, I think they want this.” And then I looked in the back to see what they actually DID want and both of us was wrong.

So, some of those books are confusing. You know, they’ll ask you for what they think you’re gonna see when you read this paragraph. And something that they think is important, you may not think is as important. So you may pick up something else—like the broken-tailed lizard. I thought it was really just a standouth thing that an animal could break off part of its body and it grow back, you know, just like this. And, for them, what they wanted you to see was that that was part of its protective mechanism. If something got after it, it broke off part of its tail to get whatever was after it to attack the part that it had broken off while it scuttered away somewhere else.

A29: Okay, that is interesting. But you were just amazed that it could fall off in the first place--that’s what you paid attention to.

M29: Yeah. Yeah. To me that was really amazing! You know, I didn’t know animals could do that--that they could just break off part of their body because they wanted to. And it would grow right back...But, you know, that’s something that I learned, you know—that just because a person wants you to see a certain thing when you read a book, it doesn’t mean that that’s exactly what you’re gonna see.

For Paulette, this was not a big change from her out-of-school reading because this aspect of her cultural model transferred unproblematically. If she did not know anything about a topic, she believed the text. She knew very little about any of the topics she read about in school, so she accepted unquestioningly teacher or text designations of what was right and wrong.



## Discussion of Key Findings for Research Question 2

The previous sections described major themes related to key areas of interest in the study. In this section I connect these themes and present key findings that answer the research question: *RQ2: What understandings do participants have about reading and the role it plays in their lives?*

The discussion here stays largely in the realm of description of findings (Wolcott, 2001); implications and more in-depth interpretations of the findings, which are integrally tied to the findings for the other questions, will be discussed more fully in the last chapter.

### **Finding 4. The types of texts and purposes for reading in out-of-school reading practices were markedly different from those related to in-school reading practices.**

Other studies (Bingman & Ebert, 2000; Fingeret, 1983; Merrifield et al., 1997) that focused on lower-level adult readers found that these adults engaged in a variety of reading practices outside of a literacy program, despite their limited literacy skills. The current study, which looked at intermediate readers only, similarly found that, instead of living text-impoverished lives, the adult intermediate readers in the study read a variety of texts for a variety of self-determined purposes in their homes, in the workplace, and in the community. Participants readily recognized a positive role for reading in their lives outside of school, attributing to reading at home, at work, and in the community the power to get things done and to enhance their lives. The women in this study read more novels than the lower-level readers in the other studies, but other than lengthy text of this

nature, and a few information books, reading practices tended to involve primarily short chunks of texts, read for practical and immediate purposes. Even when the text type itself involved more connected text, such as a magazine, newspaper, or policy manual, participants tended to focus on small sections of text, such as recipes, the court docket, or the dress code, respectively.

In school, however, texts were longer and were read for one principal purpose—to accomplish tasks assigned by the teacher as part of the curricula required for the high school diploma. This Critical-Educational purpose was accompanied by Instrumental reading, mainly in the form of reading directions for assignments and reading information presented about parenting, careers, and other special topics, and Social-Interactional reading in the Creative Writing class, where students shared their personal histories and family/relationship problems within an environment they trusted. The primary purpose of in-school reading, however, was to learn material in the way that the teacher or textbook said it should be learned, a sharp contrast from the personal meaning-making that characterized their out-of-school reading.

**Finding 5. The cultural model of out-of-school reading was different in key ways from the cultural model of in-school reading.**

Although they approached the task of investigating adults' understandings in different ways, both Belzer (1998, 2002) and Rogers (2004b) arrived at the conclusion that adults preferenced in-school reading over the reading they did in their lives outside of school. Belzer (1998) discovered that the five women in her study assumed a school-

based notion of reading when they talked about reading, not crediting the reading they actually reported doing outside the classroom as “reading.” Rogers (2004b) offered some explanation to this finding through an investigation that relied on Critical Discourse Analysis. She concluded that the participants in her study (15 African-American adult learners) did recognize and talk about reading in out-of-school domains, but they did so differently from in-school reading. Her participants referred to purpose and agency more noticeably when describing out-of-school reading practices than when discussing practices that occur in school. During my own interviews with participants, I was at first confused by what seemed to be contradictory statements about reading—until I discerned that they were indeed talking about two different types of reading—in-school and out-of-school. A sociocultural perspective would, in fact, expect such a finding. After all, understandings are developed in domain-specific contexts and arise out of participation in practices; thus, participating in school-based practices would give rise to school-based understandings of reading. The concern, then, is not that adults have a distinct cultural model of in-school reading, but rather what this cultural model tells us about the messages being communicated and enacted in the classroom.

The cultural models that surfaced in the current study support Rogers’ (2004b) conclusions that adults view the role of reading—and their role when reading—differently in out-of-school practices than in in-school practices. In participants’ homes and communities, reading served a variety of purposes, which they as adults determined and/or negotiated, making decisions about how to approach each reading task and how to use the contents of what they read. In the classroom, reading served a narrow range of

academic purposes, which, as participants understood it, left little room for personal agency. In fact, even applying strategies to accomplish their reading tasks was interpreted to mean there was something wrong with their brains.

The attention given in this study to the specific proposition-schemas that comprise the cultural models indicate that, although there is some overlap from the out-of-school model to the in-school model (e.g., the negative associations attributed to strategy use and the importance of words), significant differences manifested in how the participants thought about what reading is used for and how it is done. The implications of these differences are explored in Chapter VII, after participants' perceptions of the relevance of the reading-related instruction in which they engaged are presented in Chapter VI.

**Finding 6. Participants identified their limited vocabulary as being a barrier to understanding text, but they did not think to expect or request vocabulary instruction.**

Researchers (Gambrell & Heathington, 1981; Keefe & Meyer, 1980; Maclachlan & Cloonan, 2003; Rogers, 2004b; Taylor, Wade, Jackson, Blum, & Gould, 1980) have claimed that, because low-level adult readers talk about reading in terms of words, they do not recognize that reading is about meaning. In this study, however, participants are very clear that reading is about meaning, as seen in their use of strategies to help them accomplish their reading purposes. However, they talk about words because words, for them, are the sticking point in constructing meaning. In the following excerpt, Paulette is

reading for meaning, applying her strategy of revisiting the Goals for Learning presented at the front of her chapter in U.S. History. But the words are getting in the way:

She pointed to the first page of the chapter at a section entitled “Goals for Learning,” drawing my attention to the second bullet. Paulette said she had read the chapter and was now making sure she had answers for these goals, but she was stuck on the second goal. The item read something like “identify characteristics of five civilizations of Mesopotamia.” Paulette read it aloud to me, stumbling over the pronunciation of “characteristics.” She didn’t even try to say the last word, just waved in its general direction and then started flipping through the pages. I flipped through the chapter to get a sense of how it was laid out and directed her to the section about Mesopotamia. I showed her that there were five headings in this section that seemed to be about different peoples. As we talked, I began to suspect that she didn’t know what the term “civilizations” meant. I explained that the book was talking about groups of people, maybe tribes. She turned back to the “Goals for Learning” section and pointed to the word “characteristics,” looking at me questioningly. I said that the term referred to “facts about each group of people—information about how they lived.” (FN9-25-06)

Paulette had already read the chapter once but had obviously missed important understandings since she had not known the meanings of key terms. Although she claimed to use the dictionary regularly at home, I never observed her use one in the classroom. My impression was that she became tired of looking up word after word. Although not as extreme, Shelley and Megan encountered their own problems with vocabulary, naming “understanding words” consistently as the one problem that kept them from being good readers (other than perceiving the content from the teacher/text’s point of view). Thus, the participants do not talk about words because they have a words-based view of reading, but because they experience unfamiliar words as a barrier to meaning-making. Interestingly, though, they did not see vocabulary instruction as being an instructional need, perhaps not even considering it the purview of the adult

education classroom. Instead, they seemed to own their vocabulary issues as innate problems that they needed to work around.

**Finding 7. The participants in the study were strategic readers, both in school and out of school, but they viewed strategy use in negative terms.**

Past studies (Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Fingeret, 1983; Merrifield et al., 1997; Reder, 1994) found that low-level adult readers in their investigations employed a range of strategies to participate in reading practices. The current study confirms that the same is true of intermediate readers. This study was able to identify a broader range of strategies that were located within the individual instead of within other people or the use of technology (see Table 17). Considering the exploratory nature of the study, it is difficult to attribute whether this finding is related to the fact that the focus was on intermediate readers or to the in-depth nature of the study, with only three participants as opposed to, for instance, 12 in the Merrifield et al. (1997) study and 43 in the Fingeret (1983) inquiry. Furthermore, what was not addressed in the other studies was how the use of strategies was perceived by participants--and it was not an anticipated focus of this study. However, the data is clear that, although these adult intermediate readers use perhaps an even greater range of strategies than those reported for lower-level readers, they perceive the need to use strategies as undermining their competence. Outside of school, strategy use is accompanied by negative feelings; inside school, strategy use calls into question their very intelligence.

TABLE 17

**Cross-Study Comparison of Reading Strategies**

<b>Fingeret, 1983</b> (nonreaders - 6.0GLE; N=43)	<b>Merrifield et al., 1997</b> (mixed levels; N=12)	<b>Present study, 2007</b> (upper intermediate, N=3)
<p><i>Social networks</i></p> <p><i>Memorize text materials</i> (e.g., bill formats)</p> <p><i>Use technology</i> (e.g., taperecorders; radio; television)</p>	<p><i>Other-oriented strategies</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Regular reader/writer</li> <li>• Ask for help</li> <li>• Listen</li> <li>• Observe</li> </ul> <p><i>Self-reliance strategies</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Guess</li> <li>• Know routines</li> <li>• Memorize</li> <li>• Use text selectively</li> </ul> <p><i>Avoidance of difficult or potentially difficult situations</i></p> <p><i>Substitution of technology for literacy</i> (e.g., television, VCRs, computers, tape recorders)</p>	<p><i>Initial engagement strategies</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Select text carefully</li> <li>• Vary reading approach by purpose (scan headings, look at pictures, go to appropriate section to find something interesting to read; read a text of interest or for study from beginning to end)</li> </ul> <p><i>Problem-solving strategies</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Word-level problem-solving <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Pronunciation strategies (look at the word, attend to phonics information, skip, ask, replace it with another word)</li> <li>– Word meaning strategies (ask, skip, use a glossary/ dictionary, abandon the text, blame the author)</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Text-level problem-solving (e.g., listen/watch others; look at illustrations; ask for help; wait for hands-on demonstrations; write answers posed in a text)</li> </ul>

**Finding 8. Participants' past and current out-of-school reading practices influenced greatly their perceptions of themselves as readers, prior to entering class. Once in class, their in-school practices led them to refine their self-evaluations.**

Only Paulette expressed any concern for her reading abilities prior to entering the class. Because participants, for the most part, self-selected the texts or sections of texts that they read and engaged in tasks that were rather straightforward (gaining specific information, satisfying curiosity), they tended to evaluate their own reading abilities

rather positively. However, once inside the class, the critical reading demands, the lengthy and complicated texts, the specific kinds of tasks required--all made them revise their evaluations. Megan and Shelley still saw their reading in a rather positive light, but there were more qualifiers—they needed to slow down, the words were troublesome, they needed to perceive things the way the teacher wanted. For Paulette, being in the class confirmed her own self-assessment that she was a poor reader, but she also credited the class with helping her improve, so she had begun to be more positive about her abilities.

### **Overview of Chapter VI**

In this chapter I presented the themes and findings related to how participants viewed reading in their lives, both inside and outside of school. In Chapter VI, the findings related to their reading practices, cultural models of reading, and self-evaluations of participation in reading practices are integrated with the findings related to participants' identity work to explore how participants attributed relevance to the reading-related instruction they experienced in the classroom.



**CHAPTER VI**

**ATTRIBUTING RELEVANCE TO READING-RELATED**

**INSTRUCTION: FINDINGS FOR RESEARCH QUESTION 3**

**Orientation to the Chapter**

In this study, I investigated how a small group of adult intermediate readers perceived the value of reading-related instruction based on who they were and who they wanted to be. Three questions guided the study:

1. What are the identities guiding participants' involvement in adult basic education?
2. What understandings do participants have about reading and the role it plays in their lives?
3. How are participants' perceptions of the relevance of reading-related instruction connected to their identity work and to the role of reading in their lives?

Answering Research Question 1 offered a means through which to understand the motivations of adult intermediate readers returning to an educational setting. Framed in terms of identity transformation, I sought to understand the future selves that three participants were seeking to develop by entering the Center. Answering Research Question 2 provided insights into how participants had been able to engage in out-of-

school and in-school reading practices and how they evaluated their own participation in these practices. In answering Research Question 3, I used the findings from the first two questions to understand the factors that impacted participants' perceptions of the relevance of reading-related instruction.

The conceptual framework guiding the study directed attention toward at least two possibilities for factors affecting how participants valued the reading-related instruction they experienced: how participants self-evaluated their performance in out-of-school reading practices and how they saw themselves engaging in reading as part of their pursued identities. After a description of the types of reading-related instruction offered participants in the classroom, themes related to each of these predicted factors are discussed. Afterwards, I present other themes that emerged from the data related to how relevance was attributed.

The discussion in this chapter is summarized by two key findings:

- **Finding 9:** Participants referenced four factors when attributing relevance to reading-related instruction: direct relevance to their pursued identities, stepping stone relevance to their pursued identities, a connection to a current identity, and their self-evaluations of participation in current reading practices (and thus the need to improve their reading).
- **Finding 10:** Perceptions of time, considerations of what counts, connections to specific life contexts, and cross-identity impact acted as mediating factors in participants' attributions of relevance for any specific reading-related activity.

### Types of Reading-Related Instruction

In Chapter V, I discussed reading-related instruction through the frame of reading practices. In this section, I take a different cut, presenting a typology based on the ways in which reading was addressed instructionally. Three themes emerged from the analysis: *reading as the object of study*, *mentioning reading*, and *using reading*. Paulette was the only participant who described experiences in which reading was the “object of study” (Barton & Hamilton, 1998, p. 282). She worked in a phonics-based computer program to learn how to “break down words” (P1A-P79) and in a vocabulary workbook during her first year. Other than these experiences of Paulette’s, reading itself was never the object of concerted study for any of the participants.

Another kind of reading-related instruction involved *mentioning reading*. At times participants experienced teachers mentioning reading as part of coursework related to academic subject matter (e.g., social studies, science) or in relation to the parenting, work/career, and health activities in which students were engaged. In most of these cases, teachers were responding to students’ questions about how to say a particular word, about the meaning of a word, or how to answer a question posed in a textbook. Participants also reported the teachers mentioning how to take notes about their coursework. Teacher-initiated mentioning of topics related to reading occurred occasionally in *Motheread* when attention was brought to text features, certain vocabulary, or to the larger themes of the reading, as in the following excerpt:

10:25 Kate holds up the book she has in her hands, a very old looking, cream-colored children’s book. She introduces it as “Stone Soup,” explaining that it’s an old folktale written in 1947. She opens the

front cover and shows everyone where the copyright information is. She reads the date—1947—and explains that this particular book was written in 1947, because if it were a later edition, there would be later dates listed besides the 1947.

Belle: Where did you get it from?

Kate says that she got it from the Interlibrary Loan program at the library and briefly describes the service. Then she says, that since they only have one copy, one student can read it or she can. No one offers, so she starts reading, holding the book out for students to see the pages.

Paulette would have to turn to see the book, and she doesn't. Megan, Shelley, Belle, and Feathers all look at the book as Kate reads.

About the second or third page, the text mentions “peasants.” Kate asks the students what peasants are.

Shelley: Poor people.

J: I thought they were birds.

Everybody laughs. Kate says she's thinking about “pheasants.” Kate explains that, yes, they are poor people, but that they are the people that “work the land.” She returns to reading, which she does with great expression. [I see why participants have mentioned liking it when Kate reads.]

Megan, Shelley, Belle, and Feathers all keep their eyes pretty much on Kate and the book, but I see Paulette actually look at the book only once. She looks off into space or down on the floor most of the time.

...  
10:37

...  
Kate finishes the book. She explains that this is a folktale that is told in different ways around the world, but that it's about “coming together and making something out of nothing.” She asks students what they think—“Did they trick them?” Someone says yes.

Kate: Was that a good thing or a bad thing?

Megan: I think it was a good thing. Everybody gave a little and everybody got something in return.

Kate: So, who benefited?

Megan and another student: Everybody.

There's a brief discussion, and then Kate asks "Would you read this to your kids?" Somebody says yes but there's not much elaboration.

Kate explains that tomorrow the class will be making Stone Soup, that they will only have what people bring. Shelley says, "Why don't we make a list of things we're each going to bring?" ...  
(Observation 11-20-06)

In the excerpt, Kate draws attention to a particular feature of the text (copyright date), to one vocabulary word ("peasant"), and to a major theme of the story ("coming together and making something out of nothing") but does not provide the more in-depth explicit, scaffolded instruction that would characterize this type of instruction as a concerted study. Another example of mentioning was when teachers told Paulette she should "read, read, read" (P1A-P83) in order to build her reading skills, but instruction in how to choose books, how to structure time, and how to document range of reading were not included.

Lastly, the most common type of reading-related instruction that participants experienced was *using reading*. Participants read often to complete coursework assignments, which were usually comprised of answering literal and inferential questions at different points in a textbook chapter. In Creative Writing assignments, they read to respond to their own writing and to the writing of their peers. In Motherhood and 1-2-3 Magic, participants read to discuss themes and issues related to parenting or to other aspects of adult life. In these cases, reading was a tool for accomplishing the larger purpose of learning or exploring content; it was not the focus of the learning situation.

In the next section, I begin to explore how participants attributed relevance to these types of reading-related instruction.

### **Role of Self-Evaluation in Attributing Relevance**

The rationale for exploring participants' self-evaluations of their participation in out-of-school reading practices was that, if participants did not feel they were able to participate in these practices comfortably, then they could be expected to desire instruction that developed their abilities to function more to their liking in these practices. As discussed in Chapter V, Paulette was the only participant who found reading "hard" outside of school and dreaded public practices that required her to read. Shelley and Megan each entered the program with positive notions of how they participated in reading practices outside of school.

To examine the role these self-evaluations played in attributing relevance to reading-related instruction, I first explored participants' expectations for instruction upon entry into the program. Two themes emerged from the data in this category: *reading-oriented expectations* and *other-than-reading expectations*. Paulette was the only participant who specifically and regularly talked about wanting to work on her reading when she first entered the program four years earlier. "I felt I needed to start in reading. Because math, I could manage the basic math. But reading, I wanted to read better" (P3A-P7). She was interested in reading being an object of study. Based on their out-of-school experiences, though, Megan and Shelley did not see "reading," specifically, as something they needed to develop as part of their identity work. Megan mentioned

English, algebra, and geometry. Shelley talked about expecting to study her “histories” and math.

Since Shelley and Megan indicated that how they thought about themselves as readers changed once they began work on their studies, I also explored what they thought might help them address the issues that had arisen for them. Although they both mentioned having issues with vocabulary, rate of reading, and comprehension, they never once suggested, unprompted, that instruction related to these would be helpful. Their cultural models of reading did not appear to have a proposition-schema for instruction in these areas. Instead they mentioned that teachers could “be patient” (S1A-S111) and “come down on our level” (Paulette; GI3-272). Shelley thought that assigning a book report might help her reading, because, although she hated them, they did help her in “getting all structured and organized” and in thinking “what am I going to put first and what am I going to put next and what am I going to put last” (S1B-S5). For the most part, their notions of reading were linked so integrally with “booksmarts” that they tended to think in terms of innate limitations—possible learning disabilities, age, forgetfulness—and not what was teachable.

Ultimately, the effect that any particular activity would have on improving their reading or broadening their range of reading practices was only a factor in attributions of relevance for Paulette. The phonics instruction she engaged in her first year, she said, helped her to pronounce words better. She also believed strongly that the reading she did as part of her coursework, specifically, was transferring to other parts of her life. Shelley and Megan would talk about what they learned about reading in response to an interview

question, but when I asked such things as “why was this activity important” or “what did you learn today that was important to you,” they never framed an answer in terms of “reading.”

### **Role of Imagined Future Reading Practices**

At the beginning of this study I wondered if participants had definite notions of the kinds of reading practices they might be involved in as their future selves and whether these notions helped them give meaning to reading-related activities in the classroom. Analysis of the data suggests that Paulette had perhaps the clearest notion of the kinds of reading practices she would engage in as a Worker with Options. A sub-identity of being a Worker with Options was becoming a Certified Truck Driver. As such, she would need to be able to read such things as the truck driving manual, contracts, invoices, and log books—and more independently than she was currently able to do. Megan felt that, as Someone That Kyle Can Depend On, she would be engaged in reading practices related to Kyle’s day-to-day care, including helping him with his schoolwork.

I’ll have to help him with all of his homework, because he’ll only have me and his teachers. And I don’t want to be “duh” like my dad. My mom was smart. But my dad would say, “You’ll have to go ask your mom. I didn’t get that far [in school],” so I need to be ready to do that. (M3B-M4)

Other than these concrete connections, participants talked rather vaguely about the imagined future reading practices that related to their identity work. For instance, Paulette felt that as a Great Reader she would be able to read anything that she had to read in public and not be embarrassed. Shelley thought that an Educated Mother would



be able to read “anything she wants to” (S3B), primarily for the purpose of continuing to learn. She would be able to support her children’s education by knowing enough and knowing how to help them with their schoolwork, and when her children were grown, she would be well-read and able to talk with her grown friends in a way that did not embarrass them. Since Shelley did not know what kind of work she would have as a Worker Who Profits, she could not imagine what kinds of texts she would need to read, other than the college textbooks that would be required on her way to becoming a Worker Who Profits. Table 18 summarizes the types of texts that participants could imagine being a part of their pursued identities.

**TABLE 18****Pursued Identities and Envisioned Texts**

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Pursued Identities and Related Texts</b>
Shelley	Beautiful, Smart, and Confident Woman
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• College texts</li> </ul>
	Educated Mother
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Children’s algebra homework</li> <li>• High school subject textbooks</li> <li>• College textbooks</li> <li>• Anything she wants</li> </ul>
	Worker Who Profits
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• College Texts</li> </ul>
Megan	Someone That Kyle Can Depend On
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Kyle’s homework</li> <li>• High school subject textbooks</li> <li>• C.N.A. prep materials</li> <li>• Directions for patients (diet, how to move, etc)</li> </ul>
	Improved Megan
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High school subject textbooks</li> <li>• College textbooks (possibly)</li> </ul>
Paulette	Great Reader
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Novels (e.g., Stephen King books, novel by psychic)</li> <li>• Information to inform voting</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Letters from family members</li> <li>• High school subject textbooks</li> <li>• Anything somebody asks her to read</li> </ul>
	Worker with Options
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Driving manual</li> <li>• Contracts</li> <li>• Invoices</li> <li>• Log books</li> <li>• CDL prep materials</li> </ul>

### **Other Factors Related to Attributions of Relevance**

The data support that self-evaluations of participation in out-of-school reading practices and imagined participation in future reading practices were important considerations for Paulette but not as significant for Shelley or Megan in assigning a positive value to the reading-related instruction each experienced. However, the identity work in which they were engaged provided a strong reference point for all participants, apart from contemplations of the reading involved in those identities. Both pursued identities and current identities were referenced in attributing relevance.

In referencing their pursued identities when attributing relevance, participants did not only value those reading-related activities that prepared them in some way for their actual pursued identities; they also evaluated their experiences according to the role the experiences played in preparing for the academic purposes they would have to read *for* on the way to becoming who they wanted to be. These two themes, *direct relevance* and *stepping-stone relevance*, are described next.

*Direct relevance.* Megan seemed to be speaking from her Improved Megan self in assigning meaning to her grammar work. She thought it was important for her to work in her grammar textbook so she did not “sound like an idiot when I talk to someone”

(M2C-M32) and so she could talk to people “with...intelligence” (M2C-M54). She also seemed to speak from her vision of herself as Somebody That Kyle Can Depend On, saying, “It’ll help Kyle, too! If I speak proper English to him, he will learn proper English from me” (M2C-M33). Paulette could not find any relevance in the contents of the history book, but she was convinced that working in the book was helping her to develop into a Great Reader. And although Shelley did not see how the actual knowledge of algebra could be applied outside of schoolwork, she did speak consistently about what it meant to her in her pursuit of being an Educated Mother:

Well, my kids are my life. And, considering the fact that I have a sixteen-year-old and a thirteen-year-old, I love the fact that I have learned more about algebra. Because now I can help with my children with their algebra. That’s my number one priority is to be able to make sure that my children—that I’m not only educated but to make sure that my children are, number one, educated, so that they can make it on into college and really make something out of theirself. You know, and I always thought, you know, the same way as Megan did as far as, “Why do I have to learn this? Because I’m not going to be using this.” But, gosh darn it, to be honest, I mean, the things that I’ve learned have really profited. Because I’m really able to sit down with my children now and actually be able to have a one-on-one conversation with them where I can be on their level. You know? And I like that. Because I can help them more with their work and everything. (GI3-209)

She also spoke from her pursued self as Educated Mother—and the shared experience of being “less educated” that undergirded all of their identity pursuits-- to help Paulette see the significance of Paulette’s experience with her history assignments.

P: Now this history, it’s kinda hard.

F: Now don’t ask me...

P: You remember--having to remember some dates and what happened to

George Washington. I don't wanna know... Am I gonna have to know this stuff when I graduate?

S: You'll have to know that so you can tell your grandbabies about it.

Multiple participants talk. Heard comments:

--You see, they can do like we did.

-- But the books change.

S: Yeah, but look at how we've had to struggle. (GI1-253-258)

*Stepping stone relevance.* Sometimes the participants questioned how the content or skill would be important once they exited school. At different times (and before she had become proficient enough to work with her children), Shelley (FN10-10-06) exclaimed (about algebra), "Really. When am I going to use this?", Megan (M2A-M5) was unsure if "there'll be anywhere in my life where I will need to know that" (how many pounds are in a ton), and Paulette (GI1-255) wondered if she would have to "know this stuff" (history) once she graduated. In these cases, taking the longer view did not prove helpful; instead they took a shorter view. Ultimately, Shelley and Paulette decided algebra and history were needed to graduate, which was a necessary step in realizing fully their future selves. Paulette also figured that her improvement in reading would help her pass her certification test to become a licensed commercial driver:

And I'm trying to go all the way to get my Class A license. And actually some of the words in it [the test] confuse me. Once I learn to read better here, and I can read that book and get through with that book and try to go get my Class A license, maybe I can just whiz right through it instead of having to go 4-5 times, different times. (P2A-P34)

Megan had to take a test on conversions for her C.N.A. test, so she worked diligently on converting pounds to tons, even though she did not see how it related to actually being a C.N.A.

Besides referencing their pursued identities, participants also made connections to current identities when attributing relevance to reading-related instruction. Activities were valued that affirmed a cherished component about a current identity. For instance, in her Creative Writing class, Shelley was able to express herself as a Country Girl in her writings about her family and her heritage, and her classmates honored this sense of herself. Shelley also enjoyed connecting with the other country girls in her writing group and looked forward to reading or hearing their stories. Secondly, reading-related instruction was valued when it tapped into current identities not mentioned as Guiding Identities for participation in the program. For instance, Megan was touched by the children's book *I'll Love You Forever* because it reminded her of her mother and of her own role as a daughter.

Table 19 summarizes the ways that participants attributed relevance to reading-related instruction in terms of their pursued and current identities. What also seems significant is what did not make it onto the chart. The discussion of filters in the next section sheds light on factors that affected negative attributions of relevance.

TABLE 19

**Perceived Relevance of Primary In-School Reading Practices**

Direct Relevance for Pursued Identity	Stepping Stone Relevance for Pursued Identity	Relevance for Current Identity	Relevance for Another Identity (not in the Guiding Identity Set)
Coursework			
<p>SHELLEY Learning in the Algebra course will help her work with her children and be “on-level” with them [Educated Mother]</p> <p>MEGAN Reading English Grammar will keep her from sounding like an idiot [Improved Megan] and help her son learn “proper English” [Someone That Kyle Can Depend On]</p> <p>PAULETTE Reading in coursework would help her become a better reader [Great Reader]</p>	<p>SHELLEY Needed Algebra to graduate</p> <p>MEGAN Needed to pass a test on conversions to become a C.N.A</p> <p>MEGAN Needed English credit to graduate</p> <p>PAULETTE Needed history credit to graduate</p> <p>PAULETTE Reading in coursework would help her read the CDL certification test [Worker With Options]</p>		
Motheread			
<p>SHELLEY Learned to read with expression [Educated Mother]</p> <p>PAULETTE Enjoyed reading out loud with success [Great Reader]</p>			<p>MEGAN Emotional pull of one book connected with an identity associated with her role as daughter</p>
1-2-3 Magic			
		<p>SHELLEY Has helped her become a better discipliner [Mama]</p>	
Creative Writing			
<p>MEGAN Appreciated the positive feedback she received; affirmed her as competent [Improved Megan]</p> <p>SHELLEY Appreciated the positive feedback [Beautiful, Smart, and Confident ]</p>	<p>MEGAN Counted towards high school diploma</p> <p>SHELLEY Counted towards high school diploma</p>	<p>SHELLEY Her own writings celebrated her heritage, and she enjoyed reading about the other country girls in the group [Country Girl]</p>	

### Filters

An important finding in the study is that attributions of relevance were affected by what I will call *filters*, or mediating factors that complicated how self-evaluations of reading ability and identity work were referenced. Four filters emerged as themes from the data: *time*, *what counts*, *connection to specific life context*, and *cross-identity impact*. The first factor was time. Because they had such strong identity goals in the area of motherhood, participants did see the potential relevance of classroom reading practices such as Motherhead and 1-2-3 Magic. However, they did not want to spend as much time on them as was currently being spent because they needed more time to complete the coursework for the high school diploma. Shelley and Megan, who were receiving financial support from Work First, always felt pressed for time because their DSS caseworkers had an eye on the clock. Megan, especially, felt pressured to make choices so that she could provide materially for Kyle's needs. At one point she complained about the amount of time she had to spend in Motherhead:

Reading four-year-old books takes up my time. I need to be working on my diploma. I told [caseworker] that I only have about 4 hours a week to work on my school work [because of everything else that happens in the Center]. They don't realize over at Social Services, how much time all these things take up. And I realize that there are some people that need all that, but I don't. (M3A-M3)

In addition to feeling like their time in the program was taken up with non-course-related activities, participants also struggled with family, health, and work issues that affected their attendance. During the data collection period, Megan's son was regularly ill and she herself had surgery. Paulette could only attend school until early

afternoon, when she had to leave for work. She also separated from her husband and moved out toward the end of the data collection period, so she missed a good bit of time trying to locate and set up a new home. Shelley was the most consistent attender, but her children were sick a few days, and she felt berated by her DSS worker for failing to get her required number of hours in for those weeks.

Related to the time issue was the *what counts* factor. The Center's assignment of high school credits to most but not all activities warranted frequent discussions among students of whether or not they would receive credit for the activity. Furthermore, credits accrued for non-coursework activities counted as "electives," and since only so many electives were required compared to academic coursework, the academic coursework counted most. Activities such as viewing 411 videotapes were seen as nuisances because they interrupted the little bit of time set aside for coursework. During the last group interview, I asked the participants directly if they would want to engage in activities to build their vocabulary. Megan responded that she would not, unless she received credit for it; Shelley thought she might, if it took up just a little bit of time during the week. Paulette, who did not have the time crunch of being supported by Work First, and who, arguably, experienced more difficulties with word issues, was more willing.

An additional factor in their attributions of relevance was the *connection to the specific life contexts* of the participants. Reading-related practices like Motherhead and 1-2-3 Magic were presented in such a way that parents of children who were not in a certain age range felt marginalized. Megan's son was too young for the disciplinary techniques of 1-2-3 Magic and for the books being shared in Motherhead. Shelley and



Paulette's children were too old. Shelley remarked at one point about 1-2-3 Magic: "I want [the teacher] to talk more about teenagers. I feel like I'm left out altogether because I've got teenagers" (S3A-S11). Paulette thought she might be able to use what she was learning if she had grandchildren, but for now the 1-2-3 Magic was not relevant at all. Thus, attributions of relevance did not lie only in whether activities were related to participants' identity work, in general, but in the specifics. Parenting topics targeted for the whole class seemed to miss the idiosyncratic issues and needs facing the individuals. Purcell-Gates et al. (2000) uses the term "contextually relevant" (p. 15), as opposed to being merely "real-life" to describe this direct connection to students' lives.

Everything else being equal, all three participants preferred to work on their coursework. What seemed to matter was the *cross-identity impact* that the academic work carried. The women entered the educational setting because being recognized as an Educated Person would contribute considerably to the work related to each of the guiding identity sets in which each was engaged. Whereas the parenting activities related to only one set of identities, the academic work related to both (or, in Shelley's case, all three) sets. It was an efficient way to spend their time, considering not only the practical but the emotional benefits the high school diploma offered. Their previous experiences in school, and the lack of status they felt as a consequence of not having the cultural proof of an education—in the form of a diploma--heightened the attraction of activities related to the high school diploma above and beyond any other activity in the program. Where they saw themselves—and felt they were viewed by others—as failures in their first go-

round with school, they wanted to succeed now with the same textbooks and tests. This was about “showing” “them.”

### **Overview of Chapter VII**

Chapters IV, V, and VI presented themes and findings related to each of the research questions. In the final chapter, I review the key findings and revisit the conceptual framework that guided the lenses used in the study. In so doing, I propose a model for how adult intermediate readers attribute relevance for reading-related instruction. I also explicate key contributions to the theoretical base informing the study and implications of the findings for the field of adult basic education.

## CHAPTER VII

### CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

#### Orientation to the Chapter

The purpose of this study was to explore if and how the relevance that adult intermediate readers attribute to reading-related instruction in the ABE classroom is connected to who they are and who they want to be. Chapters IV, V, and VI presented the findings related to the research questions:

1. What are the identities guiding participants' involvement in adult basic education?
2. What understandings do participants have about reading and the role it plays in their lives?
3. How are participants' perceptions of the relevance of reading-related instruction connected to their identity work and to the role of reading in their lives?

In this chapter, I use the findings to draw conclusions concerning how *who adult intermediate readers are* and *who they want to be* impact the relevance they attribute to the reading-related instruction they experience in the classroom. This is an important consideration because research with other groups served in adult education programs suggests that the meanings attributed to educational experiences affect how learners

respond in the classroom and persist in the educational program. Several studies (e.g., Belzer, 1998, 2002; Fingeret & Danin, 1991; Fingeret & Drennon, 1997; Gowan, 1990; Reumann, 1995) have concluded that at least some adult learners resist “new ways of doing school” (Belzer, 1998) and desire the familiarity of how school was done when they were children. Other studies have demonstrated that some adults who are assessed at reading levels below those which are considered literate by policymakers, do not consider that they have a problem with something called “reading.” (Belzer, 1998, 2002; Kirsch, Jungeblut, Jenkins, & Kolstadt, 1993; Sticht, 2005). Still other studies have revealed that adults who are limited in their reading practices experience shame (Bartlett & Holland, 2002; Fingeret and Drennon, 1997), which affects their willingness to take literacy practices learned inside the classroom into more public domains. This exploratory study is the first inquiry with adult intermediate readers to ascertain if and how their own experiences with literacy learning, specifically with reading-related instruction, are similar to and different from the populations investigated in these other studies.

Situating myself within a sociocultural perspective, I made assumptions that, in returning to an educational setting, adult intermediate readers are pursuing certain visions of themselves. I also assumed that in these visions of themselves, adult intermediate readers have certain notions of how reading, in particular, will be used. Weighing these against their self-assessments of their participation in current and past reading practices and their current understandings of reading, they make judgments about whether or not improvement in the general skill of “reading” is something that requires their attention in

the classroom as part of their identity work and about the relevance of reading-related instruction. In this chapter I revisit these assumptions.

The chapter is comprised of five sections. In the first section, *Who They Were and Who They Wanted to Be*, I synthesize the findings for the first two research questions to provide a picture of the identity work that brought the adult intermediate readers in the study into the adult basic education program and the role they perceived reading to play in that work. In the second section, *How Participants Attributed Relevance to Reading-Related Instruction*, I revisit the conceptual framework that was presented in Chapter II and, in its revision, proffer it as a model for how adult intermediate readers attribute relevance. In the third section, I discuss other key contributions of the study to understandings about learner motivations and the relationship among identity work, reading practices, and cultural models of reading. Within this discussion are implications for practice and policy. The chapter ends with comments on the limitations of the study/implications for future research, followed by final remarks.

### **Who They Were and Who They Wanted to Be**

Participants in this study were all white Southern women who had endured significant hardship in their lives. All came from working-class homes, in which they had lived for at least part of their youth with one parent who struggled to provide for the family. All had dropped out of high school and started or continued working. All shared experiences of being in relationships with individuals who abused drugs and/or alcohol and of suffering in those relationships. Shelley's mother was an alcoholic and her father

was addicted to OxyContin; Megan's fiancé was addicted to cocaine and alcohol; one of Paulette's husbands was a heavy drinker. Each of the participants experienced violence in these same relationships: Shelley from her mother, Megan from her fiancé, and Paulette's husband upon himself. Shelley and Paulette had each been treated for clinical depression, Shelley after the death of her father and Paulette after the death of her husband.

If that was the end of their stories, or the only chapters in their stories, these women would seem to be nothing more than powerless pawns, shaped and moulded by overpowering social, cultural, and familial structures from which there was no escape. But the women's stories are ones of agency, where women hold leadership positions in their homes and take responsibility for their lives. All the participants had children living at home and for whom they had been the principal provider for years: Megan had a two-year-old son, Shelley had both a daughter and a son in high school, and Paulette had a daughter attending the local community college. All considered themselves workers and had held a variety of positions in various businesses from the time they were teenagers. And all had made a decision to enter an educational program to position themselves for a more positive future.

The decision to enter the adult high school setting came amidst what Holland et al. (1998) term a "rupture" in their identities, what Fingeret & Drennon (1997) call a turning point, and what Mezirow & Associates (2000) discuss as a "disorienting dilemma." As Fingeret & Drennon (1997) discovered and Mezirow (2000) acknowledges, the rupture did not necessarily occur as a one-shot traumatic event for

participants but rather was a cumulative state of prolonged tension that reached a crisis point, forcing them to think about the world and themselves in new ways. Shelley faced herself in the mirror one day after suffering from depression and realized what she had allowed herself to become and the effect it was having on her children. Megan's disorienting dilemma evolved over time, beginning when her infant son was born into a situation rife with violence. When the violence escalated despite her prayers to God and pleas to Hank, she chose to remove herself and her son from the environment by pressing assault charges and moving out. Paulette sank into depression and lost full-time work after her husband committed suicide. When her money ran out and she attempted to find full-time work again, she was not able to find a job and had to reassess the way she was operating in the world.

In negotiating their ways through their individual disorienting dilemmas, each woman tapped into certain ways of thinking about herself that she had constructed through participating in certain kinds of social groups imbued with certain kinds of cultural understandings over time. Of the multiple identities available to each participant, certain ones rose to the fore. The identities they maintained with their children and as workers seemed most significant. In many ways, each of the women expressed confidence in her identity as a mother, each seeing herself as someone who had cultivated certain values in her children and had provided for their basic needs. However, there was a sense of lacking the esteem warranted by being better educated and, thus, knowing more than their children and being able to act as their guide in their educational endeavors. This was true at the Guiding Identity level for Shelley (Mama-Educated

Mother) and Megan (Good Mom-Someone That Kyle Can Depend On), and was an aspect of Paulette's Guiding Identities set (Slow Learner-Great Reader). As workers, however, the participants were less confident, mainly because of the long, hard hours they had had to put in for the minimal income they received and because of their increasing difficulty in finding jobs due to high school credential requirements. Here, too, lack of education was viewed as the culprit and was seen as an integral piece to be added to their current identities of Shelley's Worker Who Provides, Megan's Good Mom, and Paulette's Employed Worker to realize themselves as a Worker Who Profits, Someone that Kyle Can Depend On, and a Worker With Options, respectively.

Besides their identities as mothers and workers, participants also possessed senses of themselves in the larger community, which were not necessarily associated with any particular role but were rather senses of themselves as viewed through certain structural systems. For Shelley, one of her Guiding Identities was an amalgam of notions of herself as "country," as a woman, and as someone who was "poor." Manifesting as a Country Girl, this current identity was valued for what it meant to her and rejected for what it meant to others. Instead, she wanted to be Beautiful, Smart, and Confident—maintaining those parts of the Country Girl she liked but changing the way she was perceived by others. For Megan, she felt flawed because of how society marginalized her as a high school dropout, and she wanted to become an Improved Megan. For Paulette, who had thought of herself since childhood as being a Slow Learner, becoming a Great Reader was the vehicle to "show" people that she was knowledgeable and worthy of esteem. As with the role-based identities, education figured prominently in the self-fashioning that



was going on. In essence, the missing person in all of their identity pursuits was the Educated Person (Levinson & Holland, 1996; Bartlett & Holland, 2002), and somehow becoming *that* would enhance who they were already and enable them to realize their ultimate pursued identities. Thus, they entered the adult education program.

When they entered the program, they were individuals who engaged in reading texts within sociocultural practices (Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Fingeret & Drennon, 1997; Papen, 2005). When Paulette enrolled in the program four years previously, she had quite a limited range of reading practices. However, by the time of the study, she, along with Shelley and Megan, engaged in a wide range of practices that involved different kinds of texts. Outside of school, participants typically read for Instrumental purposes, regularly for Recreational, Critical/Educational, and News-related purposes, and to varying degrees for Social-Interactional and Spiritual/Religious purposes (Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines, 1988). They employed both initial engagement strategies and problem-solving strategies to manage their success during any particular reading event.

Embedded within these reading practices and others in which they had participated throughout their lives, the participants seemed to share a cultural model of reading outside of school. The cultural model of out-of-school reading was comprised of proposition-schemas (Quinn & Holland, 1987) that held that adults read to get things done and to enjoy life, that word pronunciation and understanding are important, that pace of reading is not, and that having to use strategies is cause for negative emotions. In light of their engagement in reading practices over time and operating with this particular cultural model, the participants had drawn conclusions about themselves as readers.

Although Paulette had managed the adult reading tasks in her current household and in her jobs prior to entering the class, she had often had to use problem-solving strategies—drawing on her social network (Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Fingeret, 1983), eavesdropping on what others said about the content, and using the dictionary. Reder (1994) would describe her engagement in the reading practices she participated in as functionally- and socially-engaged; however, her ability to engage technologically—i.e., to interpret the symbols on the page--was limited. Thus, she more than the others described reading outside of school prior to enrollment as frustrating and embarrassing. She entered the program expecting reading instruction to be a major component of her studies. Even though her own self-assessment and reading scores indicated her skills had improved, at the time of the study she still found reading “hard.”

Shelley and Megan, however, rarely discussed out-of-school reading as difficult. There were some problems with vocabulary, but these were usually avoided by self-selecting the texts which they read. When significant difficulties did arise within a particular reading event, Shelley and Megan usually attributed them to outside forces (e.g., writing style and whoever named ingredients), became irritated, and/or decided that continuing with the reading was not important. In general, they entered the program feeling rather comfortable with their reading and expected the focus of their instruction to be primarily on learning subject matter.

Once inside the program, only Paulette engaged in instruction in which reading itself was the object of study. By the time of this investigation, she and the others were principally engaged in activities in which reading was used as a tool for learning,

primarily about academic content but at times about parenting and careers. Participants experienced reading practices that were almost entirely Critical/Educational in purpose. In talking about their in-school reading, they drew from a different set of beliefs that heralded back to their high school experiences but also were formed from their engagement in the reading-related instruction at the Center. In-school reading involved reading to fulfill established requirements for an adult high school diploma, pronouncing and understanding the meaning of all the words read, reading slowly and with intense focus, and having the right kind of “head” (“soft”) so that strategy use was not required. Because the teacher dictated what was read and for what purpose, the participants were forced to engage technologically with print that they might have otherwise opted out of. A different set of problem-solving strategies were utilized, some of which were taught by teachers, some of which were shared by students with each other, and some of which were brought from their previous school experiences. But Paulette and Megan thought that if someone had to use too many strategies to understand and remember what was being read, there might be a disability of some sort impeding learning.

In sum, who participants were had been shaped by the various social, economic and cultural worlds in which they had developed as individuals. Within these worlds, they had formed certain identities and, pertinent to this study, had developed certain ways of participating in the reading practices that comprised their worlds. As they contemplated new avenues of self-development, the social position afforded them in their families and in the larger society as undereducated working class women from the “country” loomed large as a motivating force in their entry into and continuing

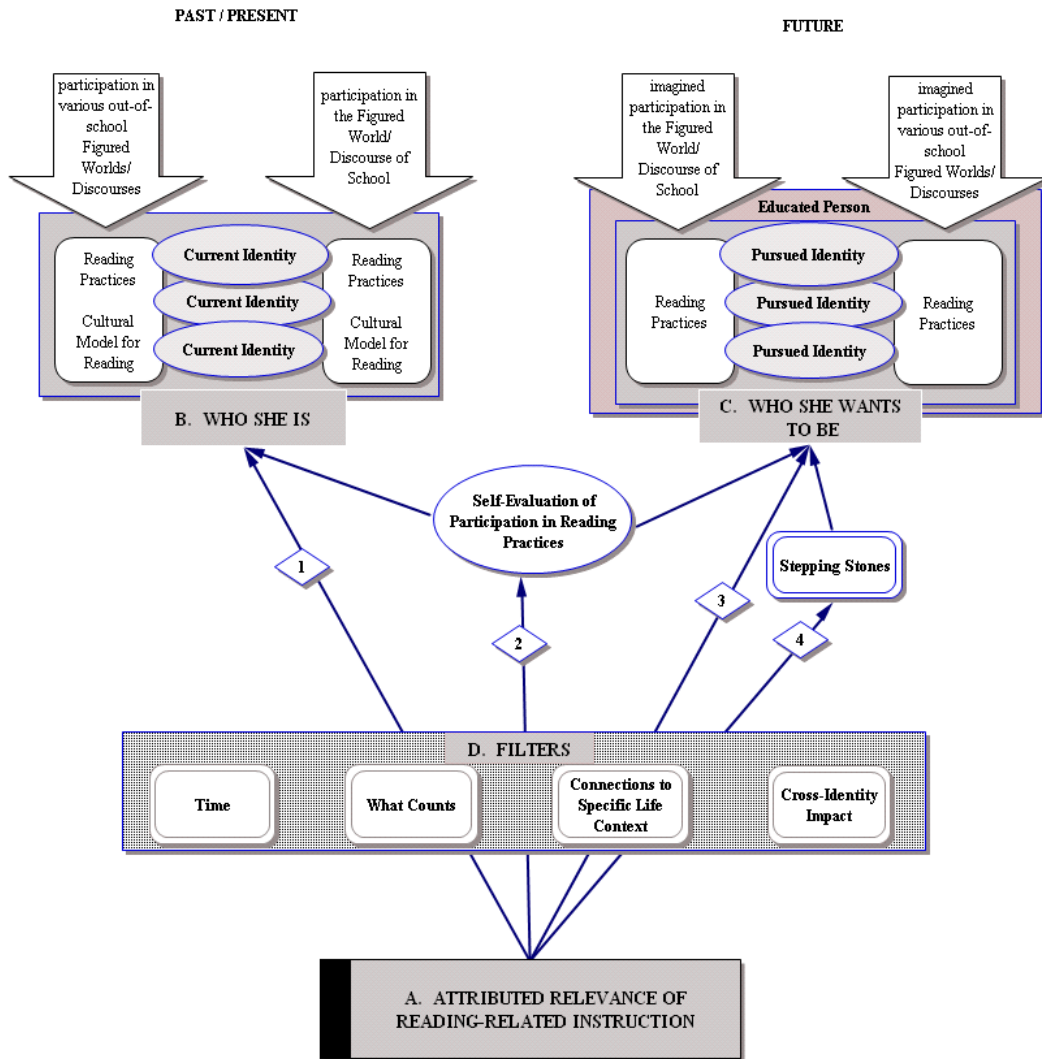
involvement within the adult education program. The ways they had developed for thinking about themselves, both present and future, and in conceptualizing reading and its role in their lives did ultimately give meaning to their experiences in the classroom, as theorized in the conceptual framework that guided the study. In the next section I discuss how.

### **How Participants Attributed Relevance to Reading-Related Instruction**

In Chapter II, I proposed a conceptual framework, elaborating the key concepts from the literature that informed the study. I theorized that participants' pursued identities—and the reading practices they envisioned being part of the worlds they would inhabit with those identities—would be the guiding force in the relevance participants' attributed to reading-related instruction. I further theorized that these would be weighed against participants' current understandings of what reading was and how good they were at it, borne out of their current (and past) experiences in reading practices. Based on the findings from the study, I propose the following revisions to the framework and posit the schematic in Figure 4 as a model for how adult intermediate readers attribute relevance.

### **Explanation of the Model**

The key constructs around which the model is built are labeled in Figure 4 with upper-case letters (e.g., A, B, C, D), and the connections among them (in terms of relevance attribution) are depicted with arrows. The starting point for reading the figure is with the box at the bottom which reads "A. Attributed Relevance of Reading-Related



**FIGURE 4**

**Proposed Model of Relevance Attribution for Reading-Related Instruction**

Instruction.” The four key reference points that adult intermediate readers use to attribute relevance are designated by the arrows originating at the top of the box. Each of these is discussed below, by the number on the schematic indicated for each arrow:

1. One reference point for attributing relevance to reading-related instruction is the learner’s current identities, the senses of themselves that they have in the present. Sometimes the content relates practically, as when Shelley found a substance abuse speaker and the concomitant brochure relevant to her identity as Mama. Sometimes the content relates on an emotional level, as when a Motherhead lesson tapped into Megan’s sense of herself as a daughter. The current identity referenced is sometimes part of a Guiding Identity set that motivated participation in the adult basic education program; sometimes it is not.
2. Another reference point is the learner’s self-evaluation of her participation in reading practices. This self-evaluation comes out of past and current participation in reading practices and is projected forward into imagined future reading practices. Paulette, for instance, evaluated herself negatively in terms of past performance in reading practices and perceived that she would have difficulty in participating in future reading practices associated with her pursued identities; thus, she valued classroom activities that helped her improve her reading, in general. Megan and Shelley also referenced their self-evaluations, but since they did not

perceive themselves negatively, improving their reading, per se, was not something they usually looked for when attributing relevance.

3. A third reference point in the model for attributing relevance is the learner's pursued identities. Reading-related activities are viewed as relevant when they enable the learner to realize a vision they have of themselves for the future. Examples from the study include Shelley valuing learning algebra because it enabled her to help her children with their algebra homework [Educated Mother] and Megan's valuing Creative Writing because it affirmed her as a competent and intelligent person [Improved Megan].
4. A fourth reference point for attributing relevance is when a classroom activity serves as a stepping stone toward the pursued identity. The most common example in this study was completing coursework, because it led to a credit, which led to the high school diploma, which led to being recognized as an Educated Person, which contributed to each of the pursued identities.

The "B. Who She Is" box depicts the elements of the history-in-person (Holland & Lave, 2001) of the most theoretical significance to the study. The history-in-person develops through participation in figured worlds. The findings from the study indicate that the figured worlds experienced in school and out of school are different enough to warrant separation (unlike in the original framework). Experience in these figured worlds lead to participation in reading practices, which were comprised of cultural

models of reading. Because they are born out of significantly different figured worlds and reading practices, the cultural model of out-of-school reading is different from the cultural model of in-school reading.

The “C. Who She Wants to Be” box depicts the elements of the learner’s future identities identified as significant in attributing relevance for reading-related instruction. When she enters an educational setting and through participation in that setting, the adult intermediate reader imagines the figured worlds which she is targeting with her pursued identities, including the type of reading practices involved. Each of the pursued identities that provide an impetus for involvement in the ABE program incorporates a notion of the Educated Person, which frames the whole box. Imagined participation in out-of-school figured worlds as well as the figured world of school (i.e., college) are considered, and relevance is attributed based on the connections she perceives between instruction and related identities.

The “D. Filters” box depicts factors that mediate how relevance is attributed. Relevance is deliberated in the midst of concerns related to time, what counts, connections to specific life contexts, and cross-identity impact. In this study, the context of the classroom, Work First requirements, family considerations—all complicated what might otherwise have been direct linkages to Shelley, Megan, and Paulette’s identity work and forced priorities to be set about what ultimately mattered.



## **Discussion of the Model**

This proposed model captures at least some of the complexity involved in the term “relevance,” a term that abounds in the literature as a valued pedagogical consideration. However, the term is often used only in passing in phrases like “relevant curriculum” (e.g., Fingeret & Drennon, 1997, p. 94) and “relevant texts” (e.g., Belzer, 2006, p. 25), signifying assumptions on the part of authors that its meaning is apparent and shared. Few researchers or theorists have considered in any depth what the term means, especially in relation to and/or for adult learners. In searching the literature for conceptualizations of the construct compatible with how the participants in the study attributed relevance, three pertinent conceptualizations emerged: relevance in terms of perceived skill need, relevance in terms of specific life contexts, and cultural relevance.

Sticht (2005) provides perhaps the most thorough explication of the notion of relevance. He first addresses it in terms of self-perceived need, pointing out that scores on the International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) imply that close to twenty percent of the adult population in the United States should consider adult literacy education needful, or relevant. However, fewer than five percent of the population actually rated their reading as poor. Fingeret (1983) and Merrifield et al. (1997) offer one explanation for the discrepancy, reporting how adults with limited reading skills employ social networks, technology, and careful text selection to enable them to address tasks that might be handled autonomously or differently by more technologically-skilled readers (Reder, 1994). The current study elaborates on these findings, demonstrating how adult intermediate readers, although they are less intimidated by printed texts than more

beginning readers, also manage their success in specific reading events by selecting texts or sections of text to read; talking with, listening, or watching others; and employing a rather wide range of reader-based (as opposed to other-based) strategies to problem-solve as they read outside of school. As a result, Shelley and Megan evaluated themselves positively and did not see instruction in reading, as the object of study, as needful. Paulette, however, was less positive about her own abilities, and found reading instruction relevant.

Sticht (2005) also approaches relevance in another way, advocating that adult literacy education “be based on what is relevant to the contexts of adults’ lives” (Sticht, 2005, p. 28). He speaks of the importance of “direct relevance” (p. 25) to enable transfer of learning into real life. Similarly, Purcell-Gates et al. (1998) explain that there are theoretical reasons why “program content and material [should] reflect the specific needs and sociocultural context of the learner with regard to real-life literacy functions” because research has shown that “students learn most effectively when instructional materials reflect and incorporate their prior experience” (p. 3). Later, the authors emphasize that the fact that texts are found in real-life does not necessarily make them “life-contextual”:

[T]he concept of “life-contextual” can actually be decontextualized in ways that reduce the effectiveness of its inclusion in adult literacy programs. Once activities and materials are mass produced and mass prescribed, they become increasingly distanced—or decontextualized—from the lives of individual students. Given the diversity of life situations among adult learners, this could easily happen in the adult literacy classroom. For example, a thematic unit centered around the use of checkbooks—considered a “real life” activity mediated by print by most middle-class people—would not be contextually relevant for students who do not have checking accounts, have never had checking accounts, and have no realistic plans

for opening checking accounts in the near future (Lerche, 1985). (Purcell-Gates et al., p. 8).

I find the notion of “contextual relevance” (p. 8) or, as one of study’s authors referred to it in a separate publication, “experientially relevant” (Degener, 2001), one that effectively captures one key consideration of relevance for the adult intermediate readers in the current study. All of the women had Guiding Identities around their roles as parents and/or workers, but these manifested in unique ways for each participant and were enacted within specific relationships and sociocultural milieus. Shelley, Megan, and Paulette were not interested in just any topic or material related to parenting or work. They wanted what they spent their time on in class to relate *specifically* to aspects of their own lives.

Another way the construct of “relevance” is discussed in the literature is in the phrase “culturally relevant” (Guy, 1999a; Degener, 2001; Beder et al., 2006; Auerbach, 1989). Cultural relevance is described as the “fit between learners’ cultural backgrounds and their educational experiences” (Guy, 1999a, p. 13), with a focus on those “group-based identity[ies]” (p. 13) most often defined according to race, gender, and ethnicity. The goals of culturally-relevant education are to “help learners who face oppression on a daily basis take control of their lives” and “to achieve within cultural communities the goal of social equality” (Guy, 1999b, p. 94). To accomplish these goals, adult educators attempt to provide materials which depict the culture of students in a positive light and avoids stereotypes, are aware of their own cultural biases, seek ways to understand the home and group cultures of their learners, and help learners “understand the political

context of the relationship between their home or native culture and that of the mainstream” (Guy, 1999b, p. 96).

It is questionable whether Shelley, Megan, and Paulette experienced instruction that could be characterized as culturally relevant—or even if such instruction would have been perceived by them as actually relevant. Data related to their out-of-school reading suggest that they might have valued instructional material and content related to their mix of regional and gendered identities as Southern “country girls.” The fact that the participants both valued these identities for their personal significance and yet resisted them because of how they were socially constructed suggests that instructional themes and/or materials that enabled exploration of these identities might have been perceived as valuable.

None of the ways of discussing relevance identified in the literature quite captures the role that seeking recognition as an Educated Person played in how the participants assigned relevance. The symbolic, cultural weight of this specific identity allowed participants to give meaning to textbook-driven activities that seemed (to an outsider) decontextualized and distanced from their lives. These activities were, in fact, meaningful at least in part because, upon their cumulative completion, they would bring these working class women a certain status that had eluded them since they left high school prematurely. Coursework was attributed relevance, then, because it carried a certain *iconic relevance*—it aided them in acquiring an important overarching symbol that contributed to identities they were seeking in a variety of roles and relationships.

Filters also played a part in attributing relevance to a particular activity or classroom practice. All things being equal, the women in the study might have been able to pursue each of their envisioned future selves with equal vigor. However, time constraints from life circumstances and public assistance policies required priorities to be set. Considering what counted towards their high school diploma, how distant the content of at least the parenting activities were from their specific life contexts, and how pervasive the practical and symbolic benefits of the diploma were to the identity work being undertaken, textbook-based coursework was seen as more relevant than anything else that occurred in the classroom. The ultimate implications of an uncritical acceptance of such a result is discussed in the following section.

### **Additional Contributions and Implications**

In this section, I describe key contributions this study has made to the research and constructs that originally informed the study. These are discussed in terms of identity-related motivations for learning and reading practices and their embedded cultural models of reading.

#### **Identity-Related Motivations for Learning**

In this study, the notion of motivation was reframed in terms of the identity work adult learners are engaged in when they decide to enroll in an adult education program. In a back and forth e-mail discussion of why identity matters in literacy education (McCarthy & Moje, 2002), Elizabeth Moje states, “[I]dentity matters because it...shapes or is an aspect of how humans make sense of the world and their experiences in it” p.

228). The motivation of adult learners has been studied in a variety of ways through the years, with most theories making a place for students' goals. These are usually discussed as skills (e.g., to improve reading), tasks (e.g., to get a job; to earn a high school diploma), or general self-improvement goals (e.g., to feel better about myself). Comings et al.(2003) recently described the latter as transformational goals in a study of efforts made by literacy programs to improve persistence. These goals were defined as "broader changes that students want to achieve, such as changes in self-perceptions or identity, major life skills, psychological states, and social or work roles. These tend to be intrinsic to the student and are described as enhancing the quality of the student's life on a deeply personal level" (p. 58).

The study described in these pages explicates these transformational goals, but I prefer the name *identity goals* to transformational goals because Mezirow and Associates (2000) discuss transformation in adults in a way that gets at their abilities to take on other perspectives. The emphasis in transformational theory is more on changes in ways of thinking than in ways of being, though the two are related. In this study the focus was on participants' sense of themselves and, as they were expressed and represented in the study, these were not characterized by new ways of thinking, but by realizing versions of their selves that would earn them the esteem they so coveted from their families, potential employers, and the larger community. The disorienting dilemmas they experienced did not necessarily cause a reframing of the way they viewed the world; rather it began a crystallization process of becoming new selves within that world. It jump started agentive action toward identity work, but the work occurred within the same "figured

worlds” (Holland et al., 1998) in which they had been operating; participants just wanted to position themselves differently within those worlds<sup>1</sup>. A key figure in their figured worlds was the Educated Person.

### *The Educated Person*

The pursuit of being recognized (by themselves and others) as an educated person may seem obvious. After all, the adult learners have come to an educational setting. However, being an Educated Person is a positionally-laden identity, socially constructed within a specific culture (Levinson & Holland, 1996). Beder and Valentine (1990) begin to get at the import of this identity for Shelley, Megan, and Paulette when they suggest from their study of 323 adult learners in Iowa that returning to school as an adult is both an vestibule activity, carrying practical implications for their lives, but also a symbolic activity, “in which learners may expunge their internalized (and socially reinforced) feelings of inadequacy” (Wikelund, Reder, & Hart-Landsberg, 1992, p. 8). Fingeret and Drennon (1997) provided perhaps the most in-depth treatment of what exactly is at work when beginning-level adult readers talk about self-esteem, exploring the notion of shame and how, rather than being a broad experience in their lives, shame is tied directly to how they feel related to engagement in literate practices, especially when they are public. What the study described in this report contributes is a more elaborated understanding of what is affecting the “self-esteem” of adult intermediate readers, in particular. Although

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<sup>1</sup> In contrast, Holland et al. (1998) report how new initiates into the figured world of Alcoholics Anonymous that they studied had to reframe how they thought about drinking—what was normal and what was not—and then they positioned themselves as alcoholics within that frame.

the women in this study experienced shame, it was tied specifically to literate practices only with Paulette, who felt embarrassment and frustration with both public and private acts of reading. However, all three participants experienced shame in relation to their educational status.

In some ways, the shame was related to specific instances when participants did not *know* enough, as when Shelley and Paulette tried to help their children with their schoolwork. It was projected into the future for Megan, who envisioned the need to help her son with his. Shelley went even further, considering what she would be able to talk about with the future potential mates of her children. Mostly, though, shame was related to how they felt they were perceived because they did not possess the cultural symbol for education. This was at least a high school diploma and, for Shelley, a college degree. Interestingly, although all participants entered the program because they were seeking employment, it soon became apparent in the interviews that much more was at stake than their ability to find a job. What this investigation has determined is that being an Educated Person is not just about obtaining a gateway credential into the world of work, though this was indeed a needful pursuit. To these women, earning a high school diploma was also a gateway into a whole realm of positional attributes that affected them in their different adult roles: their children would respect them more and be able to depend upon them, they would have more options and better quality of work, and they would be perceived in the larger world as someone of status. In essence, they would be women with power.



Importantly, what counted as the credential to signal that they were possessors of the cultural capital of education changed for participants upon entering the program. All three women came into the center in pursuit of the GED. However, through conversations with social service agencies, teachers at the Center, and other students, they came to see the adult high school diploma as the credential of choice. The amount of time allowed by Work First for Shelley and Megan's studies was about to run out when I spoke to them in March/April for their final member checks. Megan shared that she had only two months left and had been told by her caseworker to set her high school credit work aside and concentrate on passing the GED tests. She had begun to accelerate her C.N.A. preparation and had begun, from scratch, to study for the GED. She was back to having as goals the same ones she had had upon entry, except now, they did not have the same significance. In the Pursued Identities Activity, Megan left High School Graduate on the table. When I asked why, she said, "I can't do that now. I have to get my GED" (M3B-M3). Being a passer of the GED no longer counted as being a high school graduate. To cope, Megan reverted to her original plan, with a twist: "I'm going to show [caseworker]. I'm going to get my GED and then come back and get my high school diploma. I'm not going to let her pee in my cornflakes!" (M3B-M3).

### ***Problematizing the Educated Person***

The power that accompanied becoming an Educated Person was significant, according to Shelley, Megan, and Paulette. Being an Uneducated Person carried with it a form of social positioning that these women recognized more tangibly than those that

accompany the social structures usually employed to assign rank and status within the dominant culture, e.g., gender, socioeconomic status, ethnicity. Without a credential to signal otherwise, they perceived that what they knew and what they could do was compromised. Their assumption, however, that earning the credential—becoming this Educated Person—would wipe out the inequities they faced in their lives is not supported in the literature. For instance, Sohn (2006) studied the effects of attending college on Appalachian women and discovered that, although they had envisioned significant impacts for their ability to find and sustain good jobs, the reality of the economic conditions and the types of jobs available in the area did not allow them to obtain the kinds of jobs for which they were prepared. Similarly, Bingman and Ebert (2000) found that adult education students in Tennessee who obtained a high school credential did not improve their employment situations. D’Amico (1999) challenges the hegemonic thinking that addressing literacy levels alone of lower-class adults will result in increased employment in jobs that provide a living wage:

[W]e know and research shows that many more factors, beyond the literacy level of applicants, are involved in the transition from public assistance to employment. These factors include the state of the local labor market, the racial and gender segmentation that characterize employment in the United States, and access to social networks that can provide entry to employment (Holzer, 1996; Newman, 1995; Lafer, 1992; Schneider, 1997). ...[B]oth socio-economic factors—such as what kinds of jobs are available to whom and individual ones—such as substance abuse, and mental and physical health issues—mediate the relationship between literacy level and employment success. (p. 2-3)

Luttrell (1997) found that the African-American women in her North Carolina study questioned the hegemonic thinking that education of the individual is the

employment panacea because they knew of other black women who had earned college degrees and were still cleaning houses. Shelley, Megan, and Paulette, however, never articulated any concerns that a high school and/or a college diploma would fail to be the ticket for upward mobility. Instead, they bought into the prevailing figured world of success and believed wholeheartedly that becoming an Educated Person would erase the social positioning they experienced as working class women, not only in their employment pursuits but in their roles as mothers and in the greater community. Based on her interview study with women in North Carolina and Philadelphia, Luttrell (1997) contends, “Adult education is about establishing a credible, worthy self and public identity as much as it is about gaining a diploma” (p. 126).

### *Implications*

It is time to move the symbolic nature of the credentialing work going on in adult basic education classrooms from the margins to the center of discourse and application. Increasingly, the symbolic importance of educational pursuits is recognized, in passing, before returning to the more concrete goals of learners (Gowen, 1990; Fingeret & Danin; Bingman & Ebert, 2000; Comings et al., 2003; Comings et al., 1999; Beder & Valentine, 1990; Lytle, 1991). This study lends support to mounting evidence (e.g., Fingeret & Drennon, 1997; Luttrell, 1997; Sohn, 2003) that, for adult learners, this work is at the very core of their motivations for participation in adult education.

Although the study was exploratory in nature, the findings related to the significance of the identity work that guided participants’ involvement in adult basic

education programs suggest that these programs may benefit from incorporating the identity pursuits of learners more explicitly into classroom activities. Processes which support learners in reflecting upon and articulating what is at the core of their participation would enable learners to develop more concrete symbols of their future selves to use in motivating their own activity (Holland et al., 1998). The telling or writing of autobiographies, a key feature of feminist pedagogy (Tisdell, 2002; Brooks, 2002; Luttrell, 1997), seems applicable here because individuals shape themselves within a milieu of social, cultural, and historical forces. Eisenhart (2000) maintains that “[t]elling stories about self is...a means of becoming; a means by which an individual helps to shape and project identities in social and cultural spaces, and a way of thinking about learning that requires the individual to be active, as well as socially and culturally responsive” (p. 373). The ways in which learners’ stories are told permits teachers to understand more fully if not completely the path that has brought learners into their classrooms and where they hope the path out of the classroom will take them. Such knowledge can be used to shape experiences within the classroom in ways that are truly relevant to learners.

For adult intermediate readers, being recognized as an Educated Person carries great cultural weight and practical rewards, which buffers other important identities. The actual power of this identity to offset current identities which participants are resisting is questionable, considering the structural forces at work. Examining the assumptions behind participants’ expectations related to the high school credential is one way to begin a conversation about the actual benefits of having such a credential. The National Center

for the Study of Adult Literacy and Learning has developed a publication for use with adult learners entitled *Beyond the GED: Making Conscious Choices about the GED and your Future*. This curriculum supports programs in helping adult learners to examine the benefits and limitations of the GED in ways that foreground other socioeconomic and cultural factors that affect employment. A similar curriculum could be developed around the adult high school diploma or around comparing the adult high school diploma with the GED. The purpose of such an exploration would not be to diminish the high school credential but to set it in context so that adults pursuing the credential have the opportunity to consider other activities they may need to undertake in order to realize their future selves, including perhaps advocating for changes in policy (Tisdell, 2002; Papen, 2005).

The work-related identities which each of the participants pursued suggests that adult learners would benefit from activities and experiences that enable them to gain more concrete images and understandings for the possibilities the future might hold for them in the area of employment. Although all of the women had work-focused identity pursuits, they had few ideas about what kinds of jobs would help them realize their future selves and few specifics about what those jobs entailed. Career explorations which spur students' imaginings of self may serve to give students more of an understanding of the identities and reading practices required in particular job sectors. Wenger (1998) and Holland et al. (1998) suggest that the saliency of any pursued identity in motivating behavior is increased when newcomers to a figured world (in this case, a specific career) learn from "oldtimers" what is involved, identify with the identities offered within that

figured world, and can imagine themselves within that world. Field trips to local businesses, guest speakers, job shadowing, and inquiry projects would all be concrete ways to provide opportunities for the legitimate peripheral participation that Lave and Wenger (1991) posit are necessary for newcomers into a community.

Experiences of the participants in the study also suggest implications for parent education, an important component in family literacy programs. Although the topic of parenting was applicable to each of the women, the specific interests and concerns of each were situated within their own individual contexts. The relevance of many of the topics presented and discussed was distant from students' actual lives. However, their comments suggest that they did value the idea of parent education; they just wanted it to connect more directly with what they were experiencing with their own children, to be more "contextually relevant" (Purcell-Gates, et al., 1998, p. 8). The findings from this study suggest that project-based learning (Auerbach, 1992; Green, 1998; Wrigley & Guth, 1992), in which learners research their own questions around often self-chosen topics, would provide a boost to relevancy.

### **Reading Practices and Cultural Models**

A significant contribution of this study is in documenting empirically that adult intermediate readers have different identity pursuits than lower-level readers (as measured on standardized tests) and that these differences are related to how they evaluate their own participation in vernacular (Barton & Hamilton, 1998) reading practices. For Paulette, who struggled to participate technologically and autonomously in

the reading practices that comprised her adult responsibilities, becoming a Great Reader was an important identity pursuit, much like that of more beginning-level adult readers who want to become “literate people” (Fingeret & Drennon, 1997). Thus, reading as an “object of study” (Barton & Hamilton, 1998, p. 282) was important to her initially. As she increased the range of reading practices in which she was able to participate more comfortably, her focus widened, and she joined Shelley and Megan in pursuing the overarching identity of an Educated Person, though this had certainly been in the background from the beginning. To become an Educated Person, the object of study becomes not “reading,” but subject matter content, the learning of which results in a credential that carries great cultural import. Having this credential signals to family, employers, and the community recognition as a person of worth and supports the specific identity work related to their adult roles and societal structures in which each is engaged.

This distinction between being literate and being educated is significant when contemplating pedagogical implications. The Literate Person and the Educated Person are each culturally-imbued identities. The difference in the two seems to be in what signals recognition. For the beginning-level readers in the Fingeret and Drennon (1997) study—and still for Paulette—one’s (poor) participation in a public reading event could at any time trigger identification as illiterate. Fingeret and Drennon (1997) posit that experiences of belittlement from teachers, students, siblings, and others over the course of their individual development coupled with the “‘cultural injunction...to be independent and self-sufficient’ (Pratt, 1990, p. 29)” (p. 71), has resulted in the internalization of socially-constructed shame related to their literacy abilities. Whereas

individuals may feel competent in other areas of their lives, participation in a public literacy event makes them vulnerable. Thus, reading as an object of concerted study is inherently relevant for beginning-level readers. On the other hand, the Educated Person is not so much recognized through any specific action but by what they can claim (e.g., on a job application) and by what they can prove by the diploma on the wall.

Adults who are beginning-level readers, then, have both a felt need to develop the underlying and transferable knowledge and skills related to reading and, because of the immediate reading tasks that they face as adults, they benefit from instruction that brings literacy practices into the classroom and then out again into public settings (Purcell-Gates, Jacobson, & Degener, 2004; Fingeret & Drennon, 1997). But what about adult intermediate readers, who comfortably negotiate the everyday literacy demands of their lives outside of school and who are focused on the academic demands required to earn the socially-, culturally-, and practically-relevant recognition as an Educated Person? An added challenge is that the cultural model of reading that these readers have may not include a propositional-schema for the “teachability” of reading, beyond the initial work of learning how to pronounce words. Participants in the current study did not think to request instruction in reading but rather seemed to think that any issues they had with reading were innate and must be worked around. They attributed their difficulties to their “hard heads,” which instruction would not fix. Like adult learners in other studies (Belzer, 1998; Luttrell, 1997), participants’ notions of knowing impacted their understandings of what might be learned. Furthermore, in the context of welfare reform



and the economic pressure to provide for their families, time was a commodity and decisions about how to spend class time were made from among competing priorities.

### *Implications*

In contemplating instruction for adult intermediate readers, this exploratory study suggests several issues that need to be factored in: the pursuit of being an Educated Person and the concomitant and preeminent value attributed to the high school diploma, the propositional-schema of reading that holds that reading is tied to innate abilities and is not necessarily something to be taught (after a certain point), and the structure of a high school diploma system that weights certain activities as more important than others. One approach that addresses each of these issues is contextualized literacy instruction (Jacobsen, Degener, & Purcell-Gates, 2003; Condelli, Wrigley, Yoon, & Seburn, 2003; Bingman & Stein, 2001; Sticht, 2005; Jurmo, 2004; Freire, 1970), in which specific skills and knowledge are taught within meaningful life-based tasks using authentic materials for authentic purposes. Such an approach addresses the identity-related motivations discussed in the previous section as well. A particular kind of contextualized instruction termed participatory education (Fingeret & Jurmo, 1989; Campbell, 2003) seems especially pertinent considering the social structures which characterize these identity pursuits. Participatory education supports “literacy with an attitude” (Finn, 1999) and is described by Campbell (2003, p. 128) as “a collective effort in which the participants are committed to building a just society through individual and socioeconomic transformation and ending domination through changing power relations’ (Campbell,

2001, p. 1).” Participatory approaches are seen as collaborative, allowing for the development of choice and student voice, and critical (Degener, 2001), attending to the larger societal forces that figure adult learners in certain ways and position them to a certain status.

In developing curricula for adult high school diploma (and thus determining “what counts”), programs might construct contextualized units around themes and topics related to adults’ identity work that include both academic texts and tasks but also material and tasks related to adult reading practices. These might include vernacular texts using vocabulary, knowledge, and the syntax of the dominant culture (Barton & Hamilton, 1998), which all participants had difficulty reading in out-of-school contexts—the language of banks, policies, and contracts. Explicit instruction in multisyllabic alphabets, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension strategies—components of reading instruction advocated by synthesis reports (Kruidenier, 2002; NRP, 2000)—and the social and cultural meanings embedded within the reading practices themselves could be included in these units in such ways that their pertinence to the identity pursuits of learners is made transparent (Gillespie, n.d.). What is different about the approach proposed here from that experienced by participants in the study is that, in contextualized literacy instruction, reading is explicitly *taught* within the same tasks in which it is being *used*. Whereas activities like Motherhead and 1-2-3 Magic in the current study relied on reading to get across key content (related to parenting and life themes), knowledge and skills about reading itself were at best only mentioned, just as when participants engaged in their coursework. Embedding reading as the object of study within other objects of

study would enable adult learners to learn to negotiate the social, functional, and technological contexts that comprise and define any reading practice—whether in school or outside of school.

How might teachers talk about reading in ways that are meaningful to adult intermediate readers who are focused on covering the content required for their high school credential? My own experiences as a professional developer and research in the field (Belzer, 1998; 2002) and in national surveys (Kirsch, et al., 1993; Sticht, 2005) suggest that adult intermediate readers do not tend to value reading instruction, at least at first. For the participants in the current study, however, engagement with academic reading practices surfaced certain expressed issues with pronouncing multisyllabic words, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension that adult intermediate readers recognized as impediments to their ability to accomplish academic tasks. The women just did not seem to know that these were teachable. Fostering conversations about how they see each of these components affecting meaning-making and then tying instruction in these elements to their own statements would seem to provide the necessary bridge. However, when I did just that in the last group interview, asking if participants would find it beneficial to have instruction in vocabulary, its relevance was filtered through consideration of issues related to time and what counted toward the high school diploma. Focused instruction in assessed needs (Strucker & Davidson, 2003) and intentional inclusion of these in ways that earn credit and are contextualized within meaningful tasks are possible solutions.

Prior work in bridging out-of-school literacy practices and in-school reading practices (Hull & Shultz, 2002; Heath, 1983) suggests that comparing participants'

cultural models of in-school and out-of-school reading would be an instructionally useful endeavor as well. For instance, participants' out-of-school cultural model acknowledges the role of purpose in reading and the agency of the reader in determining or selecting that purpose. They also very clearly matched how they approached any reading event outside of school according to that purpose. Instead of seeing the reading that occurs in an academic setting as being separate from the reading they do in their "real lives," learners might explore how academic reading provides merely another set of purposes that require familiarity with certain kinds of words, patterns of writing, and strategies. Lea and Street (2006) argue for such in their academic literacies model, which "is concerned with meaning-making, identity, power, and authority, and foregrounds the institutional nature of what counts as knowledge in any particular context" (p. 369). Within such a model, the negative connotation of strategy use evident in both the in-school and out-of-school model might be negotiated by think alouds, modeling, and discussions about what skilled readers actually do, to demonstrate that the use of strategies is a strength, not a weakness. Discussions might also include the kind of vocabulary used in written discourse and how to learn these words, drawing upon the distinction Beck, McKeown, and Kucan (2002) make among Tier 1 words (words common to everyday speech), Tier 2 words (words that transfer across contexts in written discourse), and Tier 3 words (words that are context-specific). Whereas the textbooks participants use for their coursework explicitly teach Tier 3 words, instruction in Tier 2 words would need to be incorporated more intentionally into instruction.

Sophisticated approaches to teaching and learning such as contextualized literacy instruction and its variants (e.g., project-based learning, participatory education, and the academic literacies model) have the potential to support both the identity work *as well as* the development of the knowledge, skills, and understandings that may permit adult intermediate readers to participate more flexibly in a wider range of reading practices. Such approaches have the potential for addressing the various factors and filters that affect relevance attributions, and, logic would suggest, positive relevance attributions have the potential to affect persistence and progress in learning endeavors, issues of interest to federal and state funders of adult basic education. However, these approaches require more stable structures and investment in materials and time than typically found in adult basic education programs. Beder and Medina (2000) and Beder et al. (2006) have pointed to the open enrollment policies of programs and inconsistent attendance tendencies of adult learners as major reasons for the preponderance of the lab-like environment that characterizes much of adult education, with individuals working independently in their own materials, requesting teacher support as needed. One implication, therefore, is that policymakers might explore the influence that federal and state accountability policies are having on the pervasive decision of most local programs to provide multi-level, open enrollment classrooms. They might also examine how supports might be put in place to make planning for instruction efficient. There are models available for providing contextualized reading instruction in high schools (e.g., Greenleaf, Shoenbach, Cziko, & Mueller, 2001), and even in adult high school diploma programs where specific curricula must be followed. In Maine, for example, the state has

funded the development of curricula (e.g., Barter et al., 2007) built around adult learning standards and based in adult-oriented themes. The curricula allow flexibility in how local programs and teachers utilize the curricula to meet the expressed interests and goals of its students. Investment in the development of curricula such as these and evaluation of their uses and effects with adult intermediate readers are promising avenues for policymakers to explore in attempts to support the educational progress of this large group of learners.

### **Limitations and Future Research**

One limitation of this study is that the data were collected from one site, perhaps constraining the transferability of the findings to adult intermediate readers in other programs and in other locales. Since the participants in this study were women with children and were attending a family literacy program, it is possible that the strong parenting goals and identities described in Chapter IV may not be held by other adult intermediate readers in different settings. Furthermore, all the participants were White and lived in a rural Appalachian community; thus, the identities, reading practices, and cultural models of reading may reflect the sociohistorical and cultural contexts of the region. Research with other adult intermediate readers from different regional and cultural groups would contribute to the emerging understanding of these readers begun with the current study.

Another limitation is that out-of-school reading practices in the investigation were documented through self-report and not through actual observation. Since the focus of

the study was on participants' perceptions of the role reading played in their lives, what they recognized as reading and chose to talk about were significant to understanding how they perceived their own participation in reading practices. However, it is still likely that my findings would be different, at least at the level of detail and description if not in content, had I observed participants in their home, work, and community settings. Additional studies that investigate how adult intermediate readers engage in reading practices in their lives outside of school would add to the field's ability to bridge in-school and out-of-school reading practices (Hull & Shultz, 2002) for this group.

Furthermore, the role that cultural models of reading play in how adult learners experience and respond to reading-related instruction is underexamined in the field of adult literacy and basic education. This study surfaced differences that have the potential to inhibit or enhance reading instruction, depending on whether or not they are recognized and utilized by teachers and learners. Studies in which learners explore their cultural models of reading and build upon them in instructionally-useful ways would be a logical next step.

Because of the few participants that contributed to the grounded model for relevance attribution that evolved from the study, further research is needed to ascertain whether the model holds for other adult intermediate readers. The small number of participants was necessary to explicate as fully as possible the interrelationships among motivations related to identity, participant reading practices, and the relevance of reading-related instruction. The extent to which the findings will transfer to other adult intermediate readers, therefore, is uncertain. Such research might investigate what other

reference points adult intermediate readers access in attributing relevance, other than their identity work and participation in reading practices. Lastly, considering the relative value assigned the GED and the Adult High School Diploma found in the current study, more research into the meanings associated with each of these credentials for learners, employers, teachers, and policymakers—and where these come from—seems to be in order.

### **Conclusion**

Adult basic education is funded through federal workforce-related legislation, operates as a key feature in local and state efforts to follow Temporary Assistance for Needy Families policy, and is located in the federal Department of Education, where it is impacted by legislation related to K-12 education. In the current government culture of accountability, it is driven by numbers and dictates, often at the expense of addressing the goals which adults themselves bring into the program. Reviewing evaluation studies on the effectiveness of federal education programs, Stein (1997) maintained that the adult education system, if it can be called a system, operates without any clear vision for its services. Is it a remediation program in which adults make up for the education they did not receive in high school, or is it a future-oriented program, which foregrounds the adulthood of its customers and arranges curriculum and delivery around the literacy and education needs required to meet adult responsibilities now and in the future?

Ten years later, the same question can be asked. Experiences of the participants in the study indicate the split personality of adult education as a whole. On the one hand,



the Center provided a very traditional high school diploma, using a credit-delivery system that closely mimicked the curriculum of the high school down the street. It also offered preparation for the GED, but the adult learners at the Center perceived that the adult high school diploma was preferenced by social service agencies, teachers, and students. On the other hand, there was a realization of the adult responsibilities the learners had, and activities related to parenting, career development, and citizen participation were offered. These activities were disconnected from each other, however, and from the skill and knowledge development that counted the most (according to how credits were earned). Thus, although participants saw the potential of activities related to parenting and employment especially, the actual activities were often too distant from what they were experiencing in their own lives to be relevant.

The study described in these pages contributes to our understanding of how adult basic education might be constructed to meet the needs of adult intermediate readers. The experiences of Shelley, Megan, and Paulette reflected the identity work guiding their involvement in adult education and demonstrated how being recognized as an Educated Person was important to this work and distinct from that guiding the involvement of adult beginning readers in literacy programs. The inquiry also documented the rich reading practices in which the women participated, despite having assessed reading levels which placed them in a group viewed by policymakers as at-risk for full and competent involvement in society. Their perceptions of their own participation in reading practices and the cultural models of reading formed within these practices influenced their felt need for reading to be the object of study once enrolled in the program. Once enrolled,

they attributed relevance to reading-related instruction based on how well the content and skills related to their identity work, referencing their perceived abilities on the way and juggling considerations of mediating factors such as time, what counted as progress toward obtaining the cultural symbol integral to all of their identity pursuits (i.e., the high school diploma), and how closely the content of instruction fit with their specific life contexts.

These experiences and understandings suggest that providing dual services—academic and life-based—may not be the most efficient, effective, or empowering means of addressing the educational needs of adult intermediate readers. Organizing teaching and learning around contextualized approaches which negotiate in-school reading and out-of-school reading through relevant tasks, talk, and teaching seems to be a better solution. Including opportunities for learners to identify how their fashionings of self are supported and complicated by the social and political milieu in which they live may be even better, considering the confluence of social factors—gender, class, and regional attributions--affecting their identity work. In sum, foregrounding the foundational motivation of self-transformation that brings adult intermediate readers into adult basic education programs heralds new possibilities for how we think about and deliver adult education services.

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## APPENDIX A INTERVIEW 1 PROTOCOL

*State student's name, the date, "Interview 1," the place of the interview, and the beginning time.*

**The purpose of our time together today is to explore what reading means to you, how you learned to read, and how reading fits into your life. I will ask you some general questions and then more specific ones to try to understand your answers more fully. If you feel uncomfortable at any time, just let me know, and I'll move to another question.**

1. ***Share information about myself, then:*** Please tell me a little bit about yourself.
  - **Family:** children (ages), spouse, who lives in the house
  - Work: current and past jobs, how long, responsibilities
  - Hobbies/Interests
  
2. ***Review demographic information from student folder. Seek confirmation and clarification.***
  
3. **Why did you decide to come to this adult education program? Try to remember what you were thinking *before* you entered the class.**
  - What was going on in your life that led you here?
  - What did you want to learn? How will that help you achieve your goals?
  - How did it feel to start?
  - Have you ever been in an adult education program before?
  - *(If student has been in class for several weeks)* Has anything changed about your goals since you entered the class? *(If so)* What caused you to change your goals?
  
4. **Think about the goals that brought you class. How important do you think reading is to achieving those goals?**
  - What kinds of things do you expect to have to read when you achieve that goal?
  - Is there anything you might need to learn how to read or about reading in order to achieve those goals?
  
5. **What do/did you want this program to be like?**
  - What do/did you expect to do during class?
  - What do/did you expect the teacher to do?
  - Is it what you expected?
  - What did you want/think you'd learn about reading?
  - What kinds of topics do/did you want to read about?
  - What kinds of materials do/did you want to read?
  - How do/did you think the teacher will/would teach you reading?

- 6. Please share with me everything you can remember about learning to read.**
- How old were you? Who taught you? How did you learn?
  - Do you remember being read to? By whom?
  - Can you name a favorite book you read or somebody read to you when you were growing up?
  - What role did your family play in learning to read? What kinds of things do you remember seeing them read? For what purposes?
  - What did reading instruction in school look like? What challenges did you face?
  - What role did teachers play? Other students?
  - How did you feel about your reading ability? Why?
- 7. Describe your reading in middle school and high school. What came easily? Did you face any challenges?**
- 8. What are you like as a reader now?**
- Do you ever help your friends or your family with reading? Who? What? Where? When? How?
  - Do you ever ask someone for help when you are reading? Who do you ask and what things do they help you with?
  - What do you wish you could do better as a reader? What kinds of things do you do well, when it comes to reading?
  - In your opinion, what makes something hard to read? What makes something easy to read?
  - What do you like to read? Why?
  - What do you not like to read? Why?
  - What kinds of things do you wish you could read better? Why?
  - Are there things you'd like to read but don't? Why don't you read them?
- 9. How important would you say reading is to your life right now? Are there any ways your life would be different if you could read different kinds of things, or read differently?**
- 10. Think about somebody you know who is a good reader. Describe what he or she does that makes him/her a good reader.**
- What kinds of things does s/he read? Why do they read?
  - How is s/he different from someone who doesn't read well?
- 11. If you knew someone was having difficulty reading, how would you help her?**
- What advice would you give him/her? Is that what you do yourself?
  - Do you do anything else when you come across something you don't understand?
- 12. Is there anything else you'd like to tell me about yourself as a reader, or anything you'd like to add to what you've already said?**

*State the ending time.*

**APPENDIX B**  
**INTERVIEW 2 PROTOCOL**

(This interview will follow each of the student-focused observation).

*State student's name, the date, "Interview 2," the place of the interview, and the beginning time.*

The purpose of our time together today is to understand more fully what you are learning in class about reading and how important this learning is to you.

1. Last time we talked, you mentioned that your goals in joining the class were to \_\_\_\_\_ . Have you changed or added to these goals in any way?
2. What do you think was important for you to learn from today's activities? What was the most important thing you learned?
3. (Pick one or two text-based activities): How interested were you in the material? In the assignment? Why? What went through your mind when you were given the assignment? How did you respond?  
\*Question the student about relevant behaviors observed during the assignment.
4. In general, was the text easy or difficult for you to read? Did you get stuck at any time during the assignment? What did you do? Why?
5. Did any of today's activities help you as a reader? How? Can you think of any ways that you might apply this kind of reading in your life now? When you've achieved your goals? On your way to achieving your goals?
6. What do you wish had happened today in class that didn't

**ADD THESE QUESTIONS TO THE LAST INTERVIEW 2 FOR EACH STUDENT:**

**I'd like to talk a little bit now about not just today, but your experience in the class usually.**

7. Can you think of a lesson or an experience in this program where you learned something important about reading? What was it? What did you learn? How did you learn it? Why do you think this is important?
8. What do you tend to do if you're not interested in reading the assignment? Why?

*State the ending time*



## APPENDIX C GROUP INTERVIEW 1 PROTOCOL

### Materials:

- 2 tape players w/ microphones / cassette tapes
- Extension cord
- Chart paper/makers
- Masking tape
- Goals from Interview 1 written on chart paper
- List of what participants said they wanted to learn, written on chart paper
- Reading Diary for each participant

### Introduction

Thank you for taking the time to join our discussion today. I have talked with each of you before individually, but today, I'd like to give you a chance to talk with each other and build off others' thoughts and ideas. Our topic, in a nutshell, is "What Does Reading Mean to Us as Adults." I invited you to participate in this group because you are a member of the adult education class and have important ideas to share with teachers of classes like this one about what you think about your own reading and the role it plays in your lives.

There are a couple of things I'd like you to keep in mind. For one, there are no right or wrong answers. There is only what you think, based on your own experiences and the experiences of people you know. Please feel free to share your point of view even if it differs from other people's in the group. In fact, I'd say, especially if it differs. Hearing different opinions will help us all think more carefully about the issues that will be coming up.

Another thing I'd like you to keep in mind is that this is a research project. As I have told you before, all of your responses will be kept strictly confidential. Although I may quote you in my report, I will not use your real name. I also will not share what any of you say, by name, with anyone here in your program. However, like in my report, I may talk in general about what people in the group said or quote somebody without giving clues as to who they are. We will call each other by our first names tonight, but I will change the names in anything I write about this session.

Thirdly, please speak loudly and encourage each other to speak loudly. I am tape-recording the session because I do not want to miss any of your statements. Do try to speak one at a time and do speak clearly.

Our session will last no longer than an hour and a half, and we probably will not stop for a formal break. You are welcome, however, to take a restroom break on your own, if need be. Are there any questions?

## Questioning Route for Group Interview 1

### Opening question

1. Let's start by having you each tell us a little about yourself. Please share your name and how long you've been in the program.

### Introductory question

2. *Refer to the list of goals mentioned in Interview 1.* These are the goals you mentioned during our individual interviews? Do you see your goal on the list? Now that you've had some time to think about these, are there any changes you'd like to make?

*\*Write responses on chart paper.*

3. How will your life be different if you achieve these goals?

### Transition question

4. *Refer to the list of what participants said they wanted to learn.* Here are the kinds of things you said you wanted to learn in order to achieve your goals. Do you see your comments from the interview here somewhere? Is there anything you'd like to change/add? Why?

*\*Write responses on chart paper.*

### Key questions

5. Refer to participant comments in #4.

(If appropriate) Some of you mentioned that you needed to improve your reading in order to meet your goals. Please talk a little more about this.

(If appropriate) Some of you did not mention improving your reading as something you needed to do to meet your goals. Please talk a little more about this.

6. So, what does it mean to be a good reader?

*\*Write responses on chart paper.*

7. Are there any differences in being a good reader as a child and a good reader as an adult? Explain.

8. *Insert other questions related to themes that arise from Interview 1.*

### Ending questions

9. Is there anything else you would like to share about yourself as a reader?

## Introduce Reading Diary Assignment

*\*See Reading Diary Protocol*

## APPENDIX D GROUP INTERVIEW 2 PROTOCOL

Materials:

- Name placards or name tags
- 2 tape players w/ microphones / cassette tapes
- Extension cord
- Chart paper/makers
- Masking tape
- Completed Reading Diaries

### **Introduction**

Thank you for taking the time to join our discussion today. We are going to continue our discussion about “What Reading Means to Us as Adults.” I invited you to participate in this group because you are a member of the adult education class and have important ideas to share with teachers of classes like this one about what you think about your own reading and the role it plays in your lives.

There are a couple of things we need to review. For one, there are no right or wrong answers. There is only what you think, based on your own experiences and the experiences of people you know. Please feel free to share your point of view even if it differs from other people’s in the group. In fact, I’d say, especially if it differs. Hearing different opinions will help us all think more carefully about the issues that will be coming up.

Another thing I’d like to remind you that this is a research project. As I have told you before, all of your responses will be kept strictly confidential. Although I may quote you in my report, I will not use your real name. I also will not share what any of you say, by name, with anyone here in your program. However, like in my report, I may talk in general about what people in the group said or quote somebody without giving clues as to who they are. We will call each other by our first names tonight, but I will change the names in anything I write about this session.

Thirdly, please speak loudly and encourage each other to speak loudly. I am tape-recording the session because I do not want to miss any of your statements. Do try to speak one at a time and do speak clearly.

Our session will last no longer than an hour and a half, and we probably will not stop for a formal break. You are welcome, however, to take a restroom break on your own, if need be. Are there any questions?

## Questioning Route for Group Interview 2

### **Opening question**

1. Please remind us of your name and give us one word or phrase to describe yourself as a reader.

### **Introductory question**

2. Think back over this week of keeping the Reading Diary. Talk a little bit about how easy or challenging it was to keep up with.

### **Transition question**

3. Did you experience any “aha’s” (surprises) when you were completing your Reading Diary?

### **Key questions**

4. Lead participants in a List-Group-Label activity with the text material listed on the Reading Diary. (1a) *\*Write on chart paper.*
  - a. Let’s make a list of all the different things you read during the week. Everyone please offer one thing you read during the week and then we’ll add to our list if you still have things remaining. If someone says something that triggers a memory of something you read during the week, feel free to add that to your list.
  - b. Now let’s categorize these items by grouping together materials that are “alike” in some way. Let’s see if we can think of labels for these categories as we go along.
5. Ask: Are there other things that you typically read that you didn’t happen to read during the week you kept the Reading Diary. Are there things you read that you don’t normally read? *\*Write on a separate piece of chart paper.*
6. Invite comments about what these lists say about the role reading plays for members of the group. *\*Write statements on chart paper.*
7. For each statement written in #5, ask participants to indicate with a raised hand, nod, etc., whether each statement applies to them personally. Invite clarification, discussion, explanations. *\*Write names beside each statement.*
8. Draw attention to any noticeable gaps, possibly novels, legal documents, etc. Ask why these aren’t on the list.
9. Ask if there are things that they would like to read, or situations in which they would like to read, but currently don’t or won’t. Discuss why. *\*List on chart paper.*
10. Return to comments made in Group Interview 1 about the differences between adult reading and children’s reading. Ask if participants have anything to add or change to these statements.

### **Closing question**

11. Invite participants to comment on any realizations they had about reading during the discussion.

## APPENDIX E GROUP INTERVIEW 3 PROTOCOL

Materials:

- 2 tape players w/ microphones / cassette tapes
- Extension cord
- Chart paper/makers
- Masking tape

### **Introduction**

Thank you for taking the time to join our discussion today. We are going to continue our discussion about “What Reading Means to Us as Adults.” I invited you to participate in this group because you are a member of the adult education class and have important ideas to share with teachers of classes like this one about what you think about your own reading and the role it plays in your lives.

There are a couple of things we need to review. For one, there are no right or wrong answers. There is only what you think, based on your own experiences and the experiences of people you know. Please feel free to share your point of view even if it differs from other people’s in the group. In fact, I’d say, especially if it differs. Hearing different opinions will help us all think more carefully about the issues that will be coming up.

Another thing I’d like to remind you that this is a research project. As I have told you before, all of your responses will be kept strictly confidential. Although I may quote you in my report, I will not use your real name. I also will not share what any of you say, by name, with anyone here in your program. However, like in my report, I may talk in general about what people in the group said or quote somebody without giving clues as to who they are. We will call each other by our first names tonight, but I will change the names in anything I write about this session.

Thirdly, please speak loudly and encourage each other to speak loudly. I am tape-recording the session because I do not want to miss any of your statements. Do try to speak one at a time and do speak clearly.

Our session will last no longer than an hour and a half, and we probably will not stop for a formal break. You are welcome, however, to take a restroom break on your own, if need be. Are there any questions?

*Questioning Route for Group Interview 3*

**Opening question**

1. Please remind us of your name and give us one word or phrase to describe this class.

**Introductory question**

2. How is this class different, or is it, from what you experienced in high school?
3. How is it the same?

**Transition question**

4. I'd like you to think about class today (or the last class you attended). What are all the things you read?

*\*Record these in chart form on chart paper.*

**Key questions**

5. What do you notice about the role that reading plays in this class? How do you feel about this? Why?
6. What are some things you've learned about reading since you joined this class? Can you give an example? What helped you learn this?
7. Do you think that what you've learned about reading (if anything) is something you can apply (or have applied) in your life? Please give an example. Do you see any relevance for the type of reading you do in class for the kind of reading you'll need to do as part of your goals?
8. Are there other things you would like to read or learn about reading? Why? How might you learn this?

**Closing question**

9. What advice would you give for teachers of students like you, related to reading instruction?

**APPENDIX F**  
**STUDENT-FOCUSED OBSERVATION PROTOCOL**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date:

Class Location:

Time observation began:

Time observation ended:

<b>Time</b>	<b>Text being read</b>	<b>Student Activity</b> *where is the student? *what is the student doing? *who is the student working with? *what is that person doing? *what tools is the student using? *what questions is the student asking? **how is the student responding to the task?	<b>What else is going on?</b> *what are other research participants doing?	<b>Comments</b>

## APPENDIX G READING DIARY PROTOCOL AND FORM

### At the end of Group Interview 1:

1. Explain the purpose:

“One thing that might help teachers in teaching adult students is to understand what kinds of texts you already read. By text, I mean anything that is made up of written words. What I’d like to ask you to do is to keep a diary of everything you read for 1 week. Let me show you what I mean.”

2. Distribute the Reading Diary.

3. Teach students how to complete the diary. To begin, model writing in something that I read that morning on a transparency of the diary. Respond to the heading prompt for each column. Then, have a student share something that she read and fill it in. Invite every student to fill in at least 1 row and check carefully to make sure each has completed the diary correctly.

4. Emphasize that students should try to recall EVERYTHING they’ve read on each day. If they remember later that they have read something, they should go back and add it to the diary.

5. Ask students to complete the diary for a total of one week, beginning with the next day. Brainstorm barriers that might arise and how to address these. Ask if they would mind if I call them each evening to see how things are going.

6. Explain how students are to return the diaries (if it will be at a time other than the next Group Interview).

7. Set a time for the next group interview.



## READING DIARY

**Directions:** For one week, please write down everything you read *outside of class*. Include anything you read, even recipes, can labels, magazines, newspapers, religious material, medicine labels, cereal boxes, etc. Fill in the information for each column. If you run out of room, feel free to write in the margins or attach extra sheets.

DAY 1 Date: \_\_\_\_\_

TIME	What I read (magazine article, newspaper, ad, recipe, cereal box, novel, letter, etc)	Why I read it	Where I read it	Other people who were involved and how	How long I read it (best guess!)	How easy it was to read for my purpose 1=not easy at all 5=very easy
						1 2 3 4 5
						1 2 3 4 5
						1 2 3 4 5
						1 2 3 4 5