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LITERACY, IDENTITY AND THE EDUCATIONAL EFFECT

LITERACY, IDENTITY AND THE EDUCATIONAL EFFECT

By

JULIE RAY MCGINNIS, B.A. (HONORS)

A Thesis

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies

in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements

for the Degree

Master of Arts

McMaster University

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ABSTRACT

Using semi-structured interviews, this research brings to light the lived experiences of thirteen people participating in adult literacy programs. Despite the popularization of situated approaches to literacy in pedagogical models and practice in the field of adult basic education, few studies have emphasized the role of identity in shaping the educational experience and its effects. Symbolic interactionism offers a theoretical map from which to examine the varied experiences of adult literacy learners.

Gaining insight into learners' negotiation of a literate identity yields a nuanced appreciation for how the experience takes shape as part of the broader processes that adults undertake as they seek access to the literate world. Three distinct pathways were identified in learners' reasons for signing up for, and participating in, the literacy programs: the role fulfillment pathway, the personal betterment pathway and the instrumental pathway. Acquiring a literate identity had differing effects for learners on each pathway either by allowing them to fulfill socially desirable roles through status passage, by acquiring a more positive self-concept, or by acquiring the knowledge and skill to independently accomplish specific tasks.

Introducing identity change to the literature on the effect of adult education offers a twofold benefit. First, identity change can motivate adults' investments in education and, more so than earnings as instrumental models predict, reflects the actual experience of adult learners. Second, identity change may be a mechanism through which education has its diverse effects on a variety outcomes.

Though one might assume that those with higher educational and employment goals benefit the most from literacy programs, it appears to be the opposite: those who seem the least likely to pursue education derive the greatest benefit – a finding akin to studies of broader educational effects. Implications for future research of the mechanisms by which these effects manifest themselves as well as considerations for policy development in adult literacy are discussed.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my thanks and gratitude to the people who made this endeavour possible and my thesis come to fruition.

To my husband Leopold – you are the reason that I was able to finish this project. Your love, support, and the occasional reminder to suck it up and get it done, kept me both persistent and sane through the many ups and downs of the process.

To my supervisor Dr. Mark McKerrow – thank you for your humour and candid feedback. You have helped me to enjoy this foray into academia and to produce a piece of work that I am proud of.

To my committee members Drs. Mark McKerrow, Scott Davies, and Charlene Miall – thank you for your patience, guidance, and helpful suggestions. Your contributions have improved my thesis in countless ways.

Lastly, and most importantly, thank you to the learners who bravely volunteered their time to share their experiences. Your stories will stay with me for a long time to come. I am in awe of your courageous and committed pursuit of literacy.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Situating the Research

While the relationship between educational attainment and economic success is fairly well documented, researchers have increasingly turned their attention to the non-market effects of education, which have proved more difficult to measure. There is a growing literature that documents education's positive effects on health, happiness and civic participation. Despite the difficulty of isolating such effects, we are increasingly confident that education has large and wide-ranging impacts on individual and social outcomes (Riddell, 2006). However, debate about how to account for these outcomes, often called the education effect, continues amongst social scientists. Two models have emerged to the fore to explain schooling's effects on individuals' lives: human capital theory and credentialism models. Human capital theory sees education as an investment in knowledge, attitudes, and skills that yield private and social returns while credentialism models suggest that the credentials gained through education confer success apart from what was learned. A great many studies report findings that support both the human capital model and credentialism models. The causal mechanism by which education exerts its effect on individual and social outcomes, however, remains speculative.

Research into the effects of education has traditionally focused on compulsory schooling and post-secondary education. Although advocates for adult literacy programs often cite the many returns attributed to education more generally, few studies have systematically examined the diverse effects learners experience as a result of participation in adult basic education programs. Regardless, rhetoric surrounding literacy in the media,

in government sound bites and publications, and community campaigns often centers on the role of knowledge and skill in enhancing productivity, economic growth, and innovation, as well as improving social cohesion. In 2000, the OECD issued a report entitled *Literacy in the Information Age: Final Report of the International Literacy Survey,* in which the authors conclude that the results of the survey "confirm the importance of skills for the effective functioning of labour markets and for economic success and social advancement of both individuals and societies" (p. iii). Today, literacy is practically considered a prerequisite for individuals to succeed personally, as well as to contribute towards the success of their families, communities and countries.

As a society, we are optimistic about the transformative powers of literacy. Tied up with our hopes for individual and social development are broad historical and cultural assumptions that literacy is essential for a modern self or subjectivity. In fact, we often "[link] literate traditions and the development of internal self-awareness or self-consciousness" (Collins and Blot, 2003, p. 445). Given our considerable personal and social investments in literacy, illiteracy has been defined as a social problem. The Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (MTCU) funds more than $63 million annually to support the delivery of literacy and basic skills (LBS) programs in the province. Commonly held beliefs about literacy present considerable challenges for individuals who are labelled 'illiterate' and for whom this identity and resulting marginalization reaffirms the importance attributed to literacy in today's so-called knowledge economy. If we wish to shed light on the causal pathways through which

educational effects manifest themselves, enhancing our knowledge of the outcomes of education later in life presents a necessary and valuable component of the research.

This research will emphasize the wider effects of adult literacy. To do so, I will employ an approach that views literacy as a socially situated practice with a multiplicity of meanings and highly diverse undertakings. Such a perspective recognizes the importance of researching literacy in social contexts and sees value in looking at adult basic education from the lived experiences of people with literacy challenges; literacy is strongly affected by social interactions, the learning environment and the broader context within which the learning takes place. It is important to acknowledge that becoming 'literate' means different things to different learners and has varying effects depending on how learners apply literacy to their day-to-day lives.

Employing a symbolic interactionist framework, this research project will examine how a learner's sense of self is affected by the adoption of a literate identity. Given the central tenets and underlying assumptions of symbolic interactionism as well as its affinity to literacy as a social construct, the framework presents a novel means of examining the educational effect amongst adult literacy learners. In a review of the literature on adult literacy, Westell (2005) notes that studies that assess learners' and practitioners' senses of the outcomes of literacy show that self-image is central to people's progress in learning. Holistic approaches to adult basic education often acknowledge the situated nature of literacy and have focused on allowing learners to develop a sense of identity and self-esteem and consider these to be essential for effective learning (Grieve, 2003, p. 16). As adults transition from a deviant 'illiterate' to non-

deviant 'literate' identity, some reorient their views of self and gain access to roles their previous perceptions of self did not allow. Others view the experience as an opportunity to acquire literacy skills to gain independence in their daily tasks; no longer having to manage their deviant identity by passing as literate. These direct effects mark unintended consequences of literacy education that have different impacts on learners.

Though rarely considered as an outcome in conventional measures of the returns to education, it is clear that identity change plays an important role in shaping the educational experience and its effects and is perhaps even more significant than the literacy skills that learners acquire. Going beyond the instrumental models that dominate our understanding of the educational effect, examining how learners acquire a literate identity provides insight into the diverse behavioural and relational changes that learners undergo as they participate in adult basic education and suggests a possible mechanism through which education exerts its effect on personal and social wellbeing.

This research project also seeks to acknowledge the role that education plays in constructing and altering roles in society and allocating people to these roles. Schools are powerful institutions whose public classification systems define roles and statuses that at once provide distinctive life experiences and anticipations for the educated while also lowering the prospects of nonstudents (Meyer, 1977, p. 62). Subsequent to their period of schooling, nongraduates are "socialized through life experiences to the meaning of their failure just as graduates are socialized to the meaning of their success" (Meyer, 1977, p. 62). Because 'literate' is a critical status in our society, intimately linked with our

understanding of citizenship and human rights and bound up in status expectations, it is a label that influences an individual's social, and, as demonstrated, personal identity.

Examining individual experience through the lens of status passage theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1971) allows us to delve into the micro-macro connection between individual experience and social structure in a way that neither denies the individual agency nor ignores the influence of social roles and expectations upon the individual and his or her sense of self. In order to enhance our knowledge of adult literacy beyond statistical averages and anecdotal accounts, we must gain a more nuanced appreciation for how the experience takes shape at the individual level to understand why adults pursue non-compulsory education and the effects they attribute to participation. Gaining insight into learners' experience of identity throughout the process provides a unique means of framing the pathways people take to participate in literacy programs and the changes they undergo as they 'become literate'. This approach provides a means of thinking holistically about the effects of education as part of the broader processes that adults undertake as they seek personal and social change in their lives. Approaching the research in this fashion contributes a more nuanced understanding of the variable and subjective outcomes of education in adulthood through an exploratory foray into the "messy work" (Zimmerman, 2004, p. 4) of adult literacy.

Background on Literacy in Canada

The rise of the knowledge economy in the 1980s and the growth of information, computer and telecommunications sectors was accompanied by increasing concerns about illiteracy in the developed world (Stein, 2001, p. 51). The first literacy survey in Canada, sponsored by Southam News, was conducted in 1987 and drew attention to literacy as a national concern (Rubenson and Walker, 2011). In 1988 the National Literacy Secretariat (NLS) was formed in order to promote improved literacy rates in Canada. Initially, the secretariat was part of the Secretary of State, emphasizing the perceived role of literacy in civic participation and citizenship. It was later moved to HRDC suggesting a shift in focus to literacy development as an economic rather than civic endeavour. This trend was mirrored elsewhere in the world: the United Nations' declared that 1990 be the International Year for Literacy and the ten years following the Decade for Literacy. Low literacy rates had become a contemporary social problem, both in the developed and developing worlds. Today an "atmosphere of crisis" (Veeman, Ward and Walker, 2006, p. 1) pervades public discourse about education and literacy in industrialized countries.

The need for improved national literacy rates has become a key concern of governments in developed countries. Declining indicators of social cohesion such as voting, volunteering and interpersonal trust have sparked concerns that citizens are not as happy and healthy as they "deserve to be" (OECD, 2010, p. 11). The authors of the report suggest that the policy climate has shifted over the past decade towards more inclusive measures of national success that go beyond traditional economic indicators by including non-economic facets of well-being and social progress. Education policy is often held up

as a viable and cost effective means of promoting individual and social well-being. There has been a shift towards recognizing that the value of literacy skills extend far beyond the ability to read and write.

In response to the increasing attention given to literacy in nations such as the United Kingdom, Canada and Australia and a growing awareness of the limitations of using grade level completion as an indication of adult literacy skills, major surveys were developed to provide cross-cultural and multi-lingual comparisons. The Adult Literacy and Lifeskills Survey (1990) and the International Adult Literacy Survey (2003, 2006) were conducted in seven developed countries, including Canada. Subjects, aged 16 to 65, were interviewed regarding their self-assessed literacy proficiency and education and evaluated using psychometric tests to measure prose and document literacy as well as numeracy and problem-solving skills. Literacy was defined as "the ability to understand and employ printed information in daily activities at home, at work and in the community – to achieve one's goals, and to develop one's knowledge and potential" (OECD, 2000). Performance was measured against an established international standard and was linked to economic and social outcomes.

A body of evidence, much of it generated from secondary analyses of data collected for the IALS, supports some important findings about literacy. Common among such findings is the claim, based on the 2003 International Adult Literacy and Skills Survey (IALSS), that nine million Canadians, or 42 percent, aged 16 to 65 have literacy skills below the level considered necessary to live and work in today's society; this rate that has changed very little since the survey was first conducted in 1994. Over 60% of

Canadian-born adults are at level 3 or higher, while only 30% of immigrants are at this level. Individuals at levels 1 and 2 are often unemployed or not in the labour force. Data for Ontario display similar trends as the Canadian average, but a slightly higher percentage of adults are at level 1 and a slightly lower percentage of adults are at level 2 (Government of Ontario, 2009, p. 15). The IALS data shows little improvement over the past decade in terms of improving the province's literacy levels despite the fact that over 50,000 adults participate annually in Ontario's Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) and Academic Upgrading (AU) programs.

In 2005, Statistics Canada published a summary report entitled *Building on our Competencies: Canadian Results of the International Adult Literacy and Skills Survey*. Competencies were measured on an international literacy scale of 1-5. Level three is the benchmark or "desired level" of competence at which individuals are deemed able to "cope with the increasing skill demands of the emerging knowledge and information economy" (Statistics Canada, 2005, p. 14). According to Statistics Canada (2005), performance at or above this level on the test is generally associated with a number of positive outcomes including increased civic participation, increased economic success and independence, and enhanced opportunities for lifelong learning and personal literacy.

While studies have established strong correlations between literacy and a host of personal and social returns, particularly in relation to earnings potential, reliance on social assistance and increases in national GDP, few studies have examined the non-economic effects of literacy. Fewer still have examined the effects of acquiring basic skills in adulthood. Quigley, Folinsbee, and Kraglund-Gauthier (2006) note that there is an

obvious gap in literacy theory from the Canadian context and experience. In particular, they highlight the need for more balance in literacy research; large scale statistical analysis, which have come to dominate research, on the one hand and the perspectives and lived experiences of learners and practitioners on the other. This, they argue, would enable a deeper development of theoretical perspectives and, consequently, better informed policy, practice and service delivery to learners. The next chapter aims to develop a theoretical framework from which to examine the outcomes of education later in life to better understand how learners characterize their experiences participating in literacy programs and the role that identity change plays in shaping the educational experience and its effects.

CHAPTER TWO: THEORY & LITERATURE REVIEW

Exploring the Meanings of Literacy

Despite the fact that the quantification of literacy and its social and personal effects stem from a fairly traditional view of a singular, invariable 'literacy', many adult education programs have begun to adopt a more holistic approach rooted in an understanding of literacy as a socially situated and contextualized set of practices. Programs have focused on allowing learners to develop a sense of identity, self-esteem, and the possibility of change and consider such elements to be essential for effective learning. Public campaigns, government policy and mission statements of community literacy programs provide overwhelming evidence of a more holistic view of literacy that merges notions of social development and individual growth. Becoming literate involves the acquisition of not only a new set of discrete cognitive skills but also contextualized practices that have broader social significance. In fact, today we talk not only about reading, writing and numeracy, but also of computer literacy, media literacy, digital literacy and financial literacy, amongst others. Many such skills are interwoven into the curriculum of literacy programs. Students participate in computer classes and complete assignments using local newspapers, engage with digital mediums such as cell phones electronic games, and are taught basic financial management skills.

An optimistic story about personal and social development continues to pervade popular thinking about adult literacy education. This has, in turn, spawned pedagogical practices that emphasize the centrality of the learner and his or her personal goals. Katherine Grieve's (2003) literacy research in Ontario examined self-management among

literacy learners and found that there is a movement in research across a broad range of fields challenging the idea that skills can be taught in isolation and easily applied to other situations. This, she suggests, is evidence of an increasingly predominant view of knowledge, literacy, and learning as social: depending largely on context, meaning, and relationships. In fact, learners often perceive their own progress in a more holistic manner, one that often includes literacy skills relevant to their own lives. She concludes that "self-management and self-direction are both outcomes and necessary conditions for effective learning" (p. 15) suggesting that they impact learner progress, retention and transition.

This shifting theoretical approach towards literacy as a social construct has served to redefine popular pedagogical approaches to literacy and undergirds the widespread acceptance of common practices in the field of adult literacy education[1] . Such principles have also found their way into assessment frameworks and often the very definition and measurement of success in literacy programs. In fact, the Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (2011) recently released a new assessment framework as part of the Ontario Adult Literacy Curriculum Framework (OALCF) that emphasizes the need to "explore the potential of incorporating an understanding of literacy as a social practice" (p.6). A task-based approach allows for goal completion as an assessment strategy that is "relevant both to the individual needs of each learner and to the goal requirements for employment, further education and training, or independence" (p. 4). In this document,

[1] For example, popular conceptions of teaching have changed to reflect the notion that adults are active constructors of knowledge rather than passive recipients of the teacher's knowledge with little sense of their own agency. Teaching, in this sense, is not confined to specific literacy skills but rather contextualized within a social framework and made relevant to the lives of those engaged in the learning, often with the hope of empowering individuals for change.

the Government of Ontario outlines a specific strategy by which literacy and basic skill providers can link goal completion in three defined categories to four integral aspects of learning: skills development, task performance, social practice, and personal change.

The framework marks an effort to measure learner gains in literacy without focusing solely on skill development. In the framework, task performance reflects the usage of skills within the context of an individual's everyday life. The notion of literacy as a social practice reflects the belief that people's past experiences and current circumstances shape their feelings about literacy and its perceived role and future uses in their lives. The report also acknowledges that literacy can "shape our way of knowing and being in the world" and that the "purposes for literacy and settings in which it is used shape literacy" (p. 6). The report suggests that "people change as they learn new literacy practices, and people often enter literacy programs to make changes in their lives" (p. 6). These changes can be individual or at the family and community level. The report highlights an understanding of literacy that emphasizes its contextual and situated nature. This conceptualization of literacy is reflected in learner assessment and embedded within accountability measures and highlights the value of examining identity and learners' perspectives to enhance our understanding of acquisition of literacy skills in adulthood.

Today, many researches do not see literacy as separate or autonomous from the contexts in which it is found, but instead as "integrally connected with the dynamics of identities, with the construction of selves" (Collins & Blot, 2003, p. xviii). For example, the book *Too Scared to Learn*, in which Jenny Horseman (1999/2000) applies current research on violence and trauma to learning in the field of adult women's literacy, shows

that building a sense of self, hope and the possibility of change is essential for learners to be able to set goals and learn effectively. She shows that the fear, embarrassment and shame that learners feel has a profound impact on how they view themselves as learners. Indeed, learners do not attend literacy programs without first encountering a series of precipitating events and do not participate in isolation from the daily reality of their lives. Hamilton (2002) cautions that "we must keep reminding people that the literacies promoted by dominant (privileged) policies are not the only literacies and to substantiate this through the detail of convincing ethnographic research" (p. 194). Individuals' paths to literacy are unique and intimately tied to their life histories, social contexts, personal relationships, and sense of self.

Literacy, consequently, presents researchers with a "slippery variable". What makes someone 'literate' (versus illiterate)? How should literacy be measured? Even determining how schooling might influence adult literacy poses a challenge as doing so "requires detailed information on a host of social contexts and how they might support ongoing literacy acquisition" (Pallas, 2000, p. 504). Sociologists, anthropologists and psychologists have weighed in on the debate about literacy practices and often disagree about the role of cognitive development in explaining the differences between those who are more highly educated and those who possess basic levels of education. Street (1984) argues that literacy may not be a higher source of cognitive development than oral discourse and consequently stresses the socially situated nature of literacy as a contextual and inherently political practice. Studies that engage this perspective (often referred to as

'situated learning theory') see learning not as the acquisition of knowledge by individuals but a process of social participation.

Some scholars such as Pallas (2000), on the other hand, suggest that there is evidence of schooling differences in abstract indicators of cognitive functioning, such as problem solving and adoption of innovation: "people with more education are more likely to engage in problem solving in daily life than those who have less education" (p. 504). Kagitcibasi, Goksen, and Gulgoz (2005) conducted a study of female learners participating in nationwide literacy programs in Turkey. The study was extensive and included pre- and post-test measurements, a control group of literates, and a follow-up one year after the initial data was collected. The study included a TV recall and comprehension test comparing literacy participants at the beginning and at the end of their program. The gains found were substantial and the authors conclude: "learning to read initiates a chain reaction of changes in the cognitive processing system" (p. 483). The findings are unusual in adult basic education research given the somewhat taboo connection between literacy and cognitive processes but do suggest that the effects of literacy are far reaching.

While we recognize that the effects of literacy education, like other forms of education, have a powerful influence on individuals and positive returns for nations, our definitions of literacy strongly influence our research findings. Westell (2005) stresses the difficulty in measuring outcomes and identifying causal mechanisms particularly in light of the disagreement amongst scholars and practitioners as to the very definition of literacy and the multiplicity of variables that affect adults' lives during and after their

participation in literacy programs (p. 7). Despite differences in definition and approach, studies have emerged that have offered important contributions towards our understanding of adult education more generally, and literacy education more specifically.

The Various Outcomes of Adult Education

Introduction

What do we know about the effect of adult education in regards to personal and social 'non-market' outcomes? This section endeavours to answer the question in two parts. The first section considers the effects of adult education generally, not limiting the discussion to adult literacy in particular. While returns are often similar to those of compulsory schooling, there are some important differences. In addition, though studies focusing on adult education often lack the rigour necessary to draw any definitive conclusions, they provide a general picture that proves useful in grounding the present study within our current knowledge of the role of education in adulthood. Table 1 presents a summary of the research findings for the effects of adult education on various outcomes in comparison to the outcomes of K-12 and postsecondary schooling which generally constitute the main focus of research into the effects of education. It is important, however, to note that such variables are often linked to higher earnings and job opportunities and cannot be isolated entirely from labour-market outcomes. For a review of the effects of education on labour-market outcomes, see McMahon (2009), Oreopoulos (2006) or Acemoglu and Angrist (2000). The third section considers outcomes associated

specifically with adult *literacy* programs, otherwise called adult basic education or ABE. All sections will examine research both within Canada and internationally. This section will address some of the limitations of the studies and highlight the gap that the present research project aims to fill.

A review of the literature highlights the parallels and differences of acquiring basic skills in childhood versus adulthood and raises some important questions: Do similar externalities accrue to adult education? If so, how do they manifest themselves? What insight might this provide into the relationship between education and its many correlates more generally? The following section provides the research base for addressing such questions.

The Educational Effect

> *Education is a great independent variable. The more educated are healthier; wealthier; and, in some ways, wiser – not to mention more participative in political and civic life, more cosmopolitan, more content, more supportive of civil liberties, and less inclined to traditional religious views. What is less evident is why the more educated earn more and, inter alia, vote more, have more varied musical tastes, have more friends, and are more tolerant of homosexuals.*
>
> (Kingston et al, 2003, p. 53)

In this review, the term non-market outcome is used to refer to the short- and long-term outcomes of education that do not directly affect economic well-being. For purposes of definition, non-market outcomes can be private or societal in nature and refer

to outcomes that are non-academic in nature. A private outcome is one that is experienced by an individual or his or her family, such as improved individual or family health, while a societal outcome is one that accrues to communities or society as a whole, such as increased voter turnout and reduced crime rates. There is a substantial literature demonstrating that education is associated with a number of non-market outcomes including longer life expectancy, better health, and reduced participation in crime (Hout, 2012; McMahon, 2009; OECD, 2010; Grossman, 2006; Riddell, 2006; Pallas, 2000). The OECD (2010) recently conducted a review of the research into the non-market returns to education and concluded that education "empowers individuals by increasing their knowledge and their cognitive, social and emotional skills, as well as improving habits, values and attitudes towards healthy lifestyles and active citizenship" (p. 12). The authors are quick to note, however, that education does not act in isolation and stress the role of home and community environments in supporting the success of school-based actions.

Until recently, much of the evidence of the benefits of adult education was anecdotal. Experiences working with adult learners have been reported by a wide variety of practitioners in community, workplace, and college-based adult learning environments and have shown plentiful examples of people who gain confidence and optimism as a result of successful participation in adult learning (Aldridge & Lavender, 2000; McGivney, 1999). However, these claims have been repeated more often than they have been investigated systematically and there is still little quantitative evidence for the generalizability of such findings. Research into non-compulsory education has, for the most part, been neither systematic nor rigorous and characterized by disciplinary

fragmentation (Field, 2002, p. 120). Given the growing prevalence of notions of lifelong learning in policy circles interested in the benefits of learning beyond the economic, governments and international agencies have begun to promote research into the outcomes of learning across the life-span.

The OECD (2010), in a report on the state of adult education, suggests a "paucity of sound quantitative evidence in the literature" (p. 30) in terms of the non-financial outcomes of education. This weakness of empirical evidence presents a challenge in assessing the relative returns to education obtained later as opposed to earlier in life. In an effort to improve the research in the field of adult basic education, the UK Government commissioned considerable research in the 1980s and 1990s to examine the wider, non-economic benefits of learning and has produced a knowledge base unparalleled anywhere else in the world (Field, 2009). Studies have relied on large-scale data sets, primarily national-level cohort and household surveys. Birth cohort studies provide longitudinal information and allow researchers to identify clear measures of association between learning and its outcomes and infer estimates of causation. Similar studies have been carried out in Australia, the United States, and, to a lesser degree, Canada. Despite their strengths, the aforementioned cohort studies also present methodological limitations in their ability to establish causal linkages and have not to date presented a systematic attempt to identify the specific features of learning associated with its non-market outcomes. Field (2009, p. 17) argues, however, that cohort-based data represent the most systematic attempt to date to identify the personal and social outcomes of learning. A few important studies will be discussed to highlight key findings in the field.

Research in adult education focuses on adult basic skills programs although some include a wide range of adult learning programs, such as vocational skills, employment skills, recreational, and personal development programs, and workplace training. Almost all studies focus on private outcomes for individuals and their families rather than the broader societal outcomes. Most explore how adult learning affects feelings about self, social capital, and commitment to learning. In addition, a handful of studies investigate changes in health and health practices, independence, and participation in community life. Most studies in this review use a cross-sectional, qualitative research design whereby adult learners are interviewed upon completion of an adult learning program and asked about the outcomes that they have experienced as a result of the program. Many studies are largely exploratory in nature and do not test specific hypotheses about the benefits of adult learning. A handful of studies use longitudinal designs. Few use a comparison group. Even more strikingly, some studies include only participants who have had positive learning experiences which has obvious design limitations for evaluating outcomes. The majority of studies that assess the outcomes of adult education are qualitative in nature. Although widespread application of findings is limited as evidence is drawn from particular settings and revealed through case studies, ethnographic and action research approaches, a growing body of qualitative and practitioner evidence across many different types of learning suggests there are general social benefits to adult education. This research is often backed up by practitioner and student evidence. Again, a summary of research findings can be found in Table 1.

Outcomes of Literacy Learning

Much of what we know about the non-market returns to adult literacy education remains hypothetical and is derived principally from the experience of those in the field. The existing literature enumerates a plethora of hypothesized positive impacts of successful participation in adult literacy programs. As Bossort et al. (1994) note: "program planners, instructors, and tutors have lots of ideas about the impact increasing literacy skills will or should have on the students and on our society [but] little research has been done in Canada or the United States to confirm these assumptions" (p. 11). Often, these hypotheses assume that higher skills acquired as an adult have a similar impact as skills acquired through the K-12 school system. In her review of the research examining the non-academic outcomes of adult literacy, Westell (2005) notes that "learning is complex and difficult for researchers to disentangle from the many variables affecting an individual's life" (p.4). The connection between research, policy and practice has become increasingly important as the desire for "evidence-based best practice" continues to grow particularly in accountability and funding frameworks.

Turning to the specific findings of adult literacy research, this section will summarize important outcomes in relation to adult basic education. Evidence will be drawn primarily from studies conducted in developed countries and will be selected from the literature that represents, as best as possible, sound research methodology. In the interest of readability, the research findings will be grouped into general categories based on their area of focus. The categorizations are based on findings in the field and are as follows: the findings of literature reviews more generally, future learning, social

participation, and self-confidence. These findings mirror many of the findings elsewhere in the literature and highlight some of the common themes amongst studies of adult literacy learners. As this study focuses primarily on non-academic outcomes, the review will emphasize both personal and social returns to education.

Findings of Literature Reviews and Large Studies

Beder (1999) examined 115 studies on the outcomes and impacts of adult education programs in the US published since the late 1960s. The following are his conclusions based on his review of 23 'credible' studies:

- Participants in adult literacy education are more likely to find employment.
- In general, participants believe their jobs improve over time. There is insufficient evidence to conclude that participation in adult literacy causes job improvement.
- In general, it is likely that participation results in earnings gain.
- In general, it has a positive influence on participants' continued education.
- Evidence suggests that those in welfare-sponsored adult literacy education do experience a reduction in welfare dependence, the evidence in inconclusive as to whether adult literacy in general reduces welfare dependence for participants.
- Learners perceive that participation improves their skills in reading, writing and math.
- As measured by tests, the evidence is insufficient to determine whether or not participants in adult literacy education gain in basic skills.
- In general, adult literacy education provides gains in GED acquisition for those entering adult secondary level.
- Participation in adult literacy has a positive impact on learners' self-image.
- According to self-reports it has an impact on parents' involvement in their children's education.
- Learners perceive that their personal goals are achieved through participation in adult literacy education.

In a study by the Trent Valley Literacy Association, Zimmerman (2004) examines changes noted by practitioners in journal entries with regards to their students' progress. Overall, their findings support their conclusion that "as the only indicators of success, academic outcomes do not sit comfortably" (Zimmerman, 2004, p. 28). Journal entries were analyzed for common themes, which included: changes in vocabulary, changes in body language, changes in students' ability to work independently, changes in embarrassment over low literacy skills, changes in students' willingness to help others, changes in students ability to apply learning to real life, changes in learners willingness to learn, and changes in feelings of self-efficacy and ability to implement life changes. The research-in-practice model allowed practitioners to reflect on their relationships with students in an attempt to shed some light on the "messy" nature of literacy work and to "articulate the intangibles" that practitioners often witness in their work with adult literacy learners.

Tracey Westell (2005) conducted a literature review of the research that measures the non-academic outcomes of adult literacy programs. She gathered over 100 related references and highlighted key themes that emerged in the literature. Overall, she notes that strong correlations exist between increased self-confidence and hopefulness and returns to further education as an adult. Westell (2005) found that, while studies employed different methodology, many of the same non-academic outcomes were found (p. 3). Grouping the findings into specific categories, Westell cites self-confidence (also called self-determination, self-direction, self-esteem, agency, choice, control, and standing up for oneself), independence, attitude change, relationship and community

building and learning to learn as the most frequent outcomes to literacy learning. In her recommendations, Westell stresses the need to embrace personal growth as an integral part of learning and suggests that "perhaps all of the non-academic outcomes boil down to this term" (p. 26). The challenge, she contends, is effectively measuring and documenting these changes such that they get incorporated into policy and program agendas.

Hilbrow (2001) conducted a study of 50 adult learners participating in adult basic education courses in Alberta. The study focuses on incremental success factors rather than the achievement of the "summative goals" (p. 4) of the programs such as further education (for example, attaining a GED) or full employment. The rational for doing so is that, while individuals may not have achieved these lofty program goals, they change "in ways that approximate the impact of full-time employment or education" (p. 4). His research focused on a group of current and potential learners and engaged a descriptive qualitative approach. Data was collected via a literature review, an analysis of curriculum materials, instructor focus groups, surveys of current students, and a survey of applicants administered in a semi-structured group interview. The following potential incremental success factors emerged from the research: ability to listen to help understanding and learning; a positive attitude to learning; ability to act on their own; ability to take part in activities with others; ability to care for others in their lives; punctuality and attendance; grooming and personal hygiene; cultural tolerance and gender acceptance; work ethic and perseverance; coping skills and anger management; and improved social skills.

In her review of the empirical literature, Stromquist (2009) finds that the acquisition of literacy skills has important emotional impacts that are often empowering

for individuals and that have the potential to be used for personal and social transformation. She draws from studies with both an international as well as a North-American scope of analysis. Empowerment, Stromquist (2010) suggests, possess a cognitive dimension, an economic dimension, a political dimension, and a psychological dimension. While there is no linear sequence to these four dimensions, her findings suggest that the psychological dimension (feelings that an individual is competent, worthy of better conditions, and capable of taking action on their own behalf), is a "fundamental prerequisite for the other three dimensions" (Ibid., p. 2). In her review of the research, Stromquist suggests that empowerment has been measured indirectly as self-esteem, self-confidence, and self-efficacy and is evidenced by behaviours such as improved political and social participation, household decision-making, and decisions concerning health and the education of family members. As such, her work points to the connection between participation in adult basic education, enhanced personal well-being and, consequently, enhanced social participation.

Finally, the Tennessee Longitudinal Study of Adult Literacy Participants (Bingman, 2000) sought to expand understanding of how participation in literacy programs changed adults' lives. Semi-structured, open-ended interviews were conducted with learners from adult basic education level 1 programs in Tennessee. Participants were interviewed when they enrolled in the programs (total of 450) and those who were willing participated in a follow-up interview one year later (total of 199). The study was initially planned for three years of follow-up interviews but funding was interrupted. Researchers examined individuals' financial well-being (employment, sources of income, etc.), social

well-being (family and community involvement), personal well-being (self-esteem and lifestyle) and physical well-being (health and access to health care). Over the course of the year, a number of changes were found including an increase in employment rate, an overall increase in self-esteem, increased involvement in the community, positive changes in literacy practices such as paying bills and working with numbers on the job, and an increase in the number of people who thought a book was a good gift for a child.

Bingman (2000) argues that, while the changes do not seem to represent "major transformations" in learners' lives, they may "lead to more substantial changes as adult learners expand the scope and level of the ways they use literacy" (p. 9). In addition, ten participants were selected for a follow-up interview that emphasized a life history methodology. The small sample was constructed to be demographically representative of the adult basic education learner population in Tennessee. Particular stories as well as common themes and categories were noted. Changes were grouped into two main categories: literacy uses and changes in sense of self. Many found that their newly acquired skills changed the way they used literacy in their lives, such as filling in forms, writing letters, and reading maps and street signs. Expanded literacy uses related to many changes in people's lives, increasing what they felt they were able to do, what they were concerned with, and how they felt about themselves. Changes in sense of self were also observed in many learners, ranging from enhanced feelings of self-efficacy, losing shame about being in a literacy class, a strong sense of accomplishment and a new and stronger voice to express themselves, as well as new opportunities to do so. Thus Bingman (2000) concludes that "literacy uses and sense of self often seemed to intersect" (p. 13).

Evidently, participation in literacy programs had outcomes far beyond new skills or education gains: learners experienced changes that were "varied, contextual, and inter-related" (p. 14). This study helped to confirm many informally recognized findings regarding the outcomes of adult literacy education and illustrates the connection between literacy and sense of self although it does not delve into the nature of the relationship between the two.

Self-Confidence: A Common and Persistent Finding in Literacy Research

In her review of the literature related to learner empowerment, Stromquist (2010) argues that the research shows that, by far, the "most common type of empowerment is identified as feelings of self-esteem and self-confidence, which indicates that literacy often leads to psychological empowerment" (p. 5). Confidence, Stromquist finds, is the most important outcome of participation in literacy programs, even in workplace literacy programs that focus on the acquisition of job skills. Further, Stromquist argues that a substantial body of evidence demonstrates that such effects emerge "independent of whether the literacy programs engage in functional or critical approaches, regardless of cultural and national contexts, despite the short durations of literacy programs, and irrespective of research methodology" (2010, p. 5). It is not a stretch to hypothesize that the potential effects of improved self-confidence extend into the family, community and larger society.

Interestingly, while self-confidence is listed in nearly every study of adult literacy and is often connected conceptually to other positive changes in learners lives, few

studies examine its development or what particular aspects of the literacy program promote self-confidence (Westell, 2005). A study of adult literacy learners was conducted in Ontario with participants in community-based programs at literacy levels 1 – 2 (Lefebvre et al., 2006). The research aimed to explore learners' perspectives about what constituted 'progress' in the program and how such progress had affected their lives. The researchers interviewed learners whose stated goal was independence. Lefebvre et al. (2006) found that non-academic outcomes were both a consequence of learning and a condition for future learning. Among a large list of outcomes, self-confidence ranked first, and other common outcomes included finding voice, feelings of independence, willingness to take risks and face new challenges, as well as public discourse and asking for help.

Taking the treatment of self-confidence one step further, the authors suggest that many of the observed outcomes were integral to participants' learner identity and provided valuable resources for goal accomplishment. Importantly, "enhanced self-awareness and insight into what [learners] have achieved can help them set future goals and build on their achievements" (Lefebvre et al., 2006, p. 8). The study gives some insight into the means by which self-confidence functions and provides clues as to why it is so frequently found within the literature. Self-confidence and feelings of independence and self-determination are profoundly connected with the ability to learn and learners' sense of achievement in as much as they are outcomes of the learning experience.

A few studies take up the link between identity and literacy more explicitly. Falk & Kilpatrick (2000) focus their study of adult learners on the micro-processes that yield

social capital by examining the interactive learning process and its "desired social and economic outcomes" (p. 89). The authors align their study with existing research that "variously makes connections between social cohesion, civic and economic well-being and the social processes which contribute to such beneficial outcomes" (p. 89). The authors contend that their work expands upon the notion of social capital, as theorized by Coleman (1990), by connecting theory concerned with the "what" of social order to that which explains the "how"; in other words, contributing to our understanding of how the social structure is produced and reproduced through individual actions and commitments. They see literacy as providing identity resources to adult learners that consequently impact the social capital that inheres in the structure and outcomes of relationships between actors. In this sense, literacy provides the identity resources that yield beneficial social and economic outcomes.

Falk & Kilpatrick (2000) use conversational analysis to display the link between "instances of interaction (as data) and their possible outcomes, of which social capital is supposed to be one" (p. 90). Learning processes are those in which people interact with others as well as with social texts in a way that leads to the acquisition of skills as well as new values and attitudes which in turn assist in the adoption of different roles. Learning interactions, according to the authors, have a process dimension in the sense that they involve a set of social practices that provide the social framework within which the learning occurs. The second dimension is contextual: learning is situated within a broader socio-cultural context through which the learning event takes on meaning through institutional and societal values. Identity resources occur where "the interactions draw on

internal and external resources of common understanding related to personal, individual, and collective identities [that] build a sense of 'belonging' and encourage participation, as well as providing the framework for people to re-orient their views of self and others in order to be 'willing to act' in new ways" (p. 100) and are significant in the authors' quest to explore the operation of social capital.

Falk and Kilpatrick (Ibid.) examine learning interactions where identity-formation facilitates people's agency, willingness or capacity to act for the benefit of the community in roles their previous perceptions of self did not allow. Identity resources thus take the form of cognitive and affective attributes such as self-confidence, norms, values, attitudes, vision, trust, and commitment to the community. These, the authors argue, interact with knowledge resources such as community networks, skills, knowledge, rules, and value attributes of the community to produce action or cooperation for the benefit of the community and its members. Social capital, in this model, is simultaneously used and built through interactions in the learning process. Thus although the emphasis of this research is on social capital, identity resources comprise an important component of their theory despite making up a rather small portion of their discussion and analysis. Their research hints at the importance of identity in explaining the non-academic outcomes of literacy.

Frances Riemer (2008) examined the negotiation of literacy and numeracy tasks in a rapidly westernizing society. Interested in literacy as heuristic, she studied the meaning of literacy in the lives of Botswana's most marginalized individuals, and the role that literacy played in their negotiation of the country's social and economic changes. She

found that beliefs about literacy provided a way of making meaning, of maintaining hope, and of retaining a sense of self in a rapidly changing world (p. 452). Though not emphasizing the theoretical construction of identity, she engages identity in her view of learning as a social activity that allows adults to "to reconfigure their own identities and move toward a better understanding of who they were, who they wanted to be, and where they were going" (Riemer, 2008, p. 453). Her research highlights the role of literacy as a medium for connecting with others and transforming one's identity and sense of self.

Adults in the literacy programs she studied sought individual, rather than societal, reconstruction and the programs provided places where "marginality could be exchanged for a positive social identity" (p. 459). Literacy, she argues, afforded these individuals a way of being a "person among persons" or a "way of being human" (p. 459). The historical component of Riemer's research examined Christian notions of identity and morality within missionary-run literacy programs. While originally interested in looking at literacy as a tool to negotiate the world, Riemer writes: "after several years in the field, I realized my data was forcing me to look at identity" (Riemer, 2011). The connection between literacy and sense of self is important and warrants further exploration. The study of identity ties together important findings in adult literacy research and offers an explanatory theory as to the means by which adult basic education produces diverse personal and social non-financial outcomes.

Mechanisms by which Literacy Programs Have Effect

Socioeconomic Theory

While this research project is concerned with adult education, more specifically the acquisition of literacy skills in adulthood, an overview of the general findings and theoretical explanations related to the outcomes of compulsory and post-secondary education helps to set the stage and situate adult education within the sociology of education more generally. Sociology offers a sound foundation for the study of adult education that, in turn, may enrich our understanding of education more generally. If we wish to shed light on the causal pathways through which education exerts its influence, as well as understand the role of education in adults' lives more generally, enhancing our knowledge of the experience of acquiring education later in life presents a necessary and valuable component of the research.

In the last twenty years, there has been resurgence in socioeconomic research with the aim of obtaining credible estimates of the causal influence of education on individual and social outcomes (Riddell, 2006). The statistical techniques used to advance our understanding of the private consequences of education have also been fruitfully employed to analyze non-market and social impacts (Riddell, 2006, p. 3). Despite increasingly sophisticated quantitative methodologies, claims about the nature of the relationship between education and social and economic outcomes have remained inconclusive. As Riddell (2006, p. 36) notes, though data confirms the correlation between educational attainment and various individual and social outcomes, the extent to which it reflects the causal effects of education or some unobserved factors is unknown.

The correlation between education and economic success is one of the best known in the social sciences, and, while a few prominent theories have emerged at the fore in offering an explanation as to the nature of the relationship, the causal mechanism remains unclear.

Regardless, at present, we can be confident that education has large and wide-ranging impacts on a variety of individual and social outcomes. There have been advances in estimating outcomes such as greater civic participation, improved health, and reduced criminal activity, although there remains some uncertainty as to the magnitude of such benefits. Researchers often distinguish the effects of schooling on literacy proficiency and knowledge, cognitive development, socioeconomic outcomes, and workplace conditions and treat them as key variables that themselves influence a host of other outcomes. Recent research using natural experiments and instrumental variables has strengthened the case for believing that the social benefits of education are substantial (for example, Hout, 2012; Oreopolous, 2006; 2007a; 2007b; Moretti, 2004a; 2004b). As Pallas (2000) notes, however, there are "sharp disagreements as to what those educational credentials represent" (p. 507). The pathways through which educational effects manifest themselves remain somewhat of an enigma.

In an effort to explain why educational attainment is persistently associated with diverse social outcomes, from wealth to health and participation in political and civic life, Kingston et al. (2003) consider the applicability of human capital and credentialing theories to non-economic outcomes of education. The study draws on two competing explanations of the impact of schooling: socialization and credentialism. While the socialization model emphasizes the transformative effects of schooling, in terms of one's

intellectual abilities, knowledge, social values and personal dispositions, the credentialism model emphasizes structural conditions and the role of education in 'sorting' rather than transforming the capacities of individuals in lasting ways. In both models, however, the causal force remains unclear. As Kingston et al. (2003) contend: "no single factor or consistent constellation of factors explains the pervasive social impact of education" (p. 54). Their multivariate analysis (including linear and non-linear measures of schooling as well as socioeconomic status and cognitive ability) revealed no single factor or consistent set of factors that explains the pervasive social impact of education. Their work highlights the need to go beyond measures of cognitive ability and socioeconomic status to fully account for the effects of education and the authors call for more details about individuals' experience with education to do so.

Bridging the gap between credentialism and socialization theories, Meyer's (1977) theory of education as legitimation posits that the level of schooling achieved has substantial effects on all sorts of personal qualities not simply because schools socialize individuals or because they allocate people to certain status positions, but rather because education constructs and alters the network of positions in society. As Meyer (1977) contends, modern educational systems formally reconstruct, reorganize, and expand the socially defined categories of personnel and of knowledge in society: "they expand and rationalize the social realities that enter into the choices of the socialized and unsocialized, the allocated and the unallocated" (p. 72). Meyer's exploration of education as an institution underscores the implications of the new roles and statuses that are legitimated through modern public classification systems that define how people are

expected, and entitled, to behave and how they are to be treated by others (p. 56). Regarding education in this fashion allows one to see socialization and credentialism theories as complementary extensions of one another and provides a grounding for the exploration of the connection between micro and macro theories of the mechanisms behind the educational effect.

Introducing Identity

As quantitative measures have come to dominate studies of schooling, education has increasingly become a "metrical phenomenon" (Stevens, 2008, p. 102). Given the importance of context, identity and self within the adult learning process and the increasing reflection of this in pedagogical models and practice in the field, an examination of how learners adopt a literate identity will yield important insights into their experience in literacy programs as well as the mechanisms by which the educational effects of adult literacy manifest themselves. As Degener (2001) argues, one's identity is "inscribed by literacy practices" and is determined by literacy level, the printed material one reads, and the role of literacy in the local community. Despite the popularization of situated approaches to literacy, few studies have emphasized the role of identity in shaping the educational experience and its effects.

Writing about discourse and literacy practices, Gee (1990) suggests that we use language in situations as "a sort of 'identity kit' which comes with the appropriate costume and instructions on how to act, talk, and often write so as to take on a particular social role that others will recognize" (p. 142). Though rarely used in studies of literacy,

symbolic interactionism offers a theoretical map from which to understand the varied experiences of adult literacy learners by connecting structured role relationships with individual embodiments of identity. The framework offers a means of gaining valuable insight into the "complex interrelationship between literacy and self – how we create our literacies and how our literacies create us" (Goodson, 2003 as cited in Williams, 2003, p. 178). As one of many social identities we carry with us, 'literate' is an identity that presents "a significant part of us in our own and others' eyes, affecting our own behaviour and that of others in relation to us" (Vryan, Adler, and Adler, 2003, p. 271). The way in which adult literacy learners negotiate and transform an illiterate identity can provide insight into the learning experience and how it shapes an individual's sense of self, social roles and behaviours. As Williams (2003, p. 181) contends:

> Our conceptions of literacy and our perceptions of who uses it, for what ends, and in what circumstances always depend on interactions between people. Literacy is never disconnected from identity. People whose identities don't fit the scripts of the dominant culture's narratives are often silenced.

Because literacy and identity are socially structured affiliations, symbolic interactionist theory provides a unique perspective on the impact of education in adults' lives, particularly as it is conceived of as a form of transition from a deviant 'illiterate' to non-deviant 'literate' identity.

Fundamentals of Symbolic Interactionism

Symbolic interactionism is a theoretical and research program whose goal is to explain the structure of the self and the nature of human interaction as it is mediated by the use of symbols and the subjective interpretation of meaning. The paradigm draws on the work of a number of influential scholars such as Charles Cooley, W.I. Thomas, and George Herbert Mead and modern writers such as Herbert Blumer, Anselm Strauss, and Erving Goffman. Following Mead's seminal work, the self is characterized by its ability to take itself as object, to regard and evaluate itself and to manipulate itself to bring about future states. The self is therefore thought of as both individual and social in character. As Burke and Stets (2009) suggest, the self "works to control meanings to sustain itself, but many of those meanings, including the meanings of the self, are shared and form the basis of language communication, symbolic interaction, and, ultimately, social structure" (p. 10). The self originates in the minds of persons and is that which characterizes an individual's consciousness of his or her own being or identity.

The self emerges through interaction with others and through the roles individuals occupy and is not static but constantly in flux; new definitions of self emerge as group affiliations and social roles change. As Burke and Stets (2009) remark: "self-labels define individuals in terms of their positions in society, and these positions in society are relational in the sense that they tie individuals together" (p. 26)[2]. Social structures result from individual actions but individuals are also constrained by these structures: they

[2] Proponents of the Iowa school, such as Peter Burke and Jan Stets, traditionally make use of quantitative survey methods and Likert scaling to study identity. Though some of their theory is presented here, this research project does not test notions of centrality and salience of identity. The research is used, rather, to generate hypotheses for future testing.

affect the likelihood that persons will or will not develop particular kinds of selves, learn particular kinds of motivations, and have particular symbolic resources for defining situations they enter. Importantly, our sense of structure is "composed not just of the formally labeled roles of a group or society, but also of the unique way in which, over time, we have come to see ourselves in relation to others in that structure" (Hewitt, 1994, p. 186). In this sense, people act on the basis of the meanings that they construct, which come to the fore in the accounts people give of their experiences and interactions with others. Consequently, identities arise from participation within social groups and are often acquired within organizational contexts.

Symbolic interactionism suggests that, unlike the stable and relatively constant self, identities are multiple and operate within an elaborate system of mutual influence with social structure. The theory posits that identities are self-meanings that develop in the context of the meanings attributed to social roles. Identities can thus be conceived of as internalized social role expectations attached to positions occupied in networks of relationships. As Strauss (1959) notes: "the sociologist is, because of his concerns, struck by changes in persons, and in their sense of identity, as they move in and out of, and up and down within, social structures" (p. 89). Identity is at once a social, structural, and cognitive phenomenon.

Identity is related to social status and differences in self-identification relative to different reference groups. Social statuses become subjective definitions (which can be objectively observed), and these subjective definitions affect behaviour in important ways. According to Stryker and Burke (2000) identity "refers to parts of a self composed

of the meanings that persons attach to the multiple roles they typically play in highly differentiated contemporary societies" (p. 284). In this sense, symbolic interactionism allows for the conception of an agentic actor while simultaneously acknowledging the influence of structural factors on behaviour. We are able to acknowledge the significance of the learner's lived experience while also recognizing the social implications of literacy and the literate role.

Conduct is self-referential: people wish to attach positive value to the self and develop a coherent self-image and take themselves into account when acting (Hewitt, 1993, p. 74). In this sense, we aim to see ourselves through the vantage point of others such that social roles provide a type of organizing framework for our behaviour. Continuity is a central part of our experience of self, which depends upon our membership in groups, organizations and the like. Disruption of group membership or social dislocation can bring identity into conscious awareness and reflection.

As Rubin, Shmilovitz and Weiss (1993) remark in their study of individual transformation: "whether the identity change is abrupt or gradual, announced or unannounced, social approval to establish the new identity will be forthcoming, so long as the identity that we attribute to ourselves corresponds with that which others attribute to us" (p. 1). A person has an identity for each of the different positions or roles that she or he holds in society, what Stryker (1980) refers to as an "internalized positional designation" (p. 60). The self, however, maintains a sense of continuity from role to role and situation to situation. This continuity depends in part upon people's "sense of membership in groups, organizations, and other collectives, as well as on the

identification with the members of these social units" (Hewitt, 1994, p. 109). As learners acquire new literacy skills and build a sense of community within the programs they participate in, some experience discontinuity in their sense of self as they begin to identify with new social units and conceive of their social memberships differently. Others, who have strong social memberships with family, work or the community, often experience a strong continuity in their sense of self despite acquiring a literate identity.

Status Passage and the Movement from an 'Illiterate' to 'Literate' Identity

Status passage offers a means of understanding the experience of literacy education in adulthood as well as provides insight as to how the effects of the experience manifest themselves as individuals transition from a deviant 'illiterate' to non-deviant 'literate' identity. According to Glaser and Strauss (1971), status passages may result in individuals' movement into a different part of a social structure or a gain of privilege, influence, or power often resulting in a changed identity and sense of self, as well as changed behaviour. Their work highlights the often scheduled, regularized and institutionally prescribed nature of status passage[3]. Glaser and Strauss (1971) suggest that

[3] Some common aspects of these passages are explored in their book Status Passage (1971). Firstly, important status passages are frequently discussed by participants. Given the association between status passages and organizations/institutions, the passages are prominent in the organizational or institutional discourse (Glaser and Strauss, 1971, p. 2). Secondly, all status passages possess an element of temporality: "no one is assigned, nor may s(he) assume, a position or status forever" (Glaser and Strauss, 1971, p. 3). A person may 'dispossess themselves' or 'be dispossessed' of a given status. Thirdly, passages "reflect conditions for and changes in social structure and its functioning" (Ibid., p. 3), thus implying that they may have structural consequences. In addition, a feature of many status passages is their relatively scheduled character and their governance by fairly clear rules: "scheduling, regularization, and prescription are integral to so many status passages" (Ibid., p. 3). The authors, finally, highlight a handful of additional features that may characterize the passage: (un)desirable, inevitable, reversible, repeatable, circumstantial (solitary or collective), (in)voluntary, requiring legitimation, and the presence of (un)clear

individuals' movement from one situation or period of life to the next represents a continuous and ever-changing feature of the life course.

By recognizing the many properties of status passage, the researcher can provide a rich illustration of status passage and thereby note the many behaviours of the individual and the consequences of the passage to develop a substantive analysis of the research data. In addition, Glaser and Strauss (Ibid.) note that often the features most relevant to the research at hand should be used. The interview data analyzed in the following chapter will yield important information about whether individuals experienced status passage through participation in literacy programs and, if so, provide clues as to the nature of that passage following the principal considerations of status passage presented by Glaser and Strauss (Ibid.). Status passage offers a means of examining learners' experience with learning that moves away from cause-effect relationships and seeks to understand the role of education in adulthood by recognizing the broader processes an individual undertakes in pursing literacy and the ways in which this may transform their lives. Glaser and Strauss (Ibid.) stress the temporal, rather than static, nature of status passage. In this sense, the rate and schedule of passages are closely linked. A scheduled passage moves people along at a prescribed rate and often people have feelings that things will happen according to specific temporal expectations which, when not met, can upset passagees[4]. In terms of non-scheduled passages, timings are more readily negotiable and often actions are directed at minimizing delays by establishing mini-schedules over the

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signs of passage. Such properties, the authors argue, can "account for the behaviours of, and consequences for, the persons involved in any given status" (Ibid., p. 6).

[4] Glaser and Strauss (1971) employ the term 'passagee' to denote those who undergo a status passage.

knowns of the passage (Ibid., p. 44). Literacy learning follows a distinct schedule in that participants aim to "level up", with level 2 being the highest level offered by community literacy programs. Participants would then move on the programs offered by school boards and other agencies that offer instruction for levels 3-5, with level 5 being the final level that allows learners to progress to community colleges where GED and other certificate programs are offered. The amount of time it takes participants to complete the necessary activities and "test out" of a particular level depends on the learner. Some move through the levels quickly while others may stay at the same level for years depending on their level of commitment and ability. Thus, the pace of work is negotiable but does depend on factors outside the control of the passagee. It is the literacy organization ultimately that controls the passage because they determine whether the passagee meets the necessary criteria to 'pass' a level. The concept of mutual interdependence may be of particular relevance in describing the relationship between passagee and agent, in this case the learner and the program coordinator or instructor. Glaser and Strauss (Ibid.) argue that some passagees with special problems or skills are "contingently dependent upon a particular control agent as the only person able to help them through either a passage or transitional phase of it" (p. 70-71). Without instructors, students would not have the opportunity to address their literacy challenges and acquire the necessary skills to attain their personal learning and life goals.

Because passages are temporal in nature, Glaser and Strauss consider the importance of transitional statuses in their analysis: "the passagee is in constant movement over time, not just 'in' a status" (p. 47). Importantly, some passages do not

have clearly delineated transitional statuses such that the entire passage is seen as a transition. In the case of adult literacy learners, the role of student may embody a 'transitional status' where, once graduated or having successfully 'passed' a level, participants come to consider the passage fulfilled and themselves 'literate'. Also important to consider is the amount of time the passagee dedicates to the transition and whether his/her commitment to the transition is intermittent (as in the case of literacy learners who devote portions of their day, a few days a week to learning) and therefore not disruptive to other aspects of life. When the transitional status becomes more intermittent, time devoted to the transition is likely to be more equal between agent and passage (Ibid., p. 49); for example, student and teacher meet each week for a predetermined period of time. This may also occur when both parties share a sustained interest in each other and/or in the outcome of the passage. Lags in temporal definitions may occur and are likely to lead to strain between agent and passagee and are often met with a need to renegotiate or dissolve relationships. One participant had left the program for a few years because the instructors had not allowed him to progress the way he wanted to. Another participant switched programs because he was not learning as quickly as he had expected.

Desirability also influences the shape of a passage by providing the motivation for action and is subject to change throughout the passage. When both passagee and the agent find the passage desirable, cooperation often dominates as both work together to achieve a desirable passage (Ibid., p. 90). Learners who resist participation in literacy programs, often those who attend to keep their employment insurance, fail to progress and typically

drop out of the programs if they do not begin the see the learning as a welcome opportunity. The degree of desirability of a status passage relates to the social integration of the passagee and the social circumstances that surround the passage. If both parties cooperate, a negotiation of mutually acceptable terms is involved (Ibid., p. 94). This could be seen to occur in the initial assessment meeting that occurs between program coordinators and learners, whereby the learners' skills are ascertained and personal goals and learning objectives are factored into an individualized learning plan. Often this plan is negotiated over the first few months until the right balance is found. For some, it is self-paced work, others prefer to participate one on one with tutors and others to join a small class of learners. Negotiation can occur on a continual basis and is often scheduled, as is the case in literacy organizations where learners' progress towards their goals is assessed on a regular basis. In sum, Glaser and Strauss note: "the claims of the past on the present and future shape of the passage are scrutinized in an effort to make explicit the otherwise implicit claims to desirable aspects of the passage" (Ibid., p. 101).

Theorizing Identity Change

In her analysis of identity transformation in prostitutes who decide to leave the sex trade, Oselin (2009) emphasizes the role of institutional structures in the process of identity change. Her research focuses on biographical reconstruction (changed talk) and role embracement (changed behaviour) as empirical manifestations of identity change. For example, she states that "role embracement is apparent when an individual's behaviours meet specific expectations" (Oselin, 2009, p. 388). Oselin uses what she calls

"ideal educated middle class lifestyles" as the behavioural benchmark the women participating in the outreach program were held to. This included things like holding down a steady job, being financially responsible, and cultivating supportive relationships in the family and community. She found that the longer women participated in the program, the more proficient they became at aligning their talk and behaviour with those of the program, which she took as evidence that the deviant prostitute identity had been shed and a new identity had been embraced. The study suggests a direct connection between identity change and a myriad of other changes Oselin describes as being "loosely connected to identity" (Ibid., p. 401), such as personality, social standing, social networks, careers, and educational attainment. This study fits well with this research in examining the changes one makes in his or her life in relation to the acquisition of literacy skills and the change in social status. By asking participants whether they have changed their view of themselves, their behaviours and their personal relationships, it is possible to get insight into their biographical reconstruction and role embracement as indicators of identity change. This may also provide insight into the outcomes associated with adult literacy and the role of organizations and social relationships in confirming learners' new social roles as they undergo status passage.

Using status passage as a means of theorizing the effects of education allows me to look at institutional contexts as being crucial to identity change because they "present and cultivate language and behaviours among [individuals] that are associated with a non-deviant role and identity" (Ibid., p. 401). It draws attention to the role of environment in identity change, particularly as it contributes to or prevents the successful adoption of a

literate identity through the provision of a symbolic framework that provides the potential for personal transformation. This is particularly relevant given the significant role of standardized assessments, the strong relationships that learners develop with their tutors and program staff, and the pedagogical approaches that structure adults' experiences with literacy programs and their negotiation of a literate identity.

Adult learners often cultivate new social ties in meaningful alternative communities within literacy organizations. Barton et al (2007) have issued a preliminary report on their study about the lives of adult learners and it is clear from their list of initial findings that relationships among learners, and between learners and teachers, matter to the overall success of adult education programs: "Relationships matter in learning, including teacher/student and student/student relationships, also the networks of support learners are part of" (p. 6). Learning environments often offer structure and stability in learners' lives. This may also present an important link to the educational effect and the various outcomes associated with adult education. In this sense, social structure does not dictate roles but limits the possibilities for interaction. As Burke and Stets (2009) note: "the guide for behaviour, thus, is not the standard or meaning but the relationship between the standard and the current set of self-relevant meanings unfolding in the situation" (p. 32). Interactions thus serve to challenge or validate definitions and are further structured by definitions that emerge from the interactions themselves. Stryker and Burke (2000, p. 22) argue that structures make it more likely that certain persons will develop certain kinds of selves, learn particular kinds of motivations, and have particular symbolic resources for defining the situations they enter. The link between identity and behaviour

arises in shared meanings, which serve as frameworks for interpreting experience. As McCall and Simmons (1978) posit, role identities have a conventional dimension, which includes cultural expectations tied to social positions, but they also have an individual dimension that involves the unique interpretations that individuals bring to their roles. I am interested in understanding whether and, if so, how individuals (re)construct their sense of self amidst the changing social contexts they encounter and in light of the new literate identity that they acquire.

The Study of Adult Literacy

Introduction

In comparison to studies of early literacy, those that examine the acquisition of literacy skills in adulthood are few and far between (Comings & Soricone, 2007; Stromquist, 2009) and are plagued with their own set of challenges and limitations. Scholars and practitioners in the field of adult basic education have acknowledged the difficulty of studying the outcomes of literacy programs given the heterogeneity of the learner population and the diverse nature of programs, as well as the irregular enrolment and attendance of participants. Furthermore, the multiplicity of variables that affect adults' lives before, during and after their participation in literacy programs has spurred debate as to how best to study the effects of participation in literacy programs and how to account for such effects. Regardless, the growing recognition of the importance of literacy skills in a knowledge driven economy has meant that funding for adult basic

education has been based on demands for increasingly robust accountability measures. This has sent providers and advocacy groups scrambling to produce sophisticated measures that aim to capture the widely-recognized, though seldom measured, non-academic outcomes of literacy.

Research in adult education focuses on adult basic skills programs although some include a wide range of adult learning programs, such as vocational skills, employment skills, recreational, and personal development programs, and workplace training. Almost all studies focus on private outcomes for individuals and their families rather than the broader societal outcomes. Most explore how adult learning affects feelings about self, social capital, and commitment to learning. In addition, a handful of studies investigate changes in health and health practices, independence, and participation in community life. Most studies use a cross-sectional, qualitative research design and many studies are largely exploratory in nature and do not test specific hypotheses about the benefits of adult learning. A handful of studies use longitudinal designs while few use a comparison group. Although widespread application of findings is limited, evidence drawn from case studies, ethnographic and action research approaches have contributed a growing body of qualitative and practitioner evidence across many different types of learning that suggests there are general individual and social benefits to adult education.

Another aspect of the debate, such as the position taken by Greenwood et al (2001), suggest the need for a more qualitative approach to studying adult literacy outcomes and advocate for the centrality of learners' perspectives as a necessary

contribution to the debate about measures of learners' progress (what the authors call 'non-accredited achievement'). Greenwood et al (2001) contend that:

> Research has shown that disadvantaged groups in the community do not embark on learning pathways as a result of exercising choice over what is already on offer but as a result of organizations responding to identified interests, negotiating options and customising provision. (p. 97)

Accordingly, the report highlights the need for assessment measures to reflect learner requirements and aspirations in their effort to capture evidence of achievement for funding, quality assurance, and further research purposes.

Those who advocate for qualitative methodologies argue that learners' views should not only inform research but should "contribute to both the discussion and development of practice at local and national levels" (Greenwood et al., 2001, p. 99). The tension in this action based research emerges from the fact that learners' views and experiences are likely to be many and various and may not always align with those of the tutors and program managers. In addition, the authors cite an inherent difficulty in measuring 'soft' outcomes such as self-esteem and confidence: "while such outcomes are of immense importance, and perhaps of greatest value to many learners, they are hard to define and their acquisition is hard to verify" (Ibid., p.102). While the place of qualitative evidence in assessment of outcomes remains an 'outstanding question', it is clear that "learners' views are crucial to any resolution" (Ibid., p. 102). Other researchers have made similar claims. Stromquist (2009) suggests that qualitative studies often use small samples and seldom rely on treatment/control design, but "they do contribute insights into

program participants' perspectives and lives, which can be useful in the design of future programs" (p. 2) and arguably also contribute to our understanding of the effects learners experience and the mechanisms through which they may manifest themselves. Thus, while most researchers would agree that further study is required to develop a more robust and reliable research base in the field of adult literacy, there is some debate as to how best to proceed in this regard. Research that seeks to establish causal relationships must be complemented by research that seeks to gain nuanced insight into the perspective of learners regarding the meaning of their experiences within the context of their lives. In turn, qualitative research may offer a means of theorizing the mechanisms by which education exerts its many varying effects.

In Hal Beder's (1991) examination of 115 US studies on the outcomes and impacts of adult education, positive impact on self-image was found to be the only unequivocal outcome of adult education programs. Westell's (2005) review of the literature on adult literacy programs finds that studies that assess learners' and practitioners' sense of the outcomes of literacy show that self-image is central to people's progress in learning. While acknowledging the difficulty of isolating the causal effects of educational programming on the non-academic outcomes of adult education, Westell concludes that strong correlations exist between adults' increased self-confidence and the outcomes they experience (p. 1). To understand these outcomes, qualitative research is most certainly an important methodological approach. In her introduction to a research study that asked tutors to journal about their interactions with learners, Zimmerman (2004, p.4) comments:

> Our funders need information that is neat, objectives that are observable, clear goals that can be measured. Funders need to verify that money is well spent and that student progress is being made. However, adult literacy work is messy.
>
> We know what we do is not adequately conveyed by the antiseptic transmission of neat numbers. We are often exasperated by the seemingly impenetrable cloak of statistics. Yet we are also excited. Here is an investigative procedure which challenges us to articulate the intangibles.

It is these very "intangibles" that this exploratory research project seeks to uncover.

Applying the Theory of Status Passage to Identity Change

As Glaser and Strauss contend in support of status passage theory: "if properly qualified and substantiated by careful research, it would in turn add to the modification and densification of the formal theory of status passage" (Ibid., p. 158). A number of studies have engaged Glaser and Strauss' conception of status passage, particularly when examining social deviance and identity change. Degher and Hughes (1991) have developed an identity change model, based in principles of status passage, which relates changes in image of self and felt identity to external status cues. In order to explain identity change, the authors argue that the individual comes to internally recognize that the initial status is inappropriate, and locates a new, more appropriate status. The authors endeavor to explain what they call the often neglected "mechanistic features of this identity shift" (Degher & Hughes, 1991, p. 387). Their research is significant in the context of this project because it examines how individuals exit a deviant identity. Of particular importance is the role of behaviour as an indicator of identity transformation. This stems from the desire for an acceptable image of self in response to status cues in the social environment.

As symbolic interactionists have posited, identity is constructed on the basis of our perception of the reactions of others as much as it is a subjective definition of self. Degher and Hughes (1991) use the term 'self-evidentiality' to highlight exactly this: the concept expresses the degree to which a person, who possesses certain objective status characteristics, is aware that a particular status label applies to them (p. 385). The significance of self-evidentiality is directly connected to status cues, more explicitly the type of status cue that will play the most prominent role in identity change. Active or passive status cues both trigger and mediate the change process. The model engages a career focus in explaining identity change. Their research draws upon the notion of career as two-sided, containing both internal (image of self and felt identity) and external (publicly acceptable institutional complex) components. Degher and Hughes (Ibid.) contend that the identity change process must be viewed on these two levels. The authors also rely upon Becker's notion of 'career contingencies' or the "factors on which mobility from one position to another depends" (1962, p. 24 as cited in Degher & Hughes, 1991, p. 391). The 'internal matters' and the 'social environment' exist in a dialectic relationship. As Degher and Hughes note "the social environment not only contains definitions and attendant stereotypes for each status, it also contains information, in the form of status cues, about the applicability of that status for the individual" (Ibid., p. 391). This, in turn, influences identity change.

The adoption of a new status is hypothesized to occur through two sequential internal processes. The first, "recognizing" occurs when the individual recognizes that the current status is inappropriate. The second, "placing" occurs when the individual locates a

new appropriate status. In the case of literacy, it can be conceived that a particular event triggers the perceived need to participate in a literacy program. Placing would occur when an individual recognizes 'literate' as a more desirable status. The external component is comprised of status cues; in other words, some feature of the social environment communicates information about a particular status (Ibid., p. 394). Active cues occur through interaction while passive cues are those which the individual becomes sensitized to. Thus the authors contend that events occur that force the individual to evaluate his or her conceptions of self. These, of course, can be ignored or rejected by the individual by neutralizing one's self-image. Degher and Hughes are careful to note that there is but a "tenuous connection between objective condition and subjective definition" (Ibid., p. 394). This is particularly interesting when examining an institutionally promoted identity change such as is the case with adult literacy education. Literate is a status typically acquired in one's youth and participants spoke about their experiences with active and passive status cues, both as children and adults, which indicated their status was inappropriate. Only in adulthood, and often later in adulthood, did they identify and aim to achieve a new, more appropriate status. Learners' motivations for participation are, therefore, of significant interest if we wish to understand how they perceive the experience and its impact upon their identities.

Further to Degher and Hughes' (1991) argument regarding identity transformation, Kiecolt (1994) suggests that stressors (e.g., life events, chronic role strains) act as an initial impetus to self-change by generating unfavorable reflected appraisals, unfavorable social comparisons, and/or lowered self-perceived competence,

which in turn may act to reduce one's self-efficacy, self-esteem, and/or sense of authenticity. She contends that these impetuses alone are not sufficient, however, for making a decision to change oneself. Rather, several ''conditioning factors'' must also be considered. Kiecolt (1994) also suggests that in some instances a ''critical event'' or a ''turning point'' may also be necessary to instigate a decision to change oneself or to ''precipitate the decision to change by raising the level of any of the [conditioning factors]'' (p. 58). Labeling efforts, both by self and others, may serve as a means by which unfavorable appraisals, comparisons and/or turning points are generated.

The identification of turning points may help to elucidate the pathways that adult learners take to literacy programs, as well as some of the reasons why people wait until adulthood to acquire literacy skills. The existing research in adult literacy shows that the outcomes learners identify are not necessarily the same as they had expected upon entry into the program, which suggests their expectations often change as a result of the experience. Though cognitive expectations dominate initially, they become less prominent as outcomes over time and are similar in ranking to personal and social outcomes after participation in a program (Westell, 2005). While adults may initially be seeking literacy skills, stressors such as unfavorable reflected appraisals or low self-confidence may precipitate a desire for status passage, the outcomes of which tend to dominate learners' experiences rather than the academic outcomes they had instinctively sought as a means of integrating themselves into the 'normal' social world. Others, however, continue to see the experience and the acquisition of literacy skills instrumentally. While acknowledging the independence they have gained, some learners

do not experience great changes in other aspects of their lives or in themselves. Status passage sheds light on identity change as an outcome of education that, though seldom measured in studies of the educational effect, may offer valuable insight into the experience of learners as well as the mechanisms through which returns to education may or may not manifest themselves.

Of particular relevance to this research on adult literacy learners is a study by Rubin, Shmilovitz & Weiss (1993) that examined the status passages of those who experience dramatic weight loss and go 'from fat to thin', ridding themselves of the stigma of being obese. The authors demonstrate how most of their subjects experienced a sense of 'revolutionary change' in their lives as they got incorporated into a new status group. Key elements of the status passage were the "personal, informal rites of passage" (Rubin, Shilovitz, & Weiss, 1993, p. 3). Struggling to come to terms with their newly acquired identities, subjects practiced ritually in private and in the presence of family and friends in order to gain recognition for their new social state and prove that they were acceptable in their new identity (Ibid., p. 4). The change in image and redefinition of status that accompanied the passage was important because it allowed individuals to acquire power that had previously been unavailable to them. The authors argue that the individual uses informal rites to redefine his or her identity thus helping to accomplish the change rather than merely symbolize it (Ibid., p. 14).

In the absence of public solutions to life changes or crises, "personal definitional rites" are used where public rituals are unavailable or inappropriate but where the situation demands identity change. Newly acquired identity is "performed ritually" in an

attempt to elicit recognition and approval of a new social state (Ibid., p. 1). In a similar fashion, learners may engage in new behaviours to confirm their passage to a new, more socially acceptable status that carries with it certain role expectations and social meanings to which they have always been outside observers. These behavioural rites of passage become a means of affirming the identity change. Developing new social circles, volunteering in the community and interacting confidently with professionals were examples of the non-academic outcomes learners experienced that were, in large part, extraneous to the new skills they had acquired but reflect the new identity and power learners had acquired as a result of status passage.

Rubin, Shilovitz and Weiss (1993) aim to build upon the literature that addresses definitional rites as a personal and public affirmation of identity. Rites of passage, rather than an exclusive focus on status passage, provided "a better understanding of the dynamics of identity transformation" (Rubin, Shilovitz, & Weiss, 1993, p. 2). Individuals who rid themselves of the stigma of being "fat" through rapid and drastic weight loss grapple with a new "thin" physique and changed identity as a result of shedding the negative stigma attached to obesity. As subjects changed their image and redefined their status, the "rites proved to them that they were acceptable in their new identity" (Ibid., p. 4). The article provides considerable insight into the identity change process whereby individuals shed a spoiled identity (Goffman, 1963) and rid themselves of the attached stigma therefore transforming their sense of self and worldview and acquiring power that had previously been unavailable to them. Where the change is more drastic and abrupt, rites of passage are sought to ease the transition to a new personal and social identity that

help the individual "cross the barrier into the normal world" (Rubin, Shilovitz, & Weiss, 1993, p. 7) as a mechanism for the removal of stigma through self and social ratification thus strengthening the perception of the new status. This may help to explain why some of the outcomes of literacy learning are unrelated to the acquisition of improved reading, writing, and numeracy skills.

In summary, three primary bodies of research are engaged in this project. First, symbolic interactionist literature is used to conceptualize identity and self in order to examine participants' transition from 'illiterate' to 'literate' status. The research draws upon the notion of identity as two-sided, containing both internal components, or image of self and felt identity, and external components, including socially structured role affiliations. Second, in order to link individuals' experiences to the literature on the educational effect, research on the outcomes of education as well as the mechanisms by which such outcomes take effect, is central to this project. Also important is Meyer's (1977) theory of education as legitimation, which underscores the implications of the new roles and statuses that are created and legitimated by educational institutions that define how people are expected, and entitled, to behave. Finally, to tie together two such disparate bodies of literature, Glaser and Strauss' (1971) concept of status passage is helpful in understanding how these educational effects do or do not take hold at the individual level while maintaining an important link to macro conceptions of social roles and statuses.

The findings of the literature and theoretical review highlight the importance of thinking holistically about the effects of education as part of the broader processes that adults

undertake as they seek to effect change in their lives. The research questions, goals, and theoretical framework of this project influenced the adoption of a qualitative research methodology. The following chapter will lay out the methodological foundation for this research and will highlight both its strengths and limitations.

Table 1. Studies Examining the Effects of Conventional and Adult Education on Personal and Social Outcomes.

CONVENTIONAL EDUCATION (K-12, college, and university)		ADULT EDUCATION	
Outcome	Source	Outcome	Source
Health			
- More likely to quit smoking, or not smoke at all. - Exhibit healthier behaviours - Better informed about health risks - Better self-reported Health - Greater likelihood of using preventative care and screening - Greater longevity - Lower obesity rates Concerns: - Role of cognitive ability in accounting for health-related outcomes	- De Walque (2004, 2010) - Cutler & Lleras-Muney (2006, 2010) - Chen and Lange (2008) - Arendt (2005, 2008) - Wolfe & Havemen (2001) - McMahon (1997, 2002, 2009) - Grossman (1972, 2006) - Pierce et al. (1989) - Deaton and Lubotsky (2003) - Lleras-Muney (2005) - Auld and Sidhu (2005) - Kenkel (1991) - Kenkel et al. (2006) - Glied and Lleras-Muney (2008)	- Increased alcohol consumption (attributed to increased socialization) - Greater likelihood of giving up smoking (specific to leisure courses) - Positive health transformations (especially for people in their thirties) - Lower health-related returns for those who participate in foundational adult education (ie: GED) - Improved self-reported health when learning matched interests, strengths and needs of the learners - Small improvements in lifestyle	- Hammond and Feinstein (2004, 2006) - Kenkel et al. (2006) - Hammond (2002a, b, 2003, 2004) - James (2004) - Hammond and Feinstein (2006) - Feinstein et al. (2003) - Schuller et al. (2004)

		- Reduced anxiety and stress	
Civic Participation			
- Greater likelihood of political involvement - Higher rates of political interest (attending community meeting, working on community issues or discussing political issues with friends) - Greater likelihood of voting (US) - More engaged polity overall - Increased quality of civic knowledge - Greater support for free speech and democratic principles - Greater likelihood of volunteering for or donating to charity - Greater sense of common purpose and trust	- Moretti, Milligan & Oreopoulos (2004) - Barro (2001) - Glaeser, Ponzetto & Shleifer (2007) - Dee (2004) - Glaeser, Scheinkman & Shleifer (1995) - McMahon (2002) - McMahon and Psacharopoulos (2008) - Keller (2006) - Hodgkinson and Weitzman (1988) - McMahon (2009) - Helliwell and Putnam (2007) - Uslaner (2000) - Riddell (2006) - Gemmell (1995) - Glaser et al. (1995) - Ciccone and Peri (2006) - Acemoglu and Angrist (2000)	- Greater race tolerance - Increased participation in the community - Decreased authoritarian attitudes - Enhanced interest in politics and civic activity - Raise social awareness - Greater sense of social participation and contribution to society and access to support - Entry into new networks and extension of existing networks - Greater willingness to take responsibility - Increased civic memberships - Improved social competencies that lead to increased social capital (by helping to develop social competencies, extending social networks, and promoting shared norms	- Feinstein and Hammond (2004) - Schuller et al. (2002, 2004) - Field (2005, 2009) - Dench and Regan (2000) - Balatti and Falk (2002) - Balatti, Black & Falk (2006)

		and tolerance of others)	
Subjective Well-being			
- Higher rates of self-reported happiness - More goal oriented - Greater likelihood of job satisfaction (regardless of income) - Less likely to be low-income - Less likely to report poor health, being depressed. - Greater reported satisfaction with one's life	- Oreopoulos and Salvanes (2009) - Oreopoulos (2006, 2007a, 2007b)	- Greater life satisfaction - Improved feelings of self-efficacy - Improved mental-health - Counters depression - Improved self-confidence - Greater ability to cope - Feelings of empowerment and efficacy - Feelings of optimism - Control over important life choices	- Hammond (2002a, 2002b, 2003, 2004) - James (2004) - Alexander and Clyne (1995) - Coare and Thomson (1996) - Thompson (2002) - Field (2009) - McGivney (1999) - Feinstein & Hammond (2004) - Schuller et at. (2004) - Dench and Regan (2000) - Hammond and Feinstein (2005, 2006)
Crime			
- Negative relationship to unskilled property crime and violent crime - Decreased probability of incarceration - Educating at-risk youth and inmates is of limited effectiveness in reducing crime rates	- Lochner (2004) - Lochner and Moretti (2004) - Anderson (2010) - Buonanno and Leone (2009) - Witte (1997)	- Correctional education is nearly twice as effective at reducing crime rates than crime control policy - Inmates who participate in education programs are less likely to return to prison - Every dollar allocated to vocational and basic	- Correctional Association of New York (2009) - Bazos and Hausman (2004) - Erisman and Contardo (2005) - Gorgol and Sponsler (2011) - John Howard Society of Alberta (2002)

		education programs for offenders yields a 200-300% return on investment.	
Families			
- Parental schooling strongly relates to children's development and socio-economic success - Parental schooling improves children's health outcomes - Lower infant mortality rates of educated mothers - Lower divorce rates of more highly educated couples	- Oreopoulos (2006, 2007a) - Cunha and Heckman (2009) - Chou et al. (2007) - Grossman (2006) - McMahon (2002) - Chiappori, Iyigun, and Weiss (2009)	- Enhanced quality of life	- Townsend (2006)

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

As the intent was to gain an understanding of the experience of acquiring literacy skills in later life, qualitative methods lent themselves well to the objectives of this research project. Qualitative research approaches allow for an open, yet structured research method in which information can be systematically explored. Taking a phenomenological approach allows the researcher to "set quantitative results into their human context" (Trochim, 2005, p. 121). This research project focuses on the lived experiences of adult learners and emphasizes interviewees' interpretation of life events and personal experiences. An interpretive methodological approach assumes that the social world is constantly being constructed through group interactions, and thus social reality can be understood via the "perspectives of social actors enmeshed in meaning-making activities" (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2010, p. 5). In this sense, the research is intended not to confirm or disconfirm earlier findings, but rather to "contribute to a process of continuous revision and enrichment of understanding" (Elliott, Fischer, & Rennie, 1994, as cited in Lincoln, 1995, p. 278) of the returns to education in adulthood.

Selection of the Research Method

Face-to-face, semi-structured qualitative interviews were chosen as the primary methodological tool in this study. Interviews are "issue-oriented" (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2010, p. 120), constituting a useful tool for researchers who are looking to gain information about a specific experience from particular individuals. Semi-structured interviews use some prepared questions and probes while also allowing the researcher to follow a particular line of thought that emerges and create new questions throughout the interview. This type of interviewing is less rigid and allows participants the freedom to discuss what they deem to be important to the topic. As one study of adult learners notes "we found that consulting the learners with open-ended

questions about their progress was an effective method of dialoguing with them about their progress" (Lefebvre et al., 2006, p. 29). In this case, questions were rephrased or explained further to help the flow of conversation and ensure that the language used by the researcher and types of questions asked were understandable to each participant. Allowing participants to tell their stories also offers a broader view of adults' experience participating in literacy programs than a predetermined set of questions would. The foundation for this approach was derived from Battell's (2001) *Naming the Magic: Non-Academic Outcomes in Basic Literacy*. This project described and field-tested six techniques for documenting non-academic outcomes of learners as a result of their participation in literacy instruction. One technique involved questioning learners with the intent to encourage them to develop a "growing awareness of the various changes in their lives" (Ibid., p 47). This project made use of some of the suggested questions and prompts derived from that technique.

In addition to the interviews, a focus group was conducted with program and instructional staff from a variety of adult literacy programs, including community-based, school board and college literacy programs. The focus group touched upon themes similar to those in the interviews and practitioners were asked to share their experience working with adult learners. Many of the practitioners, having worked in the literacy field for over twenty years, provided a valuable resource to the researcher and helped to set the interviews within a broader, structural context. As an individual who possesses strong literacy skills and whose educational opportunities have had a tremendous influence on quality of life and standard of living, it was important for me to situate the research within an understanding of the "bigger picture". Before beginning the interviews, I also met informally with various representatives from the Government of Ontario, as well as program managers and instructional staff at community and

college-based literacy programs to more fully understand the discourse that surrounds literacy learning, as well as the philosophy by which it is governed, funded, and delivered in the province. These conversations were helpful in situating learners' experiences within the institutional framework that shapes the common meanings of, and people's responses to, literacy. This provided useful information about the context within which learners experienced identity change.

In speaking about qualitative analysis, Strauss and Corbin (1998) suggest that they are "referring not to the quantifying of qualitative data but rather to a nonmathematical process of interpretation, carried out for the purpose of discovering concepts and relationships in raw data and then organizing these into a theoretical explanatory scheme" (p. 11). It is as such that this research project proceeds from the collection of qualitative data via participant interviews through coding and analysis and finally to the development of theory to explore substantive areas that emerge from the data. From this perspective, the present research aims to contribute a more nuanced and detailed understanding of the broad statistical findings that inform much of our knowledge about adult literacy and educational outcomes. It is hoped that this research project enhances our understanding of the effects of learning in adulthood and also offers important insights into the many individual and social returns to education and the mechanisms through which they manifest themselves differently.

The Recruitment Process

It was difficult to recruit learners to participate in this study. I did not have previous contact with literacy organizations and therefore did not have immediate access to a population of literacy learners. Many adults with low literacy skills develop a number of strategies and coping mechanisms in order to conceal their challenges with reading and math. Indeed, those

with low literacy skills are often a secretive and hidden population with no obvious distinguishing factors or common associations or networks outside of literacy programs. Hidden populations are those whose "activities are clandestine and therefore concealed from the view of mainstream society and agencies of social control" (Watters & Biernacki, 1989, p. 417). Furthermore, this population is unable to read and thus the distribution of flyers or information pamphlets would not be useful in terms of accessing a sample of individuals to participate in the study. Often, socially invisible populations become more visible when they enter institutional settings (Watters & Biernacki, 1989, p. 417). In order to gain access to adults participating in literacy programs, I approached providers of literacy programs directly to communicate the opportunity to participate in the research. Given the difficulty of studying difficult-to-reach populations with established (and decidedly more rigorous) data collection methodologies, my approach relied on gatekeepers as a means of making contact with adult literacy learners. This did not occur without the loss of easy generalizability: convenience samples do present obvious limitations in that the representativeness of the sample is not guaranteed and sampling bias may be an issue. As Lambert (1990) contends, such research methods are appropriate for topics involving "hidden populations" and about which little is known, primarily because ethnography is by its nature exploratory. The research also helps to prepare the way for more rigorous studies that strive for precision and quantification.

After conducting research into the various organizations that provide adult literacy programs, I approached program coordinators (either "out of the blue" or through referrals from individuals in the field) at most delivery organizations in Toronto and Hamilton to solicit interest in the study. It was hoped that a broad cross-section of learners could be accessed in this way that would highlight the diversity of adult literacy learners. Referrals were made by contacts I

had established with individuals working in adult basic education with the government and the not-for-profit sector, and often allowed me to gain access to program staff who would have otherwise been difficult to establish contact with. One contact in particular opened up an excellent opportunity by extending an invitation to attend a meeting of practitioners from a variety of literacy providers. This allowed me to meet program staff face to face and discuss the research while gaining feedback and making new contacts. Many organizations, however, were already overburdened and politely declined participation while others simply did not return my calls and e-mails. Program staff often indicated that they were wary to get involved in a new project given their many time constraints. The funding shortfalls that often characterize service delivery in adult basic education were readily apparent and certainly contributed to the difficulty in obtaining support from literacy organizations. The low response rate was a limiting factor and may also have biased the research findings by producing an unrepresentative sample. For example, there were no learners interviewed from programs associated with the Ontario Native Literacy Coalition or the Public School Board.

Practitioners from only a few sites were willing to meet with me to discuss the distribution of the recruitment letter. It was agreed with the McMaster Research Ethics Board that I would solicit participation through a letter provided by the program staff to their literacy tutors and instructors. The tutors and instructors would be asked by program staff to review the information letter with their learners, explaining the purpose of the study and the nature of their involvement, as well as reassuring them of the confidentiality and voluntary nature of their participation and informing them of possible risks and benefits. Attached to the letter was a consent form that tutors and participants could fill in together, indicating whether or not the learner was willing to participate. The letter and consent form were to be returned in a sealed

envelope to program staff to ensure confidentiality, and were then forwarded on to me. This, it was felt, would eliminate any overt pressure on the learners to participate. Copies of the letter and consent form are included in the Appendices. The only qualification to participate was that learners had to have been part of the program for over a month and had to be over 18 years of age. The age limit was devised to avoid ethical concerns and consent through a third party.

Response rates within the participating organizations were very low. This may be due to the fact that the researcher was unable to make direct contact with potential participants to discuss the research in person. There was uncertainty about most participants' ability to read the letter. This meant the researcher had to trust that tutors and instructors spent the time necessary to review the research summary and the recruitment letter to explain the opportunity to participate. Having never met with most tutors and instructors, many of whom came in only a few hours a week on a volunteer basis to work with one or two learners, the researcher was unable to discuss the research with, and get a commitment directly from, the tutors and instructors themselves. This was likely a partial explanation for low response rates as the researcher was unable to gain confirmation that the letters even reached the learners in many cases. Another definite challenge in gaining willing participants was the obvious status difference between the researcher, a graduate student, and participants, who possessed very low literacy skills. The prospect of working with a University student may have seemed overwhelming and intimidating to participants. Struggling with a negative social stigma, it would perhaps be difficult for learners to trust the researcher and have the confidence necessary to share information of a personal and embarrassing or sensitive nature. If the learners had had the opportunity to meet with the researcher in advance of making a decision to participate, this may have lessened the perceived threat of the interview.

Six of the thirteen learners interviewed were members of a Student Council at a community-based literacy program (Program A). The students invited the researcher to attend one of their monthly meetings to discuss the project. The endorsement of this research project by members of the student council was critical to gaining access to participants. Upon hearing that they would be presented with a summary of the findings following the completion of the research, the students saw this as an opportunity to acquire valuable documentation to bring to their annual City Council visit in support of the literacy organization. One vocal and enthusiastic participant suggested that the interviews would be an excellent opportunity to give voice to their experiences and their unique situations proposing that they "would be heard" by others who might influence governments and funding opportunities. Members generally agreed that this was important in order to improve literacy learning opportunities for others. Gaining trust with this particularly vulnerable population, as well as the gatekeepers, was crucial and it was important that learners saw the benefits of participation from their own standpoint. It is important to note that, although some members of the student council were certainly 'star students' who became very involved in the literacy program, a number of those who joined the council did so often because of the pizza lunches that accompanied the meetings. Members of the student council had a variety of backgrounds and differed in the amount of time they had been involved with the literacy council and the level of skill they had acquired. Learners from Program A participated in a mix of classroom-based learning and one-on-one tutoring depending on their needs. Most had participated in both types of learning at one point or another over the course of their education. Learners typically spent 6-8 hours a week in the program and were required to take computer training as part of their studies.

Four additional learners participated from a second community-based literacy program, hereafter referred to as Program B, whose coordinator endorsed the study with his tutors. Learners from Program B were tutored one-on-one by volunteers and typically came one or two times a week for 2-4 hours. Computer training was not part of the curriculum. The researcher was asked to visit the centre during program hours and distributed the letters to the tutors in a separate meeting room. Learners were then presented with information about the study and the option to participate by their tutors. About half of those approached agreed to partake. It was also agreed, upon consultation with program staff and approval by the research ethics board, that learners could choose to have their tutors sit in on the interviews. Program staff suggested that this would provide security to participants given the close relationship that often develops between tutors and students. Though this option was presented to all research participants, only those at Program B engaged their tutors in the interviews in large part due to the recommendation of the Program Coordinator. Three of the four learners from Program B participated with their tutors who were volunteers with the literacy organization. In two of the three interviews, the tutors did not participate directly. One tutor did use probing questions with their learner and helped them remember examples of things they did and specific details such as how long they had been participating in the program. Though it may be argued that the tutor's participation may have biased participants' responses, in large part I feel as though it gave learners, who would otherwise not have participated in the study, the confidence to meet with me and answer my questions. In fact, all but one of the learners whose tutors were present during the interview spoke about their goal of gaining independence and acquiring specific skills and did not speak about significant changes in their sense of self or social roles.

Another three participants were interviewed from a school board community literacy program, hereafter called Program C. The instructor, hired by the school board, presented the research opportunity to his class and three students volunteered to participate. The instructor helped to coordinate the interviews which took place during the school day. These participants entered the literacy program with higher levels of literacy than those in Program A and Program B, and could often read basic text but had problems with math, spelling, and grammar. Learners participated in a classroom setting, rather than one-on-one tutoring, and followed a self-paced learning model where they worked independently through the course materials. The instructor was present to answer any questions about their work and to help them through any problems they encountered with the material. Learners in Program C dedicated more hours to learning each week than those in Program A and B, on average 25 hours, often committing half days or full days Monday to Friday. These learners received funding through Ontario Works while the majority of participants in programs A and B were part of the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) and often had no intention of returning to the workforce.

There was great variability in the educational backgrounds, skill levels, commitments, and learning environments amongst the learners interviewed. Some learners had completed high school, often being 'pushed through' or barely getting by, others finished up to grade 9 or 10 then dropped out, while some had very little education and had stopped going to school at a young age or attended reform schools or special schools for the disabled. One learner had never been to school. While these specific program affiliations and educational histories will be noted in some cases, particularly those in which the relationship appears to represent significant differences amongst learners, they will not be noted in others given the diversity among learners, even within the same program, and the importance of ascertaining participants' perception of the

learning experience regardless of skill level or the nature of their participation in a particular program. Skill sets, both desired and acquired, were diverse given the fact that learners entered the programs at different levels and exited with different abilities.

It is important to note that the intent and purpose of this research project is not to garner a statistically representative sample of adult literacy learners. The findings the data yield are not meant to be generalized to the population of adult literacy learners in Ontario or elsewhere. Rather, this research offers an initial qualitative exploration of learners' experience participating in literacy programs and seeks to explore what it means *to learners* to acquire a literate identity. Representativeness is not essential to this research project, which seeks to explore whether identity change may be a mechanism that helps explain the educational effect while taking into account the heterogeneous nature of literacy learners and the equally diverse nature of their experiences acquiring basic skills in adulthood. Duneier's (2011) notion of 'inconvenience sampling' is useful in 'truthfully' representing the results of this research by acknowledging the voices of those who do not appear in this study, including those who chose, for whatever reason, not to participate in the interviews, those in programs whose Coordinators did not approach them, as well as those who dropped out of literacy programs before having the opportunity to participate. Duneier conveys the importance of explaining to the reader "what other subjectivities or phenomena also existed in the field, and their implications for the findings that are presented" (p. 10). Though this research paints three different pathways by which participants come to participate that consequently are seen to shape their experiences within the literacy programs, these are certainly not exclusive categories into which all literacy learners' stories can be catalogued. Rather, the pathways are presented as organizing frameworks for the data collected, which by no means are intended to reflect the experiences of those outside the sample, in other

words the "inconvenient phenomena" (Duneier, 2011, p. 9), that undoubtedly introduces biases in this study. Learners who drop out of literacy programs before 'leveling up' may have had very different experiences that did not allow them to acquire an improved image of self and the independence, self-confidence and status that others spoke of. In fact, they may have engaged in resistance. Further research is needed to examine this population as an "implicit counterfactual" to those represented in the current study.

Nonrepresentative samples are useful in exploratory research, particularly when the study topic is novel, and can be valuable in gathering information to develop a typology. The information gathered can also be used in future research to assist in designing survey instruments and interview protocols. Indeed, this research yields information that could not be gathered in large probability studies, as is most often the case in the sociological study of deviance. The population for this study is inherently difficult to reach, but extremely worthy of study. This research demonstrates that this is an important topic for sociologists to pursue and that a focus on identity – and status passage theory in particular – is necessary for a full understanding of the significance of adult literacy. That being said, more time establishing relationships with key gatekeepers in hopes of yielding more participants, as well as pursuing research with other populations or in different provinces, would have improved the sample.

Interview Protocol

The interviews were semi-structured with several open-ended questions. Probes were designed to elicit further responses from participants. The questions were reviewed by program staff to ensure the language and phrasing were suitable for the learners as well as to confirm the style of the questions was appropriate. Additional probes related to individual experiences were added as

required. The purpose of this interviewing style was to yield as much in-depth information as possible from the participants about their lived experiences and daily lives. The ability to adjust the level of language and use unscheduled probes in this type of interview allows the researcher to "reflect an awareness that individuals understand the world in varying ways" (Berg, 2007, p. 95). Engaging some of the same parameters used in traditional studies of the education effect, learners were asked about changes they experienced in family life, political and social participation, personal values, leisure time use, psychological well-being, and physical health since they began acquiring improved literacy skills. Interview questions were based on research into the outcomes of adult and compulsory education more generally, discussions with program and government staff working in adult basic education, and literature produced by not-for-profit literacy coalitions and advocacy groups. The questions in the interview protocol were related to the learners' personal life experiences, in particular their experiences and the changes in themselves and their lives since participating in the literacy program. Interviews lasted from 25 to 55 minutes in length depending on the flow of the conversation and the extent of the responses. A copy of the interview protocol can be found in Appendix A

The interviews were held in the program office, a familiar and comfortable setting for participants, often following a class or tutoring session. A small room was made available by the program staff when interviews were scheduled. Once the participants arrived at the program office for the interview, the researcher used the first several minutes to build rapport and establish a level of comfort for the participants as well as to discuss the purpose and importance of the research. After initial introductions, the researcher read through the informed consent form with the participants in order to reduce any potential discomfort that the participants might have had surrounding their inability to read the document. In accordance with the McMaster Research

Ethics Board, the informed consent included a thorough description of the methods used to ensure the confidentiality of the participants. In addition, each learner was informed that his or her participation in the study was voluntary and that he or she could withdraw at any time or refuse to respond to any questions that were uncomfortable without any negative consequences. Each participant was also asked for permission to audiotape the interview and explained the reasons for doing so. The interviews were recorded in order to accurately obtain the participant's responses and allowed the researcher to focus instead on interpersonal communication and meaningful connection. All agreed to participate and all but two agreed to be audiotaped. Many emphasized that their names *could* be used in the report, explaining that they were not ashamed and felt others could learn from their experience.

The interviews began by asking participants to introduce themselves and tell the researcher whatever they wanted about themselves, including where they were from, some information about their families, their interests, and anything else they wished to share. Once participants had introduced themselves, the interview protocol was used as a guide to obtain descriptions of the learners' participation in the literacy program and explore how the program had influenced their thinking, feelings, and behaviour. Notes and impressions of the interview process were completed after each interview. The notes were used to enrich the data.

Description of the Sample

Participants ranged from 24-68 years old, with the median age being 41. Seven were men and six were women. All but three participants were born in Canada and all were fluent in English. Participants had attended literacy programs for varying lengths of time between 3 months and 8 years. Six learners had attended high school, though only two learners had

completed high school. Two learners had attended school for children with disabilities. Four learners had stopped school in elementary or were unable to identify the level they last completed in school. One learner had not attended school in his country of origin. Six participants received ODSP funding and three received OW. Two participants owned their own businesses. One learner worked a full time job, one a part-time job and another had just been laid off. One worked a few hours a week at a local mission and three worked odd jobs for the literacy program (such as fixing computers and working bingos). The remainder were unemployed. Five participants were married, three others had serious partners of several years, and five were single. Seven respondents had children.

Methodological Limitations

Each methodological approach presents certain limitations in the research process. As Waters and Biernacki (1989) note, qualitative data are "limited in the degree to which they enable generalizations about groups and contexts other than those studied" (p. 419). Indeed, by selecting a non-randomized sampling technique, the results may be subject to sampling bias and are not easily generalized to a larger population. The results of this study are, therefore, not representative of an 'average' learner population. Because respondents were volunteers there is an unavoidable risk that, as Gall et al. (1996) point out, the volunteer subjects could have some characteristics that would differentiate them from those in the target population. In order to reach a group that is often hidden and difficult to access without risk of serious ethical concerns, few other options were open to the researcher and all possible safeguards were made to eliminate as much bias as possible in the recruitment process. Because of the heterogeneity in the adult basic education population, a larger sample is required before any significant conclusions with

widespread applicability can be drawn from the results of this study. This is a finding consistent in much of the qualitative literature within adult basic education (Stromquist, 2009; Westell, 2005; Hilbrow, 2001). Limitations of the sample have been noted throughout this chapter where appropriate.

Other limitations surround the interview itself as a means of collecting data. Possible shortcomings include the fact that the data was gleaned from a single interview with participants rather than several interviews over time and direct observation of participants. The design may have influenced the authenticity of the respondents' answers as well as the propensity for them to say what they thought 'should be heard' rather than how they truly felt. Self-report data is critiqued for its potential bias given the possibility of cognitive illusion and the social desirability of responses, particularly when no baseline data is collected. As Stromquist (2009) notes, however, this bias "is much less likely to emerge when [participants] produce non-assisted responses as is the case in open-ended or in-depth interviews" (p. 3). The researcher did get the sense that, while some participants provided answers to particularly sensitive questions with relatively surface-level detail, they did provide answers that reflected their own views and experiences. Some interviews lasted just under thirty minutes which, by certain standards of qualitative research, may yield rather limited data. The short interviews, however, were of value because they reflected participants' instrumental view of literacy learning and generally indicated that these learners had not experienced the same outcomes as those who took on new roles and statuses as a result of their participation. Few responses appeared as though they were designed to impress or convey false information.

The research required participants to reflect upon the changes they had experienced as a result of participation in a literacy program rather than use a longitudinal design to assess these

changes over time. While this limits our knowledge of whether these effects were, in fact, a result of participation and whether they would persist in the longer term, learners claimed themselves that the literacy programs were the cause of these changes and had created long-term effects in their lives. The limitations of retrospective accounts are well known to researchers and this study would have been strengthened by including a longitudinal design to observe the changes in learners over time. However, as the viewpoint of the learners was stressed, participants' perceptions provided insight into the experience as it was understood by its subject which was important as the study aimed to capture participants' felt identity. In addition, a focus group was carried out with seven program coordinators from different literacy organizations to get their sense of the types of learners their programs served, the types of changes they witnessed in learners over the years, the types of learners who drop out of their programs, and the overall influence of program participation on learners. This helped to address some of the aforementioned shortcomings of the sample by providing a point of comparison to ensure support for the findings and conclusions of this study.

Analysis of the Data

The interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Each interview was read several times for the identification of major themes prior to establishing an analysis framework for the data. Initial codes were developed using an open coding method to identify various themes and categories (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The data were then interpreted using identity theory and previous research on literacy and the educational effect. Content analysis was used to identify the core meanings within the interviews. Similarities as well as individual differences were noted and key concepts were shaped into larger themes. This allowed for the identification of common

pathways to literacy programs that reflected outcomes related to status passage and identity change. Results were analyzed using an inductive iterative process, looking at both particular explanations and common themes and categories. The broad categories that cut across the interviews were, to some extent, determined by the questions asked. For example, respondents were asked about work, early schooling, and family. The analysis also looked for themes that emerged in the interviews that cut across categories, such as the value of education, literacy practices, and sense of self. The following chapter will demonstrate how the different strains of this research coalesce to highlight three different pathways that adults took to the literacy learning. Each pathway was comprised of a group of learners who expressed similar reasons for attending the program, conveyed similar self-concepts in relation to their illiterate status, and experienced similar changes in their sense of self, social roles, and behaviours. Acquiring a literate identity had differing effects for learners on each pathway.

CHAPTER FOUR: ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Introduction

This project addresses three main research questions:

1. How does the learner characterize his or her experience with literacy learning?
2. What effect does the acquisition of a literate identity have on the learner's sense of self, social roles, and behaviours?
3. What insights do these effects provide in terms of both the non-academic outcomes of adult education as well as how these outcomes manifest themselves more generally?

This chapter takes up each question by linking common themes from the interviews to two bodies of literature: that which examines the effects of education as well as that which explores identity change as an outcome of status passage. According to Hughes (2007): "changes in identity practices can be understood to be fundamentally linked with changes in the means by which people help reproduce the conditions (material, relational, financial, emotional, etc.) for and of a particular existence" (p. 674). Participants were asked in the interviews to speak to how they saw themselves and the changes they had experienced in their personal and social lives as a result of participation in literacy programs. This analysis begins with the adult literacy learners' accounts of their experiences and draws on symbolic interactionist perspectives to understand why adults pursue non-compulsory education later in life and the outcomes they experience as a result of participation in literacy programs.

Introducing identity change to the literature on the effects of adult education offers a twofold benefit. First, identity change can motivate adults' investments in education and, more so than earnings as instrumental models predict, reflects the actual experience of adult learners. Second, identity change may be a mechanism through which education has its effect on outcomes such as health, well-being and social participation. Such an approach accounts for the

varied effects of literacy education given adults' diverse goals and motives which impact their experience, and identities, differently.

The Experience of Literacy Learning

This section will present an analysis in two parts in order to address the first of three aforementioned questions "How does the learner characterize his or her experience with literacy learning?" The first will highlight learners' views of learning and schooling, both past and present, including the stigma of low literacy skills and experience of taking on the role of student within adult basic education. The second will underscore pathways to learning, including learners' decisions to participate, goals and motivating factors, as well as important turning points and outcomes they experienced. Overall, this section provides insight as to what it is like for adults to go back to school later in life and acquire improved reading, writing, and math skills.

Experiences with Schooling

Interviews were conducted to get a sense of participants' views of schooling, including their memories of childhood experiences with school as well as the experience of being an adult who possesses limited literacy skills. In a society that values knowledge and rewards credentials, low literacy levels often signal a spoiled identity, both externally from discrimination based on negative stereotypes and internally from negative self-concepts. Following Goffman's dramaturgical model, identity is something that is performed and achieved in social interaction with others, rather than something innate or essential. Identity change is an "embodied and profoundly social/relational process" (Hughes, 2007, p. 688). A person's identity can be

damaged or discredited at moments and in particular situations that, in many cases, have profound effects upon his or her sense of self.

Most participants did not report positive experiences with schooling. There were two main themes that emerged when learners were asked about their past experiences with school. Many spoke about the lack of support they received from teachers. They often felt they were "pushed through" grades despite knowing they had not met the necessary requirements. Others talked about the difficulties they had had being teased or judged by teachers or students for their poor academic performance. The following are a few excerpts from the interviews to illustrate the often negative memories of schooling that participants expressed:

> They didn't [think] of testing me [for dyslexia]. They didn't want to test me. They just pushed me around and I said, you know what, this is stupid, thank God I only had one year left […] they just shoved me right out the door. They didn't care. (Steve)

> Well basically you are in a class with 30 students, and ah, basically teachers don't have time for you. And sometimes you would be afraid to ask. Or for whatever reason, they might look at you a different way, you know. So, it was always kind of brushed off. (Avon)

> I didn't like [school]. All the kids made fun of me. Called me stupid and dumb. And the teachers were only pushing me through. They took me out of French. And mostly, they gave me a pass mark and were just pushing me through. I didn't like it. I really didn't. (Katherine)

For some, schooling was closely associated with difficult family and social situations in childhood:

> I was having trouble at home too. My stepfather was abusive. He was calling me stupid and dumb and was ripping my homework up. So it wasn't a good experience. (Katherine)

> My mom was sick at the time. And, well I have four other sisters too, it was like crowded and money was always tight and so I couldn't go to my dad and say like, oh, school was hard today, and stuff like that. (Yvonne)

> I skipped school because I didn't want people to pick on me. Now that I am older that kind of stuff doesn't bother me as much. But I hated school for a long time because of that. (Beth)

Recalling the experience evoked strong emotions for some. One participant, when discussing her experiences with school in her childhood, cried as she recounted dropping out at age 10 without telling her parents because she disliked it so much. Participants' memories of school were overwhelmingly negative and painful.

Participants often recounted situations where their sense of self was negatively influenced by their interactions with teachers and their peers. When speaking about attending a special program to help with her spelling and reading, one participant said:

> By then, I was like super shy in school and I wasn't open and stuff, so I thought that maybe if I got help a little younger I would have been okay. I probably would have opened up out of the shell and grasped it a little quicker. By the time I was done the program I was at my level, I was at a grade 8 level, but I didn't feel like my confidence was at that level. I would do the work and not believe it. […] I didn't feel like, oh, I can do that. I kind of flunked [high school]. (Yvonne)

Self-consciousness, according to labelling theory, arises within a conversation of gestures as individuals reflect on and interpret environmental stimuli as having some significance for conduct. This informs an individual's sense of self as it is continually developed, sustained, and transformed through social interaction. As one learner commented:

> I thought that I was normal, then I got labeled at a young age. Special Ed classes proved for me that I was an 'idiot' and a 'loser'. (Brent)

Participants in this study often perceived themselves as occupying a subordinate position in a society that increasingly values and rewards knowledge and academic credentials. Illiteracy was a stigma that differentiated them from others, discredited them in social interaction and, in many cases, resulted in a deviant identity. Most learners spoke of a sense of self that was socially constructed around deficiency. In this sense, learners' self-labelling reflected the internalization of normative values that stigmatize those who experience psychological or social difficulties with learning. Goffman (1963) uses the term "ego identity" to consider "what the

individual may feel about stigma and its management" (p. 106). The ego identity reflects the individual's subjective sense of a situation and his or her continuity and character as a result of social experiences. As Goffman (1963) notes: "failure or success at maintaining [identity] norms has a very direct effect on the psychological integrity of the individual" (p.128). Being 'illiterate' was a deviant identity that participants carried with them in many social interactions and relationships and often had negative effects on their sense of self. Learners spoke about feeling bad about themselves and having low self-esteem and poor self-confidence, being mistreated by others and missing out on various opportunities in their lives as a result of their illiteracy.

The importance of social context in the meaning of literacy became readily apparent with one learner in particular. This learner, who had never attended school and could not read, did not possess a deviant self-concept nor did he see his illiteracy as deviant. Where he grew up, education and literacy were not intimately bound up in purpose, productivity and personhood. His immigrant status provided him with a very different cultural frame of reference as he was not educated and did not expect to be educated. Rather, his sense of self, as he described it, was derived largely from his professional status as a salesman. He had not experienced stigmatization in interaction as a result of his illiteracy nor was his sense of self derived from his inability to read and write. For this learner, literacy was a privilege, something he had never required, rather than a necessary or normal attribute that signalled a more desirable social status. As such, his inability to read and write did not have a negative effect upon his sense of self. His experience participating in the program allowed him independence and opened up job opportunities in Canada more than it altered his sense of self in any significant way. This aligned with comments that were made by program staff during the focus group. One participant commented:

> I just kind of noticed, you know, that the other profile is someone who has never an opportunity for an education. And they come in, that is totally different, and they are

> excited, and its free and all the rest of it. And they are like, uh, you know, children on the first day of school. We don't get as many of those, but, when they come in, they are full of excitement and it's wonderful.
>
> (Interviewer): Would they have some of the similar issues, you talked about self-esteem issues, would you see the same thing?
>
> No, I haven't seen that. Because their education was denied to them. So it's a matter of "now I am able to come get an education".

Managing and Transforming a Deviant Identity

For the majority of learners, the experience of illiteracy led participants to alter their behaviours in specific ways. Covering, according to Goffman (1963), is a technique whereby the individual restricts the display of his or her failings most closely associated with the stigma in order to sustain regular social interaction and consequently one's personal identity. Participants spoke of ordering what others ordered from a restaurant menu, avoiding speaking to government officials and professionals where possible, and having someone else fill in paperwork on their behalf. One participant was very adamant that I not use her name in the interviews, as she feared that her friends who were teachers or who had been educated would find out that it was her. Nobody but her husband knew that she was participating in the program. Another learner had kept his participation completely hidden from everyone in his life, including his friends, his wife and his children. When asked why, he said "I guess I am a little embarrassed about it. I don't talk about it" (Avon). The engagement of stigma management techniques is evidence of learners' awareness of their deviation from normative expectations and their desire to maintain a sense of normalcy in social interaction. This may also help to explain why learners were reluctant to be interviewed and most turned down the opportunity to participate in the research, likely for fear of being found out but also to sustain a non-deviant identity. This accounts for the difficulty of

accessing and researching the population of adult literacy learners and raises important considerations for future research.

One interview question, aimed at uncovering participants' self-image before taking part in the literacy program, asked learners to describe themselves prior to participating. Six of thirteen learners used the words "shy" or "quiet" to describe themselves and mentioned that they avoided talking to others and often had low self-confidence. Five participants suggested that they were "loners" or had no social life. One learner described himself without hesitation: "Uh, loner. Quiet. Distant. Uh, not talkative." (Steve). Another learner answered the question as follows:

> I felt really bad about myself. I thought no one would want me. I thought I was stupid because I kept being called that. I felt really bad for myself. And I was really shy around people because of that too. (Katherine)

A few learners commented on their limited roles and identities. For these learners, their past 'illiterate' selves were not whole or complete and were limited by the roles that they were able to take on and the statuses they were able to fulfill. A learner spoke about how her embarrassment limited who she was and how she expressed herself and interacted with others:

> Um, quiet. Not really asking questions, scared to be embarrassed cause like this stuff we are doing, kids are doing it, we should know this stuff already. Part of it was being embarrassed. (Beth)

Another learner mentioned that she cried a lot. When asked why, she said: "Because I was hurt. Because I didn't know. I couldn't read." (Norma). Participants' personal characterizations speak to the social isolation many experienced as a result of their stigmatization. Often, participants' response was to withdraw. Learners avoided social contact with others who might identify their deviance or call their lack of skills and perceived failings to the attention of others.

As noted in chapter two, Glaser and Strauss (1971) use the term 'self-evidentiality' to refer to the degree to which a person possessing certain objective status characteristics is aware that a particular status label applies to them. In reviewing the work of Glaser and Strauss, Degher

and Hughes (1991) point out that "since recognition occurs in response to status cues, the self-evidentiality of a status will influence the type of cues which play the most prominent role in identity change" (p. 385). The authors, in examining the transition of fat to thin identities, were interested in identity shift; in other words, how individuals "come to make some personal sense out of proffered labels and their attendant identities" (Ibid., p. 386). Public statuses, according to Degher and Hughes (1991), are socially defined and promoted and contain information about the applicability of the status for the individual (p. 391). Consistent with Goffman's (1963) work, the authors suggest that negative external stereotypes often lead to poor self-concept and low self-esteem. Identity change occurs in response to, and is mediated by, the status cues. These different status cues have implications for how individuals come to participate in literacy programs and serve to highlight the importance of examining pathways to learning and the process of self-change to understand the educational effect, particularly as it concerns adult learners. Learning does not happen in isolation from one's life, and the motivation for participation influences one's reasons for attending a program as much as it influences their experience and the outcomes they identify.

For some, their decision to participate in the literacy program was connected to a desire to attain a more acceptable social status or an improved image of self through the acquisition of literacy skills. In fact, learning to read and write often figured secondarily in these learners' descriptions of the outcomes of participation. Learners' accounts suggest the importance of status cues in identity transformation and the effects of status passage upon their image of self and felt identity. Acquiring a literate identity opened up a world that was previously unavailable to participants, allowing them to overcome their sense of exclusion from participation in the 'normal' world. Interactionists have theorized several types of identity change. Slight changes

(Bankston et al. 1981; Glanz and Harrison, 1978) have been shown to occur within a particular career and do not require career movement or status passage. Anderson (1993) cites Travisano's (1970) work in which he distinguished between what he called 'alternations' and 'conversions'. 'Alternations' could occur with or without status change whereas 'conversions' were more dramatic and followed noticeable status passages. Importantly, conversions included new meaning systems and discourses, a change in allegiance to authorities and a negation of former identities.

This characterization of identity change is useful in understanding the different experiences of adult learners. While for some the experience was wholly transformative and led to feelings of 'being in the world' differently as changed individuals, for others it represented an opportunity to acquire new skills and obtain more personal freedoms. These types of identity change reflect the different goals that learners describe in their reasons for attending the literacy programs. Some wished to undergo a significant status change and transform their identity or acquire a more acceptable image of self, while others wished to improve their skills and undergo slight changes that enhanced their independence. Participation, therefore, had differing outcomes for learners by allowing them to fulfill socially desirable roles, by gaining a more positive self-concept, or by providing the knowledge and skill to independently accomplish specific tasks.

Pathways to Learning

Three distinct pathways became apparent in learners' reasons for signing up for, and participating in, the literacy programs. While each learner had unique reasons for attending a literacy program, there were distinct commonalities in the pathways that led participants back to school that reflected common goals and motivations for participation as well as similar

outcomes. These pathways were not connected, for the most part, with learners' skill levels, time spent learning, or the nature of involvement in the programs. For some learners, the experience meant fulfilling a desirable social role and was perceived as a necessary, and almost inevitable, step in their lives. A smaller group connected the experience with overcoming challenges they had faced and improving their felt identity (or self-concept) by proving that they were capable and worthy individuals despite these challenges. For the final group, the experience was a means of acquiring essential skills and was viewed in relation to performing specific tasks and gaining independence. All learners, despite these different pathways, acknowledged the opportunities that had opened for them as a result of the experience. This section will examine learners' sense of their pathways to learning and their progress within the programs in order to highlight the significance of identity in relation to the educational effect.

Learners offered personal descriptions of themselves that were closely connected to their identified pathways. One young mother said "I had no friends until I started coming to school here, no social life. I was really just mom before" (Yvonne). This learner, who saw herself as "just mom", was focused on the experience as a type of role fulfillment, as suggested by her identified pathway. Another, who had spent time in jail and on the streets, said that he was a "bad guy" and "not a full human" before he learned how to read. This learner focused on the experience as personal betterment which is reflected in his description of himself and his felt identity. A third, who came to the program to acquire skills so that she could gain independence, described herself as follows: "I hated writing, but I didn't want to wait for people to do things for me" (Wendy). This learner provided a skill-based description of herself that reflected her instrumental approach to learning. The following three sections will explore the pathways to

learning, the outcomes that learners described and the effects of participation on learners' experience of self.

Pathway One: Role Fulfillment and Status Passage

The first pathway was comprised of learners from Programs B and C who expressed reasons for participation that indicated a strong desire for role fulfillment. Often, the learner's decision to participate was characterized as a necessity: an inevitable step in life that they simply needed to take. It was difficult for these learners to identify a specific reason for participation or a particular event that led them to the decision to come back to school. Often these learners spoke about acquiring the skills to read and write in a way that placed great value on education more generally and conveyed literacy skills as competencies that represented a natural and necessary progression towards desired outcomes and opportunities in their lives. Completing their basic education was inevitable for these learners: a step along life's pathway and an essential component of an acceptable social status. Often, learners felt that it was just something they 'needed to do':

> I decided it was time. Time for me to read and write. It was just time […] I have two nieces now and I can't make any more excuses now (Justin)

Another learner commented:

> I need this to happen. And I can't screw up in any way. This is something that has to happen. If I want my life to go anywhere, this is the path that I have to take. (Beth)

Participation was often associated with fulfilling the role of 'adult' and having the opportunity to acquire an improved social status. A young mother commented:

> I hope that a lot more young teenage parents, after coming into the transition into the adult phase, know that there are places like this out there. That you don't always have to stay in that teenage mode and think that McDonald's is our job for life. No, we can become just like somebody who didn't have those kids and finish college and university.

> And that is what this program makes me feel like. Like there is more for us adults out there. (Yvonne)

The experience allowed learners to fulfill normative expectations in their roles as mothers, fathers, aunts and uncles. For example, one learner said:

> It is just something you have to do if you've got kids. […] They are going to be a reflection of you some day. If you are shit, guess what, your kid is going to be shit. If you are a good person, chances are your kid is going to be. And that is what I want for them. (Beth)

Another commented:

> My nieces are the reason why I decided to come to the literacy program. So I could actually read them books and so they understand that it is not good not to know how to read. (Steve)

These learners expressed their desire to ensure their lives were not limited by their lack of education, nor the lives of their children or family members. They aspired to achieve a more desirable social status.

As symbolic interactionists have posited, identity is subjectively constructed on the basis of our perception of the reactions of others. Active or passive status cues both trigger and mediate the change process. An active cue is transmitted through interaction, such as when another student or a parent tells a learner that they are stupid or incompetent or when they get sent to a 'special' school. Passive cues exist in the environment and must be sought out by the individual who becomes sensitized to them. In this case, learners often felt they were being 'passed' through grades without having acquired the necessary knowledge and skills, they sensed that teachers or supervisors got frustrated if they did not understand something quickly, or that people treated them differently when they found out they could not read well. According to Degher and Hughes (1991), the "social environment not only contains definitions and attendant stereotypes for each status, it also contains information, in the form of status cues, about the applicability of that status for the individual" (p. 391).

The first step, recognizing, represents the process wherein the individual recognizes that the current status is inappropriate. The second, placing, occurs when the individual locates a new, more appropriate status. In this case, participants were sensitized to cues over time that caused them to recognize that their current status, as 'illiterate', was insufficient and located a more desirable and socially appropriate 'literate' status. Often, attaining a particular status is equally as important as gaining a more 'acceptable' image of self by getting rid of the stigma associated with one's current status. As symbolic interactionists have posited, we aim to see ourselves through the vantage point of others, such that social roles provide an organizing framework for our behaviour. Degher and Hughes are careful to note, however, that there is but a "tenuous connection between objective condition and subjective definition" (Ibid., p. 394). Participants' accounts of their pathways to adult literacy programs are distinctive in that they represent their own unique conceptions of their lives and their sense of self, but so too do they reflect the shared stereotypes and stigma attributed to those with low literacy skills as well as social expectations of those who have reached 'adulthood' with all its implied roles and responsibilities.

Adults return to school at many different points in their lives, and learners on this pathway often cited role obligations, rather than a particular turning point, as their reasons for attending. Status cues were conveyed over time and were often reflected through personal relationships as learners spoke about their children, their nieces and nephews, or partners. Social dislocation and disruption of group membership can bring identity to the fore. As Burke and Stets (2009) note, self-esteem is a "direct outcome of the successful verification of an identity" (p. 80). Self-esteem provides a major motivational link between the person and the social order: it is by manifesting valued qualities that the person is able to favourably imagine his or her own

appearance in the eyes of the other. Social dislocation, conveyed through status cues, can provide the impetus to acquire a literate identity that aligns more closely with an individual's role performance as parent, partner or community member. Thus a marginalized identity such as 'illiterate' may be one which learners wish to transcend in order to adopt self-concepts more congruent with their social roles. For example, literacy meant being a better parent, ending an abusive relationship, or becoming part of one's community. Participants felt that their lives would not progress towards fulfillment without adequate literacy skills: "this is the first step, to the second step, to the rest of my life" (Beth). Learning to read and write was necessary to be 'successful' and become 'something'.

Participants on this pathway did not characterize the learning as a means to a specific, calculated, and predictable end, such as getting a better job or earning more money, but rather as a means of superseding the inferior and inappropriate status of low literacy. Glaser and Strauss (1971) argue that identity transformation is often an outcome of exiting a deviant career. As individuals dispossess themselves of a particular status, structural and personal conditions serve to legitimate transitions and trigger changes in identity (Glaser and Strauss, 1971, p. 30). Cues, such as getting off social assistance, higher levels of educational attainment, or confidence in dealing with officials and professionals, were important in participants' status passages. In this sense, learners saw the experience as a natural progression in their lives that would allow them the opportunity to adequately fulfill their role as parents, adults or citizens, therefore achieving an identity in line with a more favourable status.

Attaining this new status opened doors for participants and was highly desirable and provided the motivation for action. As Glaser and Strauss (1971) note, the desirability of the status passage is influenced by the social integration of the passagee and the social circumstances

that surround the passage (p. 94). In this case, those who identified the role-fulfillment pathway had family members that supported them, who they discussed in relation to the experience more often than any other group of learners. These relationships often helped to reinforce the view that literate was a desirable and more acceptable status. Relationships that were not supportive often failed to persist. One learner spoke about the troubles she experienced with her fiancé because she felt he was jealous of her and did not like the fact that she now had an active social life rather than staying at home. Learners often expressed personal goals that aligned strongly with socially desirable statuses, such as attaining further educational credentials, getting off social assistance, or moving out of 'bad' neighbourhoods. These participants readily acknowledged the stigma associated with low literacy skills as well as the resulting limitations they experienced in their lives as a result. This provided the basis of their motivation to shed their deviant identities and effectively begin their passage towards a more socially acceptable status.

Learners commented on the changes that others had noticed in them, often confirming their own personal sense of change. Most comments relayed were not directly related to skills learned, but rather to differences in who they were and the nature of their social engagement with others. For example, one learner said:

> We are talking now. Me and my sisters. Me and my children. About me. And I feel like that changed a lot. I feel like I wasn't open to talk about me before and I didn't, not like care, but it was not my first priority, me. It was more like about the kids, it was always about the kids. And now, even having you sitting here asking me questions about me. It is making me like, okay, you know. Also helping me to find myself. (Yvonne)

The identity change was reflected in her relationship with important people in her life and was significant because it had allowed her to feel a renewed sense of self beyond motherhood. This served to confirm her new literate status.

Pathway Two: Personal Betterment and Felt Identity

A second common pathway was identified and was comprised of three learners whose reasons for participation were more ethereal. These learners wished to become 'better' people and pursued very personal objectives; they desired self-improvement and self-validation. It is important to note that learners that identified this particular pathway were those from Programs A and B who possessed lower skill levels. One learner made the following remark about his participation:

> I was in jail, I stole, was on welfare, lived on the streets […] but I wanted to learn to read and write and see if I could do it straight. See if I had the guts to go to school, to learn, and do it all right. So I came back to Canada and I started all over. (Brent)

A young learner noted: "I wanted to better myself, so I came here to read and spell and now I am better than I used to be" (Roger). Learning to read and write represented a remarkable change in learners' lives and often allowed them to overcome the negative evaluations of others to achieve a more coherent self-image. Commenting on why the experience was significant to him, the same learner said:

> I wanted to do it because people thought I couldn't do it […] Like, if people judge me and say you can't do this and you can't do that, I say I'll show you I can do that and I will prove it to you. They judge me and they try to put me down but I won't let them. (Roger)

These learners were able to prove to themselves that, despite difficulties they had had with learning and the stigma they had faced, they were able to achieve a more acceptable image of self through participation in a literacy program. Hewitt suggests that self-image and self-esteem are "not simply the products of particular situations but also of a continual process of reflection in which the person decides what standards and what others are significant" (1994, p. 124). The experience allowed them to prove to themselves and others that, despite their differences, they were not bad or failed people. Another learner, when asked why she came to the literacy program, said:

> I was looking for something that could deal with my situation. I'm dyslexic. And, um, there was a lot of things behind that that I didn't really know […] and it took a lot of time but they figured out how to deal with my situation. Different from everybody else's. (Norma)

Two learners in this group started their own small businesses and another became an active volunteer in a community-based organization. These activities were significant sources of pride for these learners and likely helped to reinforce their improved images of self. Involvement in new activities allowed learners to adopt new behaviours and develop new relationships that confirmed the acquisition of a new, literate, identity and consequently a non-deviant sense of self.

Degher and Hughes (1991) developed an identity change model, based in principles of status passage, that relates changes in image of self and felt identity to external status cues. More specifically, they examined the relevance of external status cues in explaining the mechanistic features of identity change. Of particular importance in their model is the role of behaviour as an indicator of identity transformation stemming from the desire for an acceptable image of self. The confidence participants gained from learning new skills was a key factor in enabling them to overcome limitations they had previously faced in their lives. Their reasons for participation dealt less with social role fulfillment than with proving they were capable of learning which enabled them to develop a coherent self-image.

Further to Degher and Hughes' (1991) study of identity transformation, Kiecolt (1994) suggests that stressors (e.g., life events, chronic role strains) act as an initial impetus for self-change by generating unfavourable reflected appraisals, unfavourable social comparisons, and/or lowered self-perceived competence, which in turn may act to reduce one's self-efficacy, self-esteem, and/or sense of authenticity and cause psychological distress. She contends that these impetuses alone are not sufficient, however, for making a decision to change oneself. Rather,

several ''conditioning factors'' must also be considered, including the identity-relevance of the stressor, a sense of personal responsibility for the stressor, awareness of structural supports for change and whether the perceived benefits of changing are worth the cost. Labeling efforts, both by self and others, may serve as a means by which unfavorable appraisals, comparisons and/or turning points are generated. Learners on this pathway felt marginalized because of their poor literacy skills and this was often strongly connected to learners' sense of self. Often, illiteracy was perceived of as a personal failing for which participants carried a great sense of responsibility. Leaners easily discussed many situations in which they had been labelled or had suffered because of their illiteracy. On learner said:

> Reading is a right and a privilege and we were denied this. Kids' lives are destroyed with illiteracy. Especially in the information age. It is a form of degradation. The opportunity for these kids to be anything is taken away from them […] If I had known how to read I would have done more. I would have been unbelievably successful. Look at all I've done anyway. (Brent)

Awareness of structural supports for change often precipitated learners' decision to change. These learners often spoke of finding out about the programs, and how they came to participate, in great detail.

For learners on the personal fulfillment pathway, the experience in the classroom provided them with the necessary resources to succeed elsewhere, not only because they learned how to read and write but because they overcame the negative self-images they had developed as a result of their perceived failures both in school and consequently elsewhere in their lives. Dissatisfaction with one's present identity often results from socially disjunctive experiences that cause stress and feelings of alienation. New relationships and opportunities in their lives signalled learners' movement into a different part of the 'normal and literate' social structure and an enhanced sense of personal power as a result of their accomplishments which resulted in a changed identity and sense of self as well as changed behaviour (Glaser and Strauss, 1971). One

learner, when asked if she experienced changes in feelings of self-esteem and unhappiness responded:

> It is a "deal with it" kind of thing. My favorite saying. Uh, you know, I used to be very depressed. I wanted to die all the time. And I said well if God isn't going to take me a normal way then I guess he doesn't want me. So I guess I am going to stay here. So I dealt with it. (Norma)

While learners' poor reading and writing skills might initially be seen as the necessary site for change, it was ultimately their sense of self that changed because so much of their sense of self was wrapped up in these unfavourable reflected appraisals that threatened competent identity performance and lower self-esteem.

When learners were asked about the experience, their identity change and renewed self-confidence were often central to their accounts, rather than the types or levels of literacy skills they had gained. Often, it was these types of benefits that kept them coming back despite the hard work they had to put in. Studies in adult education have shown that cognitive expectations dominate initially, but they become less prominent as outcomes over time and are similar in ranking to personal and social outcomes after participating in a program (Westell, 2005). With this group in particular, we can see that "what" was learned, though important, was less significant over time than the fact that it was learned. When asked about her learning goals, a learner said:

> I guess they called me the motivator of the school. I felt like a motivator. [Interviewer: Can you tell me more about that?] Some people come and they don't know what is going to happen and they are very afraid. But when I came here and started doing all this stuff, I started trying to push other people. If I could do it, I couldn't read, if you can read a little bit, you can do it. And I said don't worry about anybody. Forget about anybody. Nobody else is important except yourself. (Norma)

Self-confidence was the most commonly cited outcome amongst learners on this particular pathway. Learning to read and write meant not only the acquisition of valuable skills but also that these learners could absolve themselves of some of the blame for the illiteracy that was often

seen as a source of personal failing. For example, one learner found out with the help of program staff that if she used yellow paper she could manage her dyslexia.

Learning to read and write meant prevailing over the stigma and marginalization they had faced in their lives as a result of their difficulties with learning. Learners were able to overcome poor self-concepts by proving to themselves and others they learned differently, not deviantly. Participants gained the confidence to build new ties to the community and new social networks. One learner became involved in a program for street youth, another volunteered with a community radio station and sat on a municipal literacy council and the third opened a community-based thrift shop. Identity change, for these learners, meant an improved self-concept, or felt identity, and their experiences were reflected in accounts of personal change.

Pathway Three: Instrumental Learning and Independence

The third pathway, made up of a mixed group of five individuals from each of the programs of varying skill levels and educational backgrounds, viewed the experience much more instrumentally and chose to participate in order to fill a gap in their knowledge base. Often, this was expressed as a desire for independence in daily tasks such as texting, e-mailing, reading menus, getting around the city, filling in forms or even getting a job. These learners cited specific reasons for attending the programs that related to desired improvements in math, spelling or reading. As one learner, who spoke strictly about skills and shared very little personal information about himself, commented:

> I knew I needed help with certain things that I always got stuck on, that I didn't know how it worked. The rules of the English language. I always had questions about what were the rules to it. And I just needed help […] and finally I said I am going to take care of this. (Avon)

Others talked about a desire for independence and wished to acquire the ability to accomplish day-to-day tasks on their own. Speaking about having to rely on her husband to read things to her, one learner, when asked to describe herself, said: "I wanted to learn to read and write; I hated writing, now I like it" (Wendy). Another learner attended the program because he wanted to learn how to read *The Bible*. The learners in this group often cited specific reasons for attending and, unlike the role fulfillment and personal fulfillment pathways, could easily explain their motivation and specific reasons for participation. One learner who had been laid off right before retirement commented:

> I decided to come back, get some education, and my goal is to get further education. It has been over 40 years since I have been in school. After I [got laid off] work, I got an assessment done and found out that I had forgot an awful lot of stuff […] and my age being what it is, it is also a great exercise to keep my mind sharp. (Bill)

For one learner in particular, it was the first opportunity he had had to acquire any kind of education. Learners is this group entered the programs with varying levels of skill: some had achieved a high school diploma while the aforementioned learner had never attended school.

Learning, for this group, was the means to a very specific end. The acquisition of new skills and knowledge meant being able to accomplish tasks they had not previously been able to and opened up a world of information and independence. These learners often spoke of their goals and accomplishments in an instrumental fashion. Though these learners were asked the same question as the learners mentioned previously as to how they would describe themselves before they participated in the program, the learners who identified the instrumental skills pathway focused primarily on the experience of coming to the program for the first time rather than provide personal descriptions of themselves or their lives before attending the program. For example, one learner, when asked how he had changed as a result of the experience, noted very directly:

> I go into restaurants, right. And someone gives me a menu right. And I didn't know how to read what I wanted to order. And now I can read the menu. (Charles)

Participants' responses suggest that their sense of self was not tied up in their reasons for attending the program nor did it surface in their explanations of the outcomes they had experienced as a result of participation. Their illiterate identity was less salient as they claimed they were, first and foremost, parents, spouses, workers and community members. These learners held self-concepts that were congruent with these more salient roles. Participation in the programs meant that they could go about their daily lives with greater facility and ease, but the experience had not altered the roles that they performed or their sense of self. When asked about his experience with the program, a learner said:

> It makes me feel good. Like I can do it myself and I am not depending on anybody, not even my wife. Before I was depending on her. Like even when I went to the bank to open my account, I was depending on [my wife]. But now I don't need her help. Because this is the thing, I can go to the bank and fill in a form. (Nazr).

The learners on the third pathway were the least likely to experience changes that affected the relationships in their lives and their felt identity. In contrast, learners who were looking to fulfill particular social roles or enhance their image of self expressed a greater sense of personal and social transformation as a result of acquiring a literate identity.

Compared to the other groups, this third pathway was comprised of individuals who focused specifically on the skills they wished to acquire, and the process of learning them, and did not connect the learning to anything beyond the completion of specific tasks when responding to the interview questions. Although they often strove for independence in daily tasks, these learners did not speak of role or personal fulfillment as motivation for, or outcomes of, learning. This differs significantly from the first two pathways. For example, one participant on the first pathway who spoke of role fulfillment mentioned: "Even a lot of this stuff, like when are we going to use it in our lives? We're not. But you still need to learn this stuff. It is part of

education" (Beth). This comment provides a sharp contrast to those on this third pathway who viewed learning instrumentally in association with the completion of specific, purposeful tasks, rather than as a more general process of 'being educated' as a means of personal and social growth or fulfillment.

One distinct difference between the characteristics of learners on the third pathway and those on the previous two pathways is that these learners were more likely to be married and/or employed. Four of the five learners were married and all five learners were employed, or had been employed before retiring. Of the learners on the other pathways, one was married and one was in a common-law relationship, two were self-employed and none of the other learners had employment outside of the work they did for the literacy organizations (such as teaching a computer class and working bingos). Only one of the learners in the instrumental pathway collected Ontario Works while all but one of those in the other categories did. This, more so than skill level or program involvement, set these learners apart.

Because their sense of self was derived principally from other identities, these participants experienced a more 'gradual' or 'incremental' identity change that had less impact on their sense of self and personal and social wellbeing. They tended to view the experience as an opportunity to acquire new knowledge and skills rather than view it as an opportunity for personal change and growth. Much less of their sense of self and their identities were tied up in their participation. These learners commented less on personal insecurities and transformations when asked about how they would describe themselves before attending the program and instead emphasized their feelings of nervousness towards attending the program. Many were unsure about performing the role of student. For example, one learner responded:

> I came here, I was a little nervous, I was not sure how it was going to be. And the tutor, I didn't know. And when I met up with the tutors, this made me so much more comfortable

> because they were so nice. And uh, they are so helpful, there are just a lot of positive things. I was walking into an environment I didn't know. (Avon)

This might help to explain why those whose identity was to a greater extent derived from a deviant 'illiterate' status experienced greater transformation than those who possessed other primary identities such as spouse, worker, or community member. The illiterate identity was less salient for these participants and they were more focused on taking on the role of student that they had failed at in the past. These learners were more focused on succeeding as students than transforming their deviant illiterate status or identity. The meaning of the experience, therefore, was much more instrumental in nature and more easily separated from other aspects of their selves and lives.

As symbolic interactionists have posited, identity is constructed on the basis of our perception of the reactions of others as much as it is a subjective definition of self. Vryan, Adler and Adler (2003) note:

> Our definition of self and others are rooted in positions within socially structured relations and culturally defined role expectations that precede us and are to some extent beyond our control. As we hold certain positions within structured relations, these social placements constrain the ways that we see ourselves and others and function to impose limits on our behaviour (p. 380).

Our personal histories and identities are not merely a set of objective facts, however, and must be "dynamically constructed, enacted, and interpreted" (Vryan, Adler and Adler, 2003, p. 379) by ourselves and others. Identities, as Mead suggested, simultaneously create and are created by social contexts. Structured social relations influence identity as well as individuals' and others' expectations and interpretations of behaviour. Interaction conveys information about social roles which in turn influences an individual's identities and behaviours. These social roles, identities and behaviours contribute to our lasting and more continuous sense of self. This serves to highlight the social meanings associated with low literacy and its different effects upon

individuals in terms of their motivation to participate in adult basic education and the resulting outcomes of participation. Compared to the previous two pathways, participants on the instrumental pathway noted specifically that they were the same people fulfilling the same roles as before, but had acquired improved skills that had enhanced their quality of life. As one learner described himself before participation: "Bout the same, but I couldn't read" (Charles). Though these learners had still experienced stigma and recognized the value of acquiring literacy skills, they possessed stronger identity resources than other groups and their motivations for attending stemmed less from marginalization and a desire for change and more from a functional need for independence.

Adult Basic Education and the Educational Effect

Social Roles and Relationships in Identity Change

For all learners, relationships with program staff were particularly important in transitioning towards a successful learning experience. Every participant mentioned the staff very positively as being either kind, helpful, or supportive. One participant spoke of a negative experience with program staff and his resulting frustration that led him to walk away from the program for several years before finally coming back. Learners required supportive environments that reflected positive images of the self, particularly given the stigma that they had experienced as a result of their low literacy skills. Participants needed to feel like capable learners; able to accomplish the tasks required of them in the classroom and needed the confidence to apply these skills in their day to day lives. Though the literacy organizations that participants were in touch with were not focused on identity change and the re-construction of identities, they undoubtedly played a role in influencing participants in this regard, particularly in

terms of providing the structure and definition of the new status of 'literate'. As one instructor noted:

> I just met with someone a week ago, and I tell them, I says "it is going to be a change", and I always ask them "are you ready? Are you ready for this journey?" And I say "cause it is going to change your life, cause even if you don't think of it right now, it is going to change your life". Especially if you are in with a crowd, your social network is going to change because you are going to say well, I don't need them anymore. Because they are not in my realm anymore, I am going to be with this different group. So hang onto your hat when you get into this program.

Another said:

> I think the instructors are key to the success of the client. The stronger the life skills background of the instructor, the more successful they are with them. That is quite evident. And that, I think, is where the ministries are starting to refocus on recognizing the value of life skills.

There were several cases in which participants used common phrases, such as "coming out of one's shell' or "opening up", to characterize their experience despite participating in different literacy programs. The same vocabulary was used in discussions with practitioners during the focus group. This suggests that a common vocabulary was provided by practitioners in the field as a resource for learners to conceptualize their experience. The contexts within which literacy is acquired also undoubtedly play a role in socialization as well. A focus group participant commented on changes she had witnessed in learners:

> They also do a lot of unlearning. Things that, and that, when they come into the program, sometimes there are a lot of prejudices. You know, just kind of their values start shifting. I've noticed quite a bit of that kind of thing.

More research is required to explore how provincial funding frameworks and local delivery organizations provide a symbolic framework through which learners undergo identity change and status passage. It is within such organizational contexts that the literate identity and role is acquired and reinforced through a regularized and prescribed passage. Learners are exposed to an

established curriculum and tested at regular intervals to 'level-up' as they acquire more proficient literacy skills.

The literature has shown that identity transformation organizations are contexts that promote identity conversion through differential reconstruction (Anderson, 1993, p. 135-136). Participation in programs with other literacy learners helped to normalize the struggles they often faced as a result of their illiteracy and tutors and instructors helped learners to differentially reconstruct their personal biographies. As one learner put it "I was told two things: the school system failed you and there are millions of Canadians who can't read. Nothing in my life ever hit me so nice. I was the happiest in my life. I wasn't the only one" (Brent). Some learners expressed awareness of the structural factors that influenced their lives such as the school system, abusive parenting, and poverty. One learner said:

> My mom was sick at the time. And, well I have four other sisters too, it was like crowded and money was tight and so I couldn't go to my dad and say like, oh, school was hard today, and stuff like that.

Identity reconstruction was evident as learners became more confident in their participation and their skills as they progressed through the programs. Where they may have kept their participation secret initially, they often became advocates for the program, telling their families and friends and recommending people for participation who they thought could benefit like they had. Nine of 13 participants said they recommended the program to friends, family, and neighbours. Those who had attended programs for longer generally expressed more confidence in their comportment, their interpersonal interactions and their answers during the interviews. This finding was supported by the discussion in the Focus Group. As one instructor commented:

> As they go through programs, then become proud to identify themselves as a literacy learner. Where they are coming in and they are potentially ashamed or embarrassed, maybe not sharing that information with family or friends, to that kind of transformation to say, this is part of my identity now. And that's encouraging.

What was once an embarrassment in many cases becomes a mark of pride, transforming failure into accomplishment.

Participants were given the opportunity to integrate themselves into the literate world. Learners on the first two pathways expressed a sense of almost revolutionary change, often redefining their status and sense of self and, like others who experience a status passage, "acquiring power that had previously been unavailable to them" (Rubin, Shmilovitz and Weiss, 1993, p. 4). As one learner said:

> I found my family. Uh, I found a new life for myself. I am a stronger person now. Even my sisters say that. I won't let anybody push me around […] I wasn't a strong person [before]. I was one of the weakest persons you could ever meet. (Norma)

Other learners relished the independence that they had gained as a result of their participation. While their social roles and felt identity remained consistent, the day to day lives of these learners were transformed as they completed tasks on their own and gained access to new information through books, papers, and online mediums. Regardless of the different effects learners experienced, it is clear that 'literate' marks an important identity constructed and legitimated largely by educational institutions. As Meyer (1977) remarks, the legitimating effects of education reflect public classification systems by which "the newly defined persons are expected (and entitled) to behave, and to be treated by others, in new ways" (p. 56). The legitimating effects of education transcend the effects it may have on individuals being processed by the schools in that public classifications transform social roles independent of people's educational experience. Moving from the institutional to individual level, we can see how these effects come to life for adult literacy learners, and also how the outcomes differ depending on the pathway an individual takes to literacy.

If we assume that, as Meyer (1977) contends, adults adopt the qualities appropriate to the roles and expectations to which their educational statuses have assigned them, the status passage from illiterate to literate would mark less of a transition for learners whose sense of self was derived from other salient identities such as spouse or worker. For those who managed to 'pass' as literate, the effects are not as far reaching because they likely gained access to the role of literate prior to attending the literacy programs. Those who experienced marginalization as a result of their illiteracy experienced the passage as far more significant in terms of accruing new status rights. According to Glaser and Strauss (1971): "passages may entail movement into a different part of a social structure; or a loss or gain of privilege, influence, or power, and a changed identity and sense of self, as well as changed behaviour" (p. 2). By acquiring a more socially acceptable level of knowledge and skill, learners were able to embody normative expectations of adulthood and occupy expanded social roles.

Participants who underwent very personal changes as a result of the experience often recounted changes in relationships in their lives. For some, particularly those on the role fulfillment pathway, their changed status affected their relationship with others. For example, one participant, when asked if any relationships in her life had changed, responded:

> My fiancé, yeah. He got really jealous when I started coming to school. Um. I think it was more because I was at home all the time and now I go out and have experiences with friends, and now I go out with the girls and I think he is a bit jealous. Just because I hadn't done that before, it wasn't what he was used to. So this is why we are going to couples counselling and stuff like that, because we broke up two Fridays ago. So school has a big part of it, for him. Like, I went to school and my confidence got up. For him, it blew his confidence down a bit. [Beth]

Another who identified the same pathway said the following:

> Um, kind of. Like the good ones, my kids and my sisters, for instance, they are seeing better things in me so our relationships are getting better. [Yvonne]

This comment suggests that, as learners change social statuses, their relationships also change, some for the better and others not. Changes in relationships were often associated with their new status as students or as literate people and often reflected the importance of these passages in their lives. Important events included those where their new status was reinforced, often by others who highlighted the learners' new roles and abilities. Those who spoke about personal betterment saw definite changes in their personal relationships. One learner said "[…] I am not being abused anymore. That is the only thing that changed really. Cause I got myself out of it" (Katherine). Attending a literacy program was significant in this transformation, and the participant suggested that she now had more female friends and as a result had built different types of friendships with others. This learner in particular reported feeling greater self-confidence as a result of her participation in the literacy program and this was reflected in her relationships with both men and women. Another learner commented on a new partnership when asked about changes in the relationships in her life: "Yes, I used to get people [physically] beating me up all the time. And not him. He takes care of me like a princess" (Norma). She claimed that, as a result of experience in the program and the confidence she gained, she no longer dated men who were abusive. Another commented on his openness to talking to others and his relationship with his family:

> Yeah, usually [my sister]. My mom. They know I have changed. Cause they even judged me because of this disability […]. And now no one judges me anymore. (Roger).

Clearly, learners' changed social status was reflected in their personal relationships with significant others, family, and friends.

For those who followed a more instrumental pathway, the effect of participation on relationships in their lives was very different. For example, a few of these learners did not disclose their participation to family and friends. These learners had more to lose by disclosing

their status as adult literacy learners, particularly because they occupied other important social roles. They were proud of the skills they had acquired, but their newly acquired literate identities were less salient and therefore less significant. Many did not experience personal or social transformations, nor did they acquire the power and privilege associated with status passage. When asked about any changes in relationships, one learner responded: "No, nothing has changed" (Avon). Others in this group gave similar responses, suggesting relationships with their spouses, family and friends remained constant. Participants' comments reflected the more instrumental aspects of their experience rather than any fundamental shifts in their social roles and relationships suggesting they had experienced an alternation in identity rather than a conversion through their involvement in literacy programs.

Rubin, Shilovitz, and Weiss (1993) have highlighted the importance of personal, informal rites of status passage. Their research has revealed the processes by which individuals, both in private and with family and friends, seek to gain recognition for a new social state and prove that they are acceptable in their new identity (p. 4). Key to any transformation is the change in image and redefinition of status that accompanied the passage, allowing individuals to acquire power that had previously been unavailable to them. These rites of passage are sought to ease the transition to a new personal and social identity that help the individual "cross the barrier into the normal world" (Rubin, Shilovitz, and Weiss, 1993, p. 7) as a mechanism for the removal of stigma through self and social ratification thus strengthening the perception of the new status. This can explain why participants often make close friends at the literacy programs they attend, begin to engage in new activities, and have difficulty maintaining, or in other cases improve, existing relationships. Those who did not undergo a significant status passage or identity change would not have experienced changes in relationships in their lives because they would not have

acquired a new status that required confirmation. In fact, two of the four did not disclose their participation to significant others in their lives, for one this included his wife.

Hout (2012) shows that, contrary to arguments that the correlation between education and success reflects positive selection bias in the educational system, the correlations reflect the significant causal impact of education on a variety of individual and social outcomes. In fact, Hout (2012) suggests new research "shows that selection bias is actually negative; unlikely college students probably benefit from their education more than typical college students" (p. 380). Studies have found that family background constrains the occupational achievements of people without college degrees but not those with degrees. Evidence from research on American social mobility has "recast the concerns regarding ability bias" (Ibid., p. 386). This research project suggests that such findings may hold true for adult basic education as well. Though one might assume those with employment and higher educational goals would benefit the most from literacy programs, it appears to be the opposite; those least likely benefit the most. Individuals in this study, on a whole, became more self-sufficient, engaged with their community through volunteerism and membership on boards, and developed healthier relationships with others including their children and partners. Their sense of self improves as does their confidence and self-esteem. Learners overwhelmingly attributed these changes to their participation in literacy programs. They saw the experience as an accomplishment that proved they were capable, and that they were able to leave their illiteracy, and the stigma that they had experienced as a result, behind them.

Shifting Views of Social Roles and Self

A question, often anticipated by learners, asked them to describe themselves at the time of the interview by focusing on any changes they had experienced. Participants' responses to this question were diverse: some reflecting deep personal changes, others expressing changing life situations and still others emphasizing a gain in desired skills and independence. Those who mentioned being shy and quiet spoke of changes in the way that they approached others and their own lives. One learner said "Now, I am more confident. And more outgoing [...] it opened a lot of doors" (Justin). Another responded "I was a quiet, shy person. Now I am not. I'd rather be out of my shell, talking to people" (Steve). Speaking about her increased confidence, one learner commented "Now I am not a little hermit, I am more open to whatever now instead of not trying anything" (Beth). For some, the change was more profound. A young mother commented:

> I don't feel like I am 17 still, you know. Like even last year, sitting home, I still felt like a kid. I felt like still in a teenage mode but with kids. But now that I am doing this stuff I feel like I am an adult. I feel like I am 27. (Yvonne)

Another learner said: "It's different because of the school. It made me feel better" (Katherine). Learners on the first two pathways had no trouble identifying the changes that they had experienced, and the changes were often of a very personal nature and quite distinct from those on the instrumental pathway who experienced continuity in their sense of self. Often, the literacy skills these learners had acquired were secondary to the changes they had experienced in terms of becoming more "themselves" as stronger, confident, more socially engaged individuals. Overall, these learners experienced changes in their lives as a result of participating in the literacy programs; many felt this even though they had not been attending for long. The decision to participate marked a significant event in learners' lives and symbolically represented their ability to take control of their lives.

McLaughlin, Tett and Hall (2009) remark of literacy learners: "this newly found sense of self had been used to open doors into other worlds and activities that learners would not previously have contemplated" (p. 14). For those on the first two pathways, participating in a literacy program marked a shift in participants' access to new social roles, statuses, and group memberships. One learner said:

> It is a short period to have that much build-up of confidence. To have it so low, and then boom, it was like an energy drink, I swear to God, boom! Like, different. I came here and a whole world opened up. (Beth)

This was often tied up in participants' ability to be effective role models, parents, friends and citizens. Individuals' increasing willingness and ability to interact with others is further evidence of status passage and identity change. As one learner said:

> Like those professional people, I would never talk to because it would make me feel very unsmart if they said a word and I didn't know what it means but you know, now I don't care, because it is a learning process. So eventually I will learn it, so it is a learning process. (Beth)

Seeing their social status and themselves differently, the participants took on new identities as students and 'literate' people, often altering their perspectives of the world and their own place within it.

For those who approached the experience instrumentally, the learning allowed them to gain skills but maintain their sense of self. One learner answered the question about whether she had changed by saying: "I am the same person, but I am more happy now. My personality is the same" (Wendy). Others on this pathway talked about aspects of their lives that had changed, such as being able to use the computer, read a recipe, send a text message or fill in a form at the doctor's office. A learner, after pausing to reflect on the aforementioned question, responded "I am getting the help that I need. And hopefully I will achieve what I came here for" (Avon). One leaner simply said "Pretty near the same. I don't have to order what other people order on the

menu" (Charles). A learner who spoke of his first encounter with schooling said "It feels good, it feels great. Like not have to depend on someone else. Right, like if I do it myself it gives me more confidence, because I can do it" (Nazr).

To these learners, acquiring improved literacy skills meant they achieved more independence and self-sufficiency in their lives. These responses suggest that the instrumentally focused participants did not experience the learning as a status passage, but rather that they viewed the acquisition of important skills from less of a personal perspective and more of a task-based perspective. Changes were not intimately bound up with their social roles or their sense of self. The ability to be more self-sufficient was very clearly communicated by these learners who had acquired a literate identity and they did not relate the experience to group membership or felt identity because they already had families, jobs or other resources on which to base their self-concept and had not had the same experience of marginalization. The learning, in this sense, represented less of a necessary and salient 'resource' for these participants such that they did not acquire a new social status or occupy different social roles as a result of participation.

Interestingly, it was people who followed the instrumental skills pathway who were most embarrassed about attending the literacy classes and, even after several months (or years in one case) of participation, did not tell other people in their lives that they were attending. This, in many ways, demonstrates continuity in learners' sense of self and social roles. Those who experienced participation as role fulfillment were more likely to mention that they were telling others about the program, and that they hoped that others would decide to attend and benefit from the program. All those who saw it as personal fulfillment mentioned that their names could be used in the report. Those whose sense of self was more strongly affected by the stigma of illiteracy had fewer resources to inform important identities other than the stigmatized 'illiterate'

status that consequently informed much of their sense of self and their social position. These learners had less to lose and more to gain by participating in literacy programs. The outcomes they experienced were more significant in terms of their personal and social transformation.

Examining the Effect of Adult Basic Education

Despite many different outcomes, every learner mentioned that he or she got more out of the program than expected, even those who had only been participating for a few months. Table 2 demonstrates specific effects of education and highlights the differences by learner pathway. Upon examining learners' responses to questions about specific changes in behaviour, it is clear that the differences they experienced since participating in a literacy program were unrelated to the level of skill they possessed or the time spent in the program, nor did changes consistently reflect the pathways that learners took to the program. The group most likely to say that they engaged in particular behaviours a great deal more, such as getting involved in the community, reading newspapers, or expressing themselves differently, were those on the role fulfillment pathway. Individuals who followed a self-fulfillment pathway were more evenly distributed across the spectrum of behaviour change, expressing a great deal more, a fair amount more, a little more, and no change fairly consistently, with a slight predilection for a great deal more. Those most likely to express that they had experienced no change were those on the instrumental pathway. These findings suggest that, while an individual may adopt a literate identity, they may not necessarily engage in behaviour change.

Table 2: Specific Outcomes of Literacy Learning

Pathways

Role fulfillment (R): Learning is conceived of as a necessary and inevitable step along life's pathway, often as a means of fulfilling a social role. The goal is to achieve desired outcomes and opportunities in life not directly connected with literacy skills. (Yvonne, Steve, Beth, Justin, Katherine)

Betterment (B): Learning is conceived of as an opportunity to improve oneself. The goal is to become 'better' people both in their own eyes and the eyes of others by overcoming stigma and enhancing their felt identity. (Roger, Brent, Norma)

Instrumental (I): Learning is conceived of as an opportunity to fill a gap in one's knowledge base, usually with the goal of independence or completing a specific task. (Avon, Wendy, Bill, Charles, Nazr)

Do you…	A great deal more	A fair amount more	A little more	Not at all (no change)
Read newspapers and magazines?	Justin (R) Roger (B)	Katherine (R)	Nazr (I)	Yvonne (R) Steve (R) Beth (R) Norma (B) Charles (I) Bill (I) Avon (I)
Read for pleasure?	Katherine (R) Norma (B) Charles (I)	Roger (B)	Steve (R)	Justin (R) Yvonne (R) Beth (R) Bill (I) Avon (I) Nazr (I)
Help your children with their school work?	Justin (R)	Roger (B)	Steve (R)	Yvonne (R) Beth (R) Katherine (B) Charles (I) Bill (I) Avon (I)
Feel like you have the opportunity to get a job (or a better job)?	Justin (R) Yvonne (R) Steve (R) Beth (R) Norma (B) Nazr (I)	Bill (I)	Katherine (R)	Charles (I) Avon (I) Wendy (I) Roger (B)

Get involved in your community (your child's school, literacy program, volunteering, other programs or classes)	Justin (R) Beth (R) Roger (B) Norma (B)		Katherine (R) Steve (R)	Yvonne (R) Charles (I) Bill (I) Avon (I) Nazr (I)
Interact differently with people like doctors, librarians, teachers, police officers, etc. (e.g., do you speak out more? Listen more? Express yourself better? Feel more confident?)	Katherine (R) Steve (R) Beth (R) Norma (B)			Justin (R) Yvonne (R) Roger (B) Charles (I) Bill (I) Avon (I) Nazr (I)
Look out for your own health and that of your family? (Do you eat, drink, smoke, or exercise differently?)	Yvonne (R) Steve (R) Norma (B)	Katherine (R)	Roger (B)	Justin (R) Beth (R) Charles (I) Bill (I) Avon (I) Nazr (I)
Think about future learning and the possibility you will participate in more courses? (GED, etc.)	Katherine (R) Yvonne (R) Steve (R) Beth (R) Roger (B) Bill (I) Nazr (I)	Justin (R) Charles (I)		Avon (I) Norma (B)
Express yourself in different ways than before? (music, art, reading, conversation, gardening, hobbies, etc.)	Yvonne (R) Steve (R) Roger (B) Norma (B) Nazr (I)	Justin (R) Beth (R)		Steve (R) Charles (I) Bill (I) Avon (I)
Feel like you have control in your life?	Justin (R) Yvonne (R) Steve (R) Beth (R) Norma (B) Nazr (I)	Charles (I)	Katherine (R)	Roger (B) Bill (I) Avon (I)
Experience feelings of low self-esteem or unhappiness?	Justin (R) Katherine (R) Beth (R) Yvonne (R) Roger (B) Norma (B) Nazr (I)	Steve (R) Charles (I) Bill (I)		Avon (I) Nazr (I)

Those who sought a literate identity as a means of role fulfillment tended to experience the greatest changes. The most commonly cited outcomes for these learners were feeling as though they could get a job, or a better job; feeling like they had control in their lives; considering future learning opportunities; and fewer feelings of low self-esteem and unhappiness. One participant said: "More confidence. I, it's something I could do… Like, if I'm looking for a job, if I get an interview, I have a better chance of talking about myself than I did before" [Justin]. Another said: "I feel like I have more control, like I am finding myself now. A lot more for me. I feel like I have a greater sense of control in my life now, more now than before" [Yvonne]. Participants who sought a literate identity as a means of enhancing their sense of self and overcoming a spoiled deviant identity experienced fewer outcomes. Of the outcomes the learners did experience, however, there was a greater variety than the other pathways, such as reading for pleasure; getting involved in the community; interacting differently with professionals; and fewer feelings of low self-esteem and unhappiness. As one learner said, "before I came here I looked at the pictures and now I am reading" (Roger). Those who sought knowledge and skill rather than personal and social transformation did not experience significant outcomes as a result of the educational experience. As one learner commented: "No, with papers and magazines. I never [read them] and I still don't do it. It is not what I came here for, I just came here for my spelling" [Avon]. These participants' behaviours confirmed they experienced no status passage or significant change in their sense of self. Because the self emerges through a process of interaction and through the roles individuals occupy one's sense of self is not static. New definitions of the self emerge as group affiliations and roles change. Those on the role fulfillment and personal betterment pathway demonstrated that new definitions of self emerged through changing relationships and changed behaviour while those on the instrumental pathway

did not experience such changes in self, their relationships or their behaviours – even those that were more directly related to the new skills they had acquired.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Concluding Thoughts

In human capital theory, economists (Becker, 1964) and some sociologists (Morgan, 2005) suggest that individuals are rational actors who forecast the costs and benefits of non-compulsory education and decide to pursue education if the benefits exceed the costs. Models can include nonmonetary costs and benefits, but in practice economists rarely consider them empirically. Sociologists often identify nonmonetary costs and benefits but rarely consider identity. As adult educators have argued for some time, it is not merely the knowledge, attitudes and skills that are the most valuable effects of education or that hold the most potential for individuals and society. It is perhaps here that the value of looking at identity in understanding the role of adult education in contemporary society is most evident. In fact, this research demonstrates that those who experience marginalization and view the educational experience as something other than a mere means to an end, as those on the role fulfillment and personal betterment pathway did, gained the most from the experience. This mirrors findings in the sociology of education more generally that education affects individuals who are less likely to pursue education more than traditional students (Hout, 2012). Such findings also support the conclusion that education is valuable because its effects touch individuals and their communities in ways that are wide ranging and at times unexpected. Policies that support educational initiatives for society's most marginalized members are clearly very important; even those who 'take the least' from the experience gain valuable skills that enhance their independence and self-sufficiency.

If identity change were included as an outcome of education we could better understand the education effect and gain a more nuanced perspective of the role of adult education in people's lives more generally. Behaviour change, as a result of education, can be seen to signal one's entry into a new status and one's continued negotiation of identity in relation to this new status. Participants who underwent the greatest changes did not learn the most or acquire the most advanced literacy skills, but rather had acquired identity resources and engaged in different behaviours that helped to confirm their new social status. Aligning personal and social identity elicited a sense of personal and social efficacy, enhanced ties to the community, and improved relationships with others. Conventional measures of the returns to education may therefore understate effects because they do not take identity into account. In addition, identity change may be a mechanism through which education has its effects on personal and social wellbeing. Concepts such as status passage, role fulfillment and sense of self help elucidate the role of identity in shaping the types of outcomes learners experience. Such findings help to integrate the literature on adult education and allow for a more nuanced understanding of the effects of education later in life and how such outcomes differ depending on learners' pathways to literacy learning.

Meyer's (1977) legitimation theory suggests that the effects of education manifest themselves both through socialization as well as through credentialism given the role of modern educational institutions in constructing or altering social roles and statuses while signalling individuals' access to these roles and statuses. By examining the legitimating effects of education at the individual level, we can see how these types of persons and competencies are created and how the effects differ independent of an individual's educational experience. Glaser and Strauss' conception of status passage is helpful in understanding how these effects take hold at the

individual level and allow us to examine the experience from the individual's perspective while maintaining an important link to a more macro perspective. Drawing from the experience of adult literacy learners, this research extends the study of the educational effect into the realm of adult education and builds upon our understanding of the mechanisms through which education exerts its effect.

Implications and Future Research Directions

This research expands upon the limited literature that engages notions of identity in examining the effects of participation in adult. Given its limited sample size, future research could extend this study to a broader population of learners. Larger samples sizes would allow the researcher to compare differences across age groups, ethnic backgrounds, and genders. This research should include learners from other provinces, those participating in different types of literacy programs (such as those for First Nations), as well as learners who drop out of programs. While this research was focused on community-based programs and those offered through school boards, future research should also include those with higher skill levels who participate in literacy programs at colleges aimed at preparing individuals for vocational or GED programs. It would also be interesting to compare learners who were participating by choice, such as those in this study, and those who were mandated to participate in literacy programs, for example Ontario Works recipients or prison inmates. Ultimately, it would be important to extend this research into other adult education fields, such as those offered by universities, community groups, and corporate training functions.

The hypotheses generated in this study provide a useful starting point for examining the effect of education as it pertains to adult literacy, and adult learning more generally, and suggest

the importance of exploring identity change and status passage as possible mechanisms by which these effects manifest themselves. This approach helps to extend our understanding of how the institutional effects of education as a system of legitimation play out at the individual level by exploring how adults adopt qualities appropriate to the roles and expectations structured by education and to which their educational statuses assign them.

The policy implications of this research also warrant consideration. For example, gaining a better understanding of adults' motivations for entering literacy programs may help program coordinators to design multifaceted approaches to literacy education that reflect the different pathways adults take to the programs. Some may focus on allowing adults to fulfill social roles, while others might emphasize improving felt identity or the more utilitarian uses of literacy. The research findings also provide significant cost justifications for literacy programs. Benefits to adult basic education extend beyond enhancing individuals' productivity in the workforce. Because traditional cost-benefit calculations may underestimate the effects of such programs and, consequently, the resources that should be directed to these programs, this research may provide support for greater public investment given the significant personal and social returns to literacy. Such findings also suggest the considerable costs to illiteracy and caution against school policies that promote students without attention to the skills students have, or have not, gained. In some cases, retaining students or directing extra resources to them might be valuable given the negative effects of illiteracy upon students' identities. If schools fail to teach students how to read, the effects extend beyond their inability to participate in the modern workforce. Literacy functions as a sort of identity kit that often enables individuals to take on particular social roles and see themselves in particular ways that build a sense of belonging and self-esteem and encourage social participation.

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APPENDICES

A) Letter of Information
B) Interview Protocol
C) Letter of Recruitment
D) Focus Group Interview Guide

APPENDIX A

December 5, 2011

LETTER OF INFORMATION AND CONSENT

A Study about Adult Literacy Learners

Student Investigator:
Julie McGinnis
Department of Sociology
McMaster University
Hamilton, Ontario, Canada
(647) 978-0041
E-mail: rayje@mcmaster.ca

Faculty Supervisor:
Dr. Mark McKerrow
Assistant Professor
Department of Sociology
McMaster University
Hamilton, Ontario, Canada
(905) 525-9140 Extension 23609

Research Sponsor: Dalley Fellowship (McMaster Graduate Scholarship)

Purpose of the Study

I am a Master's student in Sociology at McMaster University and I am researching adults' participation in literacy programs. The information provided through the meetings will help me better understand how adults experience literacy learning and what personal changes (beyond new literacy skills) result from participation. My research will look at how participants gain new literacy skills and how this influences their view of themselves and their behaviours.

As a result of your participation, I will gain important information about your experience in this literacy program that will help me to understand the impact of this literacy learning for you.

Procedures involved in the Research

This research will involve a meeting where the researcher will ask you a series of open-ended questions. This should take about one hour, maybe less. You are free to say as much or as little as you like, and to skip any questions you do not want to answer. The questions will focus on

your experience participating in this literacy program and will relate to changes you have experienced personally and in other areas of your life. I will also ask you for some background information, including your age and previous education. I will audio-tape the meeting with your permission in order to improve accuracy and will take a few notes throughout our discussion. You have the choice as to whether you would like to have your tutor/instructor in attendance at the meeting: this is entirely up to you.

Potential Harms, Risks or Discomforts:

The risks involved in participating in this study are small. You may feel uncomfortable with some of the questions as they are personal. You do not need to answer questions that you do not want to answer or that make you feel uncomfortable. You can stop taking part at any time without any consequences. This will not affect your ability to continue participating in the literacy program and program staff, other than your tutor/instructor, will not know whether you completed the meeting or not.

Potential Benefits

By participating in the meeting, this research may assist you in identifying and reflecting on any potential changes that you have experienced from participation in the literacy program. It may also help you to establish new goals.

This research will also help those who fund and develop adult literacy programs to better understand the experience of participants. I hope that what is learned as a result of this study will improve our knowledge of the different outcomes of literacy programs, beyond improving skills in reading and writing.

Confidentiality

You are participating in this study confidentially. I will not use your name or any information that would allow you to be identified. No one but me and your tutor/instructor will know whether you participated although the meetings will take place at the program office so program staff may become aware of your participation. Your tutor/instructor, if he/she attends your interview, will be asked to sign a confidentiality letter prior to the interview as a safeguard to keep your interview comments confidential. Your name will not be used in any reports associated with this research and the information that I collect from you will be combined with others' responses and will therefore be unidentifiable. Data will be stored safely by myself, the researcher, and will only be viewed by me. Once the research has been completed, all confidential files will be destroyed.

Legally Required Disclosure

Although I will protect your privacy as outlined above, if the law requires it, I will have to reveal certain personal information (e.g., potential to self-harm). Otherwise, everything will remain confidential.

Participation and Withdrawal

Your participation in this study is voluntary. It is your choice to be part of the study or not. If you decide to be part of the study, you can decide to stop (withdraw), at any time, even after signing the consent form or part-way through the meeting. If you decide to withdraw, there will be no consequences to you. In cases of withdrawal, any data you have provided will be destroyed unless you indicate otherwise. If you do not want to answer some of the questions you do not have to, but you can still be in the study. Your decision whether or not to be part of the study will not affect your continuing access to services with the literacy program. Your decision to withdraw will be treated with the same confidentiality as described above.

Information about the Study Results

I expect to have this study completed by approximately May, 2012. A summary of the results will be presented to your program coordinator. If you personally would like a brief summary of the results, please let me know how you would like it sent to you.

Questions about the Study

If you have questions or need more information about the study itself, please contact me at: rayje@mcmaster.ca or 647-978-0041.

This study has been reviewed by the McMaster University Research Ethics Board and received ethics clearance.

If you have concerns or questions about your rights as a participant or about the way the study is conducted, please contact:
McMaster Research Ethics Secretariat
Telephone: (905) 525-9140 ext. 23142
c/o Research Office for Administrative Development and Support
E-mail: ethicsoffice@mcmaster.ca

CONSENT

I have reviewed the information presented in the information letter about a study being conducted by Julie McGinnis, of McMaster University.

I have had the opportunity to ask questions about my involvement in this study and to receive additional details I requested.

I understand that, if my tutor is present during the meeting, he or she will sign an oath of confidentiality.

I understand that if I agree to participate in this study, I may withdraw from the study at any time. I have been given a copy of this form. I agree to participate in the study.

Signature: _____

Name of Participant (Printed) _____

Audio Recordings

To increase accuracy and reduce the chance of misrepresenting what I say, I agree to having the meeting audio-taped recognizing the tape will be stored securely by the researcher and destroyed once the study is complete.

Signature: _____

Name of Participant (Printed) _____

APPENDIX B

Interview Questions

ADULT LITERACY AND IDENTITY: EXAMINING THE NON-ACADEMIC OUTCOMES OF ADULT EDUCATION.

Julie McGinnis, Master of Arts Candidate
(Department of Sociology – McMaster University)

Information about these interview questions: This gives you an idea what I would like to learn about your experience in this literacy program. Interviews will be one-to-one (with the option of including your tutor) and will be open-ended (not just "yes or no" answers). Because of this, the exact wording may change a little. Sometimes I will use other short questions to make sure I understand what you told me or if I need more information when we are talking ("So, you are saying that …? or "Please tell me more?"), or to learn what you think or feel about something ("Why do you think that is…?").

General Introduction

1) First, tell me a little bit about yourself and your family. (Probe: Are you married? Do you have children, and, if so, what are their ages?)
2) How long have you been involved with the Hamilton Literacy Council?
3) Can you describe how you came to participate in the literacy program? (Probe: Did you hear about it from a friend? Community agency? Poster?)
4) What were your main reasons for taking part in this program? (Probe: What did you hope to get out of it? … a job or better job? a qualification? function better at work or at home?)
5) What was schooling like for you as a kid/teenager? (Probe: What good memories of schooling do you have? Do any bad memories stand out?)
6) Is this experience different than your previous experience with school? If so, how? (Probe: What keeps you participating? Are you more or less motivated to participate now?)

7) Have you learned some of what you wanted to learn? If so, how can you tell? (Probe: Can you give me an example of how you know you've moved forward?)

Program Participation

Let's talk about your experiences in this literacy program.

1) Think back to when you began participating in this program. How would you describe yourself before you came to class?

2) What about now - have there been any changes in how you would describe yourself since you began participating in this literacy program?

3) Would your life would be different if you had decided not to participate? What about that of your family?

   If yes, what are the most important ways that this program has affected you as a person? Your family?

4) Did you get what you expected out of the program? (Probe: more or less than expected?)

5) Sometimes people feel isolated before starting these types of programs. Did you feel this way?

6) Has participating in this program helped you feel less isolated? (Probe: Have you made new friends in the program? Participated in new community groups?)

7) I am going to ask you whether there have been any changes in your behaviour. If yes, I will ask you how much you think these behaviours have changed. I will go through the possible changes one by one – consider how they relate to your everyday life. (If the answer is a great deal or fair amount more, I will ask for specific examples)

Do you…	A great deal more	A fair amount more	A little more	Not at all (no change)
Read newspapers and magazines?				
Read for pleasure?				
Help your children with their school work?				
Feel like you have the opportunity to get a job (or				

a better job)?				
Get involved in your community (your child's school, literacy program, volunteering, other programs or classes)				
Interact differently with people like doctors, librarians, teachers, police officers, etc. (e.g., do you speak out more? Listen more? Express yourself better? Feel more confident?)				
Look out for your own health and that of your family? (Do you eat, drink, smoke, or exercise differently?)				
Think about future learning and the possibility you will participate in more courses? (GED, etc.)				
Express yourself in different ways than before? (music, art, reading, conversation, gardening, hobbies, etc.)				
Feel like you have control in your life?				
Experience feelings of low self-esteem or unhappiness?				

8) Sometimes people find that participating in literacy programs can change relationships in their lives.

   Has participation in this program changed anything in your relationship with your spouse/partner? If so, how?

   (Probe: How does he/she feel about your participation? Has it made it difficult for you to participate? Has it improved your relationship with your spouse/partner?)

9) Sometimes people also experience changes in other relationships with friends or family. Have you experienced any other relationship changes since participating in this program?

   (Example: You no longer spend time with the same group of friends or your relationship with your parents or other relatives has changed).

10) Have friends or family commented on a change in you? What did they say?

I have a few final questions about your experiences with this program.

11) What if any, are the most important ways that this program has changed you as an individual?

12) What if any, are the most important ways that this program has changed your relationship with others?

13) Is there anything that we missed, or you would like to say about the program?

Participant Classification

1) Age of participant?

2) Born in Canada? If not, where and when did you arrive in Canada?

3) Highest level of education?

4) Working or not? Temporary or permanent? Has this changed since participating in the program?

APPENDIX C

Letter of Recruitment

Julie McGinnis, BA (Honors)
Masters Candidate in Sociology

Study Title:
Adult Literacy: Examining the Non-Academic Outcomes of Adult Education

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Dear Tutors and Instructors,

Julie McGinnis, a McMaster student, has contacted the Hamilton Literacy Council asking us to tell our literacy tutors about a study she is doing of adult literacy. This research is part of her Master of Arts program in Sociology at McMaster University.

Julie is asking you to invite your students (who have participated in the program a minimum of 1 month) to take part in a 60 minute informal meeting that would take place on site after a tutoring session/class. Participants will have the option of asking their tutor/instructor to attend the meeting if they wish. She has requested that you fill in the attached form with your student and submit it as soon as possible to the program office in a sealed envelope. Your response will be returned confidentially to Julie.

She hopes to learn more about how adults experience literacy learning and what personal and social outcomes (beyond newly acquired literacy skills) result from participation.

Ms. McGinnis has explained that the student's participation is completely voluntary and that he or she can stop being in the study at any time. She has asked us to attach a copy of her information letter that gives you full details about the study. If you are interested in getting more information about taking part in Julie's study contact her directly at rayje@mcmaster.ca or 647-978-0041.

This study has been reviewed and cleared by the McMaster Research Ethics Board. If you have questions or concerns about your student's rights as a participant or about the way the study is being conducted you may contact:
McMaster Research Ethics Board Secretariat
Telephone: (905) 525-9140 ext. 23142
c/o Office of Research Services
E-mail: ethicsoffice@mcmaster.ca

Sincerely,

Hamilton Literacy Council Program Staff

PLEASE SEE OVER – COMPLETE FORM AND RETURN TO YOUR PROGRAM COORDINATOR

Decision to Participate

With the understanding that participation is completely voluntary, please indicate whether your student wishes to be interviewed as part of this research on adult learners:

☐ NOYES ☐

If your student's answer is NO, please place an X in the appropriate box and seal this letter in the envelope provided and return it to the program office. The sealed envelope will be returned to the researcher.

If your student's answer is YES, please assist your student in completing the following information:

I, _____, am a student participating in a literacy program.

By signing this form, I acknowledge that I have been a literacy student for over one month in my current program and am 18 years of age or older. I also acknowledge that I am freely choosing to participate in the stated research.

_____

Student's Signature

Preferred date and time for the meeting: _____ at _____ am/pm.
Second preference: _____ at _____ am/pm.

I wish to have my tutor/instructor in attendance: ☐ NO ☐ YES

For Tutors

In order to confirm the date and time of your student's meeting, your contact information is requested. The researcher will be in touch with you to confirm the scheduled meeting time.

Name and e-mail address and/or phone number:

_____

By signing this form, I acknowledge that I presented the research information to my student and allowed them to freely choose to participate.

_____

Tutor's Signature

APPENDIX D

FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW GUIDE

ADULT LITERACY AND IDENTITY FORMATION: EXAMINING THE NON-ACADEMIC OUTCOMES OF ADULT EDUCATION.

Researcher: Julie McGinnis

NOTE: *TEXT WRITTEN IN INTALICZED BOLD CAPITAL LETTERS CONSTITUTES ADDITIONAL REMINDERS MEANT TO GUIDE THE FOCUS GROUP FACILITATOR ONLY.*

[THE COMPLETION OF THE INTRODUCTORY SECTION OF THE FOCUS GROUP SHOULD TAKE APPROXIMATELY 10-15 MINUTES]

I) INTRODUCTION AND INSTRUCTIONS:
Hello, my name is Julie McGinnis. Thank you for agreeing to participate in this focus group. Just to remind everyone, I'm looking at opinions about how the adults that you work with in your literacy programs experience personal transformation as a result of their participation.

[POINT OUT NAME TAGS if used – people should use their first name or pseudonym only].
In a minute, we will all introduce ourselves – first names only. But first, I would like to walk you through the consent form that is in front of you.

[FOR FACILITATOR: REVIEW INFORMED CONSENT FORM AND ANSWER ANY QUESTIONS ABOUT IT. COLLECT SIGNED CONSENT FORMS AND ENSURE THAT PARTICIPANTS HAVE A COPY OF THE LETTER OF INFORMATION TO TAKE WITH THEM (IF APPROPRIATE FOR THE TOPIC AND GROUP).

Confidentiality: **[*READ ALOUD]*** Before we begin our discussion of adult literacy, I want to spend a few moments **talking about confidentiality** and to go over some basic ground rules for our focus group discussion today:

- Everyone's views are welcomed and important.
- The information which I will collect today will be attributable to you as a group.
- I will not identify the quotes or ideas of *any one person* of this group. Because of the nature of small communities or groups, it is possible that people could link participants in this room to quotes in the report. This is why we need to talk about confidentiality.
- We *are* assuming that when we learn about one another's views, they remain confidential. In a small community (group) like this, people are identifiable to some degree by their views and opinions.
- Having said this, and having made these requests, you know that we cannot guarantee that the request will be honored by everyone in the room.
- So we are asking you to make only those comments that you would be comfortable making in a public setting.
- Anything heard in the room should stay in the room.
- If you are talking about a particular learner, it is important to make generalizations and not to use any names or obvious identifiers.

- All voices are to be heard, so I will step in if too many people are speaking at once or to make sure that everyone has a chance to speak.
- I may also step in if I feel the conversation is straying off topic.
- You can expect this discussion group to last about 1 hour.

Use of Tape Recorder

- As you will recall, this focus/discussion group will be recorded to increase accuracy and to reduce the chance of misinterpreting what anyone says once your comments get transcribed.
- All tapes and transcripts will be kept under lock and key by the researcher.
- Names will be removed from transcripts. Participants will have coded numbers attached to their name which only I will know.
- Only I and my thesis supervisor will have access to transcripts (with personal names removed) of this focus group.
- For transcription purposes, I might remind you to say your first name for the first few times you speak so that when I'm transcribing the tape I can get used to recognizing your voice. That will ensure we assign the correct code to each person's answers. I will give you a gentle reminder.
- I'll also ask that when using abbreviations or acronyms, you say the full name at least once to aid transcription.
- I may also use a "flip chart" to write down key points during the focus group and take notes.

[AT THIS POINT, GROUP MEMBERS CAN QUICKLY INTRODUCE THEMSELVES –remind them that it is '<u>first names only</u>'.]

[HAND OUT ANY MATERIALS (IF APPLICABLE) THAT THE PARTICIPANTS WILL NEED DURING THE FOCUS GROUP INCLUDING PENS OR SCRAP PAPER. GIVE THEM A FEW MINUTES TO READ OVER ANY WRITTEN MATERIAL NOTING THAT THEY CAN MAKE NOTES IN THE MARGINS BEFORE THE DISCUSSION BEGINS.]

II. INTERVIEW

- Focus group discussion begins with the facilitator asking the first question.
- *Open up discussion for general responses of participants to each question.*
- **Interview questions**:

First, I would like to gain a better understanding of learners when they first choose to participate in a literacy program.

a) What makes adults decide to participate in a literacy program (the most common reasons)?
b) What are their major challenges/hurdles in deciding to participate?
c) Describe someone who is new to the program? What is he/she like? (nervous etc.)
d) What are some of the personal goals that they set when they first come in (beyond reading, writing and basic numeracy)? (what do they want to accomplish and why?)
e) What is the first change that you notice in your learners?
f) What is the most common change?

g) Do you see changes in people's self-image? Do learners see themselves differently once they acquire some basic literacy skills?
h) Do you think that changes in learners' self-image affect their relationship to family? Friends? Their communities?
i) Do learners' roles change in any of these settings? (e.g. Active parent, community volunteer etc.)
j) What influence does the pedagogical approach of the program have? (i.e. are some instructional formats more conducive to change in the learners than others?)
k) Tell me about those who don't seem to change at all – does this happen?
l) Overall, how would you characterize the contribution of the literacy program to the individual learner?

- Is there anything we forgot or something important that we should know about

Wrap-up:

- Remind participants that "what is said in the room should stay in the room".
- Thank the participants.