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Stories of School : Perspectives of the Low Literate Adult

Anne Shipway
Edith Cowan University

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Stories of School: Perspectives of the Low Literate Adult

Anne Shipway

Bachelor of Education with Honours

Edith Cowan University

South West Campus

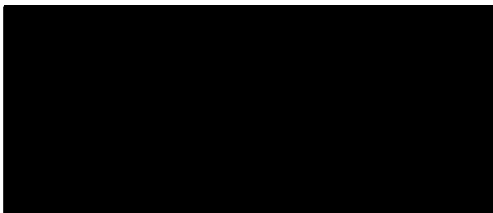
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Anne Shipway

ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the school experiences of low literate adults through their perspective recognising that the 'voice' of the low literate adult is absent from the arena of adult literacy research. Stories are co-constructed by the participant and the researcher with particular emphasis on maintaining the voice of the research participant. Through this thesis I argue that the inclusion of the low literate adults perspective is an essential element in gaining a deeper understanding of themes and issues which impact on literacy attainment.

CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION	4
1.1 Journey Through Literacy	4
1.2 Formative Questions	6
1.3 Research Questions	6
1.4 Significance	7
1.5 Limitations	9
2. LITERATURE REVIEW	10
2.1 Adult Literacy Research	11
2.1.1 <i>Adult profile</i>	11
2.1.2 <i>Current literacy practices</i>	12
2.1.3 <i>Reading material in the childhood home</i>	12
2.1.4 <i>Low literacy adults perceptions</i>	13
2.2 The Missing Voice	14
2.3 Schooling Experiences	15
2.4 Sociocultural Theories	17
3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK	19
4. METHODOLOGY	21
4.1 Justification of Methodology	22
4.2 Narrative	23

4.3	Problems	26
4.4	Adult Literacy Centres	39
4.4.1	<i>Adult Literacy Centre One</i>	31
4.4.2	<i>Adult Literacy Centre Two</i>	34
4.5	Recruitment	36
4.6	Story Sessions	37
4.6.1	<i>Interactive Interviewing</i>	38
4.6.2	<i>Reflective Interviewing</i>	41
4.6.3	<i>Reciprocity</i>	43
4.7	Writing up the Stories	45
4.8	Empowerment as Self Growth	46
5.	STORIES OF SCHOOL	49
5.1	Lisa's Story	50
5.2	Mark's Story	59
5.3	Anne's Story	68
6.	ANALYSIS	76
6.1	Analysis of Stories	76
6.2	Summary of Stories	79
6.3	Themes within the Stories	80
6.3.1	<i>Parent's literacy skills</i>	80
6.3.2	<i>Literacy within the home</i>	82
6.3.3	<i>Oral world</i>	84
6.3.4	<i>Parents schooling experiences</i>	85

6.3.5	<i>Coping strategies</i>	86
6.3.6	<i>Curriculum</i>	87
6.3.7	<i>Teaching practices</i>	89
6.3.8	<i>Lack of relationship between teacher and student</i>	91
6.3.9	<i>Truancy and absence from school</i>	92
6.3.10	<i>Isolation</i>	93
6.3.11	<i>Lack of intervention</i>	94
6.3.12	<i>Self blame</i>	96
6.3.13	<i>Student Interests</i>	97
6.3.14	<i>Sickness, injury and/or death</i>	98
7.	CONCLUSION	100
8.	IMPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCH	103
9.	BIBLIOGRAPHY	104

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Journey through Literacy

The interest in this research comes from my own personal journey through literacy, from a child and young adult with low literacy to the experienced literacy user of today. My journey through the despair and shame of low literacy and school failure began at the age of eight when a debilitating illness disrupted my access to literacy within the classroom and only began to abate when I began on my present path of 're-education' some fifteen years ago at the age of 22. The experience of first being an 'insider looking out at a literate world' and then an 'outsider looking in at a low literate world' provides me with a unique perspective in exploring the schooling experiences of low literate adults.

Throughout my 'journey' I did not once speak to or read of others who had endured similar schooling experiences to my own. This was a silent road where one did not speak out or about for fear of the shame, which taints every low literate adult. This research humbly attempts to break that silence through the sharing of school stories from two low literate adults as well as my own so that the 'voice' of low literate adults and their stories of school can be heard.

Sharing the intimate and silent stories of the low literate child at school has been a powerful motivator during this research project. The lack of research and knowledge within this field has further increased my motivation to collect these stories and thus break the silence of this neglected area of literacy research. These stories are

powerfully educative and need to be heard by all those in literacy delivery, be they policy makers, government, programmers and/or teachers. It is essential that that all involved in the education of children and adults are witness to the life of the low literate child at school.

Throughout the period of my teacher education I have engaged in the process of writing my own story on a number of occasions where I have been able to explore and analyse my 'story'. Identifying themes which had impacted on my literacy learning as a child. It was only through this self-exploration that I came to understand that I was indeed not to blame for my own low literacy, rather, there were a number of compounding factors which had hindered my access to literacy learning. Through this process of writing and reflection the realisation of myself as an intelligent being was born.

An important aspect of this research is to involve participants in the informal process of identification and reflection on themes which have been detrimental to their literacy learning as children. The size of this research project and my own lack of qualifications in counselling and therapy prevents this research from claiming to make a significant impact on the way in which research participants now view themselves as learners. Rather it is my hope that through gaining some understanding of their schooling experiences, low literate adults may be able to move beyond self-blame and view their literacy difficulties within a social and political context.

1.2 Formative Questions

- To what causes do low literate adults attribute their lack of literacy learning at school?
- Can research participants identify these important themes or issues in their stories?
- Are there themes or issues common to both the participants' and my story?
- How do the issues identified as important by participants relate to the causal factors identified in large scale statistical research into low literacy?
- What does it feel like to be a low literate child within the schooling system?

1.3 Research Question

How do adults who struggle with literacy understand and represent their experiences of school?

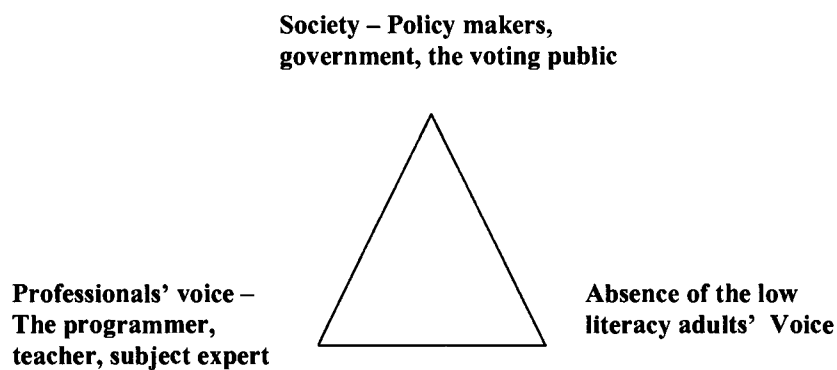
1.4 Significance

The significance of this research project is that the ‘voice’ of the low literate adult is heard through the sharing of participants’ stories of school, providing an intimate insight into the world of the low literate child at school through the identification and exploration of themes that have impacted on their literacy learning.

The telling of their ‘school story’ provides the low literacy adult with a ‘voice’ which has too often been absent from the arena of adult literacy research and policy. The emphasis of research from the perspective of education and policy has viewed the low literate adult with in the context of cost to society and the economy. The inclusion of the low literate adults’ perspective provides an insight in to the human cost of low literacy:

To understand the marginalisation of the [low literate] learners’ voice at the policy, research, and program level, it is useful to see our programs as comprised of a triangle of three components or voices (Quigley, 1993, p.80).

Components of Decision-Making Adult Literacy



(Quigley, 1993,p.80)

The stories of the low literate adults' schooling experiences are a valuable educative tool providing those involved in the field of education with an insight into the world of school through the eyes of the low literate child. Such an insight into the human cost of low literacy encourages an understanding of low literacy which would benefit all involved in educational delivery.

For example, the development and implementation of adult education policies that are sensitive to the social and emotional cost of low literacy as well as the economic costs, leading to the creation and distribution of funding for programs and resources, which are best suited to the needs of the low literate adult.

Secondly, exposure to the life of the low literate adult at school would ensure that educators are informed of the realities of low literacy greatly enhancing the implementation and delivery of programs, which would provide the low literate student both child and adult with the greatest chances of success.

Finally, gaining an insight into the world of the low literate adult's schooling experience provides a human voice to the trauma of school failure and low literacy from the perspective of the low literate adult thus revealing the personal realities and consequences of this experience. In addition, engagement in the process of telling their story, low literate adults have an opportunity to reflect on and to make sense of their schooling experiences.

1.5 Limitations

Although this research project is limited in scope it is emancipatory in intent, as participants are activity engaged in making meaning through:

- The telling and construction of their story, which is heard as far as possible through their voice.
- The identification of themes which have emerged from their stories, impacting on their literacy learning.
- Engagement in reflective discussion, which aims to illustrate that these themes were instrumental for their present low literacy, not some personal deficiency.

This research project does not aim to lead participants to a full understanding of and realisation that it is the social and political context of their literacy learning which contributed to their low literacy. Instead the research makes some claims to engage participants in the beginning of this process.

- Participants are not involved in the formal analysis of the research themes. While such claims would have ensured the engagement in a true emancipatory critical research, such a process would need to be undertaken on a time scale well beyond the limits of this research.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

A relatively comprehensive review of current literature on adult literacy has failed to locate research specifically on the schooling experiences of the low literate adult through their perspective. To gain an understanding of the themes and theories which have impact on and are determined causal in adult illiteracy a broad review of literature has been made.

The review of literature is divided into four sections. Section one examines broad statistical research undertaken into adult literacy levels within Australia by Wickert (1989) and the Australian Bureau of Statistics (1996). This review focuses on users who experience difficulty with literacy and the factors which the research indicates impacts on the attainment of literacy. A review of these two significant studies provide a profile of the Australian low literate adult, focusing on the social and economic costs of illiteracy although it does not seek to explore the personal and emotional costs. Section two reviews literature suggesting that there is a lack of research, which includes the 'voice' of the low literate adult within traditional research. Section three examines literature, which makes reference to schooling experiences of low literate adults and the relevance of these schooling experiences in their lives. Section four briefly reviews literature focusing on literacy learning within the sociocultural context. This section is expanded within the methodology section.

2.1 Adult Literacy Research

Significant studies into adult literacy in Australia have been undertaken by Wickert (1989), *No Single Measure* and the Australian Bureau of Statistics (1996), *Aspects of literacy*. These two studies examined the state of adult literacy in Australia in relation to specific everyday literacy and numeracy tasks, including prose, document and quantitative literacy, constructing a profile of the Australian adult who typically experiences literacy difficulties.

2.1.1 Adult Profile

Wickert (1989) found that “Adults who have the greatest difficulty with more complex literacy tasks tend to be older, have worked or are working in unskilled occupations, come from unskilled families and had less access to literacy materials in the home when they were children” (Wickert & Black, 1990, p.26).

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (1996) study supports Wickert’s (1989) conclusion that “younger people tended to have higher levels of literacy than older people” (Australian Bureau of Statistics 1996, p.5). There was also a clear relationship between literacy skill levels and labour force status with a higher proportion of unskilled workers at lower literacy skill levels compared to skilled occupations (Australian Bureau of Statistics 1996, p.7). Not surprisingly a “greater proportion of people with high literacy skills had high levels of educational attainment compared with those at lower skill levels” (Australian Bureau of Statistics 1996, p.5).

2.1.2 Current Literacy Practices

Wickert (1989) found that the current use of literacy by research participants is usually dependent on their literacy levels, those with high levels of literacy use literacy materials at a greater rate than those with lower levels of literacy: “The best predictor of current literacy performance is current levels of literacy activity. Eleven percent of the sample had not looked at a book in the preceding six months” (Wickert & Black, 1990, p.27). These findings were again reinforced by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (1996) “On each of the three scales, larger proportions of people at the higher skill levels undertook literacy related activities at least once a week compared with those at lower skill levels (Australian Bureau of Statistics 1996, p.34).

2.1.3 Reading Material in the Childhood Home

Wickert (1989) states that “the presence of reading material in the childhood home (childhood literacy support materials) was a significant variable in explaining variations in literacy performance” (Wickert, 1989, p. 43). Wickert found a correlation between parents’ occupation, literacy levels and childhood support material “Children whose parents were unskilled had the least access to childhood literacy support materials” (Wickert, 1989, figure 7.2, p.44). The Australian Bureau of Statistics support these findings “The proportions of people at Level 1 who had more than 25 books, a dictionary, or a daily newspaper in the home was markedly smaller than corresponding proportions of people at higher skill levels” (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1996, p. 35).

2.1.4 Low Literacy Adults Perceptions of Factors Affecting Schooling and Literacy Performance

Wickert (1989) identified the following themes which adults with low literacy skills attributed their literacy difficulties (Wickert, 1989, Table 7.1, p.42).

<u>Reasons Stated for Difficulties</u>	<u>%</u>
Health problems	31
Parents health	5
Socio-economic problems	20
Hearing	3
Absence from school	17
Parental attitudes	3
Attitudes towards schooling	11
Intellectual disability	2
Physical disability	9
English problems	2
Sight	8
Didn't go to school	1
Bad opinion of teachers	6
Learning disabilities	5

The identification of themes by low literate adults which have impacted negatively on their literacy leaning, while not offering any new surprises, do provide an insight into the issues low literate adults participating in Wicket's study attributed to their lack of literacy learning.

2.2 The Missing 'Voice'

The lack of research and literature which includes the 'voice' of the low literate adult is addressed by Quigley (1993) who states that research into adult literacy which asks the low literate adult "...remains remarkably unrepresented in the literature" (Quigley, 1993, p.78).

The importance of providing the research participant with a voice is emphasised by Quigley (1993) during his research into the non-participation of low literate adults in basic adult education programs. During his study he asked adults who refused to participate in literacy programs why they had chosen not to participate. Quigley (1993) described this approach as "back to the drawing board" (Quigley, 1993, p 78). This research revealed that resistance of the adults to these programs stemmed from their previous experiences of schooling, a cause which had been previously overlooked by traditional research practices. The value of this research was that "It became possible to see literacy through the eyes of those who refuse to attend, and begin to build implications for recruitment, retention, programming and new approaches to research" (Quigley, 1993, p 78).

While there is a noticeable absence of any representation within academic press of the low literate adult from their own perspective, popular press and select publications do occasionally carry brief stories of low literacy from the perspective of low literate adults. Often these stories focus on low literate adults who are achieving long held aspirations to achieve their desire for literacy. These stories portray the gaining of literacy skills as a means of making life easier through

obtaining a better job, more money and better life. They also contain a deep insight into the way in which literacy attainment or lack of it impacts on a person's concept of self.

Ken's story of his developing literacy skills and the impact it has had on his life is typical of these stories "I am successful in my trade and now I am getting better at spelling, thanks to my tutor. I will succeed. I'm not stupid." (Stepping Stones, 1991, p.8). Such stories often provide a brief insight into themes associated with low literacy as in Phyllis's story "During those years we travelled a lot and they both went to lots of different schools in Perth and other states in Australia. It was very unsettling for them. (Stepping Stones, 1991, p.90). The publication of stories within popular press fulfils the purpose of providing an avenue for inspirational and "feel good" stories. However, it fails to address systematically the schooling experiences of these adult learners.

2.3 Low literate adults' schooling experiences

While there is a lack of research into the schooling experiences of low literate adults, anecdotal reference is made within research undertaken by Johnston (1985) and Eberle & Robinson (1980). These accounts do provide some insight into themes concerning low literate adults' recollection of their school education.

During their research on the perspectives of low literate adults learning to read Eberle and Robinson (1980) examined the issue of schooling experience in relation to the low literate adults' present learning "for most illiterates, whatever their

schooling experience was, they have a keen recollection of its particulars and a sense of its generic relationship to their situation as adults” (Eberle & Robinson, 1980, p.6). Eberle and Robinson (1980) collected brief stories from low literate adults about their schooling experience, providing an insight into the traumatic experience of those students who fail within the schooling system:

The system is designed for most children, but the Rafers and Annabelles and Ginnys who do not fit either have to be made to fit or find their own way of surviving until they are 16 and can legally abandon the conflict, often to the relief of school personnel who have found their presence destructive (Eberle & Robinson, 1980, p.6).

Eberle and Robinson (1980) stress the importance of the adult literacy teacher gaining an insight into the low literate adults’ schooling experience due to the impact that past schooling experiences have on their quest to gain literacy skills: “What they bring most instinctively to the present effort to gain literacy skills (and eventually, literacy) is the feelings of failure, and the inadequacy of those early losing battles” (Eberle & Robinson, 1980, p.7).

Johnston (1985) emphasises the importance for both researchers and teachers in having a comprehensive understanding of themes concerning the low literate adults’ present literacy levels. Johnston (1985) argues that in examining reading disability the researcher needs to place more emphasis on “cognitive, affective, social, and personal history of the learner” (Johnston, 1985, p.155).

Johnston (1985) concedes that “the affective and motivational dimensions of reading failure are conspicuous mainly for their absence from current research and causal explanations” (Johnston, 1985, p.173) reinforcing the need for further research into reading disability using alternative methods of inquiry.

2.4 Sociocultural Theories

A review of literature examining low literacy invariably identifies a tendency for those with lower levels of literacy to be of lower socioeconomic status and thus from subordinate social groups. Lankshear (1997, p.29) refers to the use of language as a ‘broker’ by dominant social groups who “enlist the ‘services’ of language to act as an ‘agent’ on behalf of their interests”. Such an approach places literacy learning firmly within the sociocultural context where “Dominant social groups use raw materials of the larger societal culture – including established institutions and institutional procedures - in ways that help preserve their dominance” (Lankshear, 1997, p.29).

The inequalities of literacy learning outcomes of members from different socioeconomic groups can be attributed to variations between social groups’ primary discourses, cultural capital and family resources (Lankshear, 1997; Gee, 1990). This is especially evident within the school where “Dominant social groups have been able to establish *their* knowledge priorities, learning styles, pedagogical preferences, etc., as the ‘official examinable culture’ of school” (Lankshear, 1997, p.30).

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Emancipatory critical research provides the framework where the school stories of low literate adults can be heard and analysed. Within the theoretical framework of emancipatory critical theory participants co-construct their story with the researcher while being involved in the identification and reflection on themes which have impacted on their literacy learning. The use of critical theory within this research attempts to exploit the empowerment potential of critical research which “ serves the interests of the traditionally marginalised, silenced and oppressed” (Smith, 1993, p.75). The lack of the low literate voice within adult literacy research serves only to perpetuate their silence and powerlessness within society. Critical theory actively involves the low literate adult within the research progress where they are engaged in the telling and analysing of their school stories.

The engagement of participants in the identification and reflection on emergent themes empowers the low literate adult through breaking the silence of their school experiences and involves them in self-discovery concerning their low literacy. In Freire’s terms, “When carried with a methodology *conscientizacao* the investigation of the generative theme.....thus introduces or begins to introduce men to a critical form of thinking about their world” (Freire,1979, p.95).

The recording and writing of their stories and the subsequent identification and reflection on themes provides the low literate adult with the beginnings of developing skills to understand the context of their literacy learning thus gaining an understanding of ‘why’ they had difficulty with literacy learning. Of equal

importance to this research is that educators also understand why participants experienced difficulties with literacy learning. These stories thus provide a unique perspective of literacy learning for all those involved in literacy delivery:

To explain to the masses their own actions is to clarify and illuminate that action, both regarding its relationship to the objects facts by which it was prompted and regarding its purpose. The more people unveil this challenging reality which is to be the object of their transforming action, the more critically they enter that reality (Freire, 1979, p.38).

The lack of insight by low literate adults into why they had difficulties learning literacy during their formative schooling leads to an acceptance of themselves as deficient within the area of academia. As Freire (1979) notes, this self-blame profoundly limits their opportunities including the capacity to change their situation:

Indeed, the interests of the oppressors lie in changing the consciousness of the oppressed, not the situation which oppresses them; for the more the oppressed can be led to adapt to that situation, the more easily they can be dominated (Freire, 1979, p.60).

4.1 Justification of Methodology

The incident with Mark reflects the very nature of people with whom this study is concerned: low literate adults who are marginalised, vulnerable, invisible and disempowered within society and adult literacy research. This study aims to break the status quo of adult literacy research through providing a research framework which is respectful, reflective, reflexive and reciprocal. The need to develop a methodology that empowers and caters for the needs of the research participants is achieved using emancipatory critical research. As Smith (1993, p. 77) notes:

Critical research is a form of conviction research. It is designed not just to explain or understand social reality but to change it. Research with an emancipatory intent which strives to empower participants to make changes, is the *raison d'être* of critical research.

Methodology has evolved into a key issue in this study. It has been necessary due to the evolving nature of the story sessions to ensure that the methodology is in a state of flux, catering for the needs of individual research participants. Such an approach has been absolutely critical in ensuring that the research participant be empowered through their participation within this study. The telling of 'their story' has required engaging low literate adults in story sessions where they are encouraged to reveal core aspects of their lives thus exposing their very sense of self: feelings of shame, guilt and inadequacies to scrutiny. Emancipatory critical research provides a framework for research participants to tell their stories of school and to examine

‘Narrative reasoning operates by noticing the differences and diversity of people’s behaviour’ (Polkinghorne, 1995, p.11). Carter (cited in Polkinghorne, 1995, p.11) states that narrative reasoning “captures in a special fashion the richness and the nuances of meaning in human affairs” and that “this richness and nuance cannot be expressed in definitions, statements of fact, or abstract proposition” (Polkinghorne, 1995, p.11). Polkinghorne (cited in Mishler, 1995, p.108) states that narrative is “... a scheme by means of which human beings give meaning to their experience of temporality and personal actions” (Mishler, 1995, p.108).

While the use of narrative provides the research participant with a ‘voice’ the issue of truth needs to be addressed by the researcher, as Kamler (1997) stresses:

Stories are representations of experience. Even though narrative approaches are committed to allowing participants to speak for themselves – to make visible the stories that are often silenced – it is a mistake to treat the stories told as though they were the truth. This is not to imply that people are lying when they tell of their experiences, rather that they are selecting certain things and omitting others, foregrounding some elements and backgrounding others (Kamler, 1997, p.13).

The influential role of the researcher in the collection and analysis of participants’ stories is emphasised by Kamler (1997) who states that “stories are produced not found. When researchers use the stories people tell as data, they are involved in a process of co-production with research participants. We therefore need to pay attention to the ways in which we get people to tell their stories and to our part as

researchers in shaping those stories” (Kamler, 1997, p.13). This study incorporates reflections on my own role, both in the research relationships and as a co-writer and co-producer of participants narratives.

Jalongo and Isenberg (1995) reinforce the importance of narrative within the field of teaching: “Story has an immediacy about it; every good story, whatever the era, seems to be happening right now. Yet, story also enables us to preserve events, to hold them constant and study them” (Jalongo and Isenberg, 1995, p. 28). This is especially so for teachers, where story provides them with the opportunity to “Examine past events and impressions as if they were current, reflect on different teaching contexts, or even anticipate future courses of action as if they had already occurred” (Jalongo and Isenberg, 1995, p. 28).

Unlike me, the two participants were not equipped to reflect on their schooling stories through the perspective of teacher and educational theory and as a result my story includes some analytical reflections derived from my role as a trainee teacher. The participants’ stories provide a different perspective that this study respects through attempting to retain the authenticity of their voice within the stories. The educational perspective of participants’ stories is addressed during the analysis section of this study.

4.3 Problems

A number of problems were encountered in the design and implementation of this research project. These problems often involved the complexities of working with low literate adults and the degree of sensitivity such a research project required. In addressing these problems the needs of the participant were paramount.

The amount of time allocated for story sessions and story writing during the initial planning stages of the research was greatly underestimated. During the early stages of the research it became apparent that in order to record stories that were rich in detail and depth it would be necessary to spend considerable time working with the participants during the construction phases of their stories. This was especially important in consideration of the aim of the research, which is to ensure the voice of the low literate adult is heard. Therefore in order to accommodate the requirements of the timeframe for this research project the study was limited to the school stories of two low literate adults.

The importance of establishing a relationship with research participants was also undervalued during the initial planning stages of the research. In order to record stories that were an accurate record of their schooling experience it was necessary to develop a trusting and caring relationship with the participants. This relationship was essential in the devolving of intimate and personal details, related to participants' lives as a low literate child.

Some difficulties were experienced attracting low literate adults to the study, this degree of difficulty varied between adult literacy centres and the manner in which I was able to approach potential research participants. At adult literacy centre one potential research participants were able to meet me and talk informally about the research before they were asked if they would like to participate. The informality of this approach resulted in a number of low literate adults expressing interest in the research. Problems were encountered at adult literacy centre two where I was not able to meet with potential research participants personally. Due to the confidentiality arrangements of the centre I was only able to make contact with potential participants via their tutors. As a result, I received a very poor response to requests for participation within the research.

The initial aim of this research was to focus on the collection of stories and my subsequent analysis of themes which emerged from the story. During the early stages of the research it became obvious that the research would have to incorporate involvement of the participants in the identification of these themes. An important aim of this research was to avoid disempowerment of the research participant that has often occurred using traditional research practices, such as surveys and questionnaires where research participants are not involved within the research process past the collection of raw data. This was achieved through including the participant in the identification and reflection of themes and how they had impacted on their literacy learning. This also added to the amount of time which was required for story sessions again limiting the number of research participants. It also meant that the methodology became a major and continually evolving element of the research.

While the research actively involves the participants in the process of identification and reflection of themes it does not claim to make a life changing contribution to the participants' self-concepts of themselves as learners. Rather it engages participants in the beginnings' of the process of understanding how these themes impacted on their literacy learning as children. The timeframe for this research project limited the extent to which participants were able to gain an understanding of the way identified themes impacted on their literacy learning. Participants were engaged in only four formal story sessions where these themes were addressed. In order for a significant difference to be made to the lives of low literate adults participants need to address these themes within a formal structure, such as that found in a unit of work focusing explicitly on the political and social context of their schooling experience.

As mentioned earlier during discussion of research problems the methodology evolved into a crucial element within this research project. To ensure participant empowerment it was necessary to establish a methodology that was interactive, reflective and reciprocal. This was achieved through research methods that gave priority to the dignity and self-respect of those who chose to share their stories of schooling.

4.4 Adult Literacy Centres

The soliciting of possible research participants began through contacting local adult education providers involved in basic adult education programs. Two adult education centres were approached and both were keen to participate in the research. I had previous contact with both centres in varying degrees prior to this request for participation in the research. I had made contact with the course coordinator from adult literacy centre one during my honours thesis proposal night, while I had tutored on a voluntary basis for over three years at adult literacy centre two.

Adult literacy centre one catered for a small number of adult students. The centre's clients attended courses on a daily basis throughout the week. Adult literacy centre two utilised voluntary literacy tutors with lessons often taking place within the homes of its clients, usually once weekly for a period of one to two hours.

The course coordinator of adult literacy centre one approached me after the presentation of my honours thesis proposal inviting me to contact her, she expressed confidence that a number of her clients would welcome the chance to participate within the research. This initial contact was followed by several telephone conversations focused on the research details and the best way to approach the project with regard to the centre and its students. A time for the first visit was organised which best suited the needs of the students, it was arranged that morning tea would be the most appropriate time to visit the centre as this would cause minimum disruption to students' lessons and would allow for an informal introduction of myself and the research over a cup of coffee.

The course coordinator at the adult literacy centre two supported my research enthusiastically, advertising the research to volunteer tutors through the centres newsletters and fliers. Contact was to be made with possible research participants through tutors passing on information to their students. The tutors were then to contact me if their students expressed an interest in the research. Such an approach ensured the confidentiality of the students, a high priority of the centre.

An important consideration to emerge from the detailed planning before the research was undertaken was that both teachers and administrators concerned in the early stages of adult literacy development recognised the need to approach the research with a great deal of sensitivity. We acknowledged that this research was focusing on a period within the research participant's lives, which may evoke unpleasant memories, and may be extremely difficult to talk about especially to a relative stranger. It was also acknowledged that those who met the requirements for this research were vulnerable to invasive research, and that adults accessing basic literacy were extremely sensitive to the public scrutiny of their lack of literacy skills.

The period prior to the commencement of the research was vital in 'setting the scene' for the research, ensuring that research participants were within an environment that recognised and respected their courage for taking part within this research project. This belief has been the focal point behind the methodology of this project.

4.4.1 Adult Literacy Centre One

Before my arrival at adult literacy centre one, the course coordinator briefly explained to the students present who I was and why I was visiting, leaving a more detailed explanation of the research to myself. I took care of my presentation, very informally dressed (not difficult on a student budget), no tape recorder and only a pen and small note pad in my pocket. I was also armed with a packet of biscuits for morning tea. It would have been difficult for an outsider to distinguish me from the students and indeed the lecturer who was also very informally dressed; informality was an important aspect of the centre's success.

The first meeting at adult literacy centre one was primarily a period of introducing myself to possible research participants. I considered that it was an important aspect of the research that possible research participants be able to gain a detailed understanding of what the research required before being formally invited to participate in the research. The first meeting with possible research participants was undertaken within the group of students present at the centre that day, only one student declined to be part of the group. The group consisted of seven students, all of whom were women ranging in ages from 20 to 52. The group conversed easily together engaging in general conversation which focused on varying topics such as children, men, studying and then after the introduction of my research, experiences of their schooling. I was included in all conversation and was accepted readily into their group.

This meeting proved to be successful in encouraging people to recall their memories of school, which were in some cases a considerable time ago. Those present

continued recalling their schooling experiences on other occasions with students not present on that day promoting the research and developing interest in the research within the centre.

This first meeting was followed a week later with another visit to the centre again during morning tea. During this session group members again participated in sharing some of their experiences of school. These conversations were an interesting experience for me: it was only through my involvement with adult literacy centre one, that I had had the opportunity to speak for the first time with low literate adults about experiences of school which were similar to my own. Another point of interest was that those who later became my most valuable contacts were also the ones who contributed somewhat shyly to initial conversations, taking some time into the conversation before they were comfortable in contributing to the discussion. From this meeting people expressed a real interest in being involved in the study, telephone numbers, addresses and names were exchanged, as were times suitable for interviewing. I was particularly excited when research participant one expressed an interest in the study as I sensed through what had been said in conversation that she had an interesting story to tell. Of benefit in gaining research participant one's support was that coincidentally she had lived for a number of years in the same rural district as myself. This formed a common bond, and emphasised the importance of relationships when collecting stories involving sensitive issues. It also allowed me to give something back to her, in the way of information about people she knew but hadn't seen for a very long time.

details collected, they were then added to the story for appraisal during the next session. The material collected dictated the types of questions asked during each session in an attempt to establish a greater understanding of the story. This was a period of reflection for both the researcher and the participant, often one memory would trigger another memory, adding to the richness of the data. The going, while time consuming and at times frustrating, was instrumental in shaping the story and ensuring that the story written was that which the research participant wanted to be told, thus it ensured that the story was their story 'their voice'. A total of four story sessions were needed to complete the story.

4.4.2 Adult Literacy Centre Two

I was contacted by a number of volunteer tutors involved with adult literacy centre two in response to the research, unfortunately these responses were to decline participation in the research on behalf of their students. The general comment was that the low literate adults felt uncomfortable talking about their school experiences to someone they didn't know. One volunteer tutor ringing on behalf of her student said that her student had been so traumatised by her schooling experience that she had blocked that part of her life from her memory.

One possible explanation for the lack of participation of low literate adults from adult literacy centre two is that these adults have chosen to access literacy in the privacy of their own homes under confidential arrangements with the literacy centre suggesting privacy during this stage of their literacy development is a priority in their endeavour to gain literacy skills. Underlining the profound importance of respecting and understanding the emotional impact of low literacy.

One of the research participants did eventually come from Adult literacy centre two. I had been tutoring this student over a period of two years and the fact that we had a good relationship was I believe instrumental in him expressing interest in and consenting to participate in the research.

The story gathering sessions with research participant two were undertaken within the same facility where our literacy lessons were conducted (as a single male with relatives living next door we had been conducting lessons in the vacant office of a community building, thus ensuring his privacy from family). While much of the preliminary work of the research, building relationships and confidence had already been established all other aspects of the research remained the same.

The story sessions were held during the evening, before literacy lessons, usually allowing for two hours per story session. During these sessions I supplied tea as well as biscuits and coffee. It was an important consideration when doing this research that the story sessions did not interfere with the literacy lessons. Data collection went for four sessions, all were held at the same venue, although times were changed to allow for dealing with family crises that occurred during the story sessions. The last three sessions commenced with listening to a taped version of the evolving story, comments and alterations were then recorded on tape to be changed later and added to the final story.

4.5 Recruitment

One participant was recruited from each adult literacy centre. While others were keen to participate from adult literacy centre one time restraints restricted the number of research participants for the research to two. The intensity of the process and the time taken to build relationships were contributing factors in restricting the number of research participants.

4.6 Story Sessions

Research participants were involved in story sessions which included the following stages:

- 1 Telling and recording of the story
- 2 Co-construction of story during repeated story sessions where the evolving story is under the constant scrutiny of the research participant
- 3 The exchange of stories and confidences between the researcher and participant
- 4 Identification of themes emerging from the story
- 5 Reflection of themes which have emerged from the story
- 6 Reflection of self as a learner and the beginnings of revaluation of self as a learner.

Stages 1,2,3 occurred primarily during story sessions 1 and 2 while all stages occurred during story sessions 3 and 4. The final session (5) involved the hand over of the published story and focused mainly on stages 5 and 6.

The recording and co-construction of the research participants' stories of school is achieved through a research design that is interactive, reflective/reflexive and reciprocal. These key elements have been evident during all stages of the research: recruitment, story sessions, story writing and the identification and reflection of themes that emerged from the stories.

4.6.1 Interactive Interviewing

Interactive interviewing has been valuable in both the recording and writing of the stories and was utilised during the identification and reflection of themes emerging from the stories. The recording of school stories often resulted in the research participant revealing details not readily shared with others. Through the process of the interactive interview stories have been revealed within an environment that is secure and conducive to intimacy. Thus promoting confidence and disclosures that have been instrumental in the recording of school stories which have often included the exposure of difficult and painful experiences. The value of the interactive interview is promoted by Ellis et al (1997, p.121) “as an interpretive practice for getting an in-depth and intimate understanding of people’s experiences with emotionally charged and sensitive topics”.

Interactive interviewing during story sessions involved the sharing of experiences and stories between the participant and myself resulting in the hierarchical structure of the traditional interview being rejected. An interactive approach was particularly appropriate due to my own school history and was a crucial element in the development of a relationship between participants and self that went beyond the boundaries of the study:

Interactive interviewing reflects the way relationships develop in real life: as conversations where one person’s disclosures and self-probing invites another’s disclosures and self-probing; where an increasingly intimate and trusting context makes it possible to reveal more of ourselves and to probe deeper into another’s feelings and thoughts; where

Rather it was my intention during these discussions to demonstrate to the participants that there were social and contextual elements within their stories that would have impacted on their literacy learning while at school. Oakley (1981) identified during her research the need for those being interviewed to talk about their experiences as a way of getting it out of their system. The use of narrative as a way of making sense of experience is particularly relevant to the low literate adults taking part in this research where recounting experiences and discussing identified themes may help in their gaining some understanding of these themes and how they impacted on their literacy learning.

4.6.2 Reflective Interviewing

The reflective aspect of this research began during the first meeting at adult literacy centre one and through discussion with research participant two when detailing the research. These occasions provided rich conversation on their schooling experiences giving me an invaluable insight into their stories and providing a basis for reflecting on discussion and questioning I could engage participants in during the first story session.

The process of reflection on themes as they emerged was an important process in trying to establish a deeper more meaningful account of the evolving story. Often the research participant would make a statement but not elaborate, for example when research participant two said “I used to feel shame, real shame” this related to why he played truant from school when he was older. Reflection on this statement which after several discussions of trying to establish why he felt shame, revealed that he had been kept down three times during his primary education.

change the subject during tea to a more general topic which I had unintentionally ignored. The following story sessions ensured that the time spent eating was spent engaged in conversation unrelated to the research with extra time allowed for the story session to account for time spent sharing a meal.

4.6.3 Reciprocity

The reciprocity aspect of this research design meant giving back to the participant some aspects of the research in ways that were both useful and empowering. Oakley (1981) draws attention to the difficulties faced by the researcher which requires people to reveal private and intimate details of their lives with very little personal gain for themselves. To ensure that research participants were involved in a research process that was empowering it was important to 'give back' to the participant. This was achieved through actively involving the participant in all stages of their story, participants were given complete control of how they wanted their story to look and were able at any stage of the research to add/change or withdraw their story from the research.

The sharing of my story with participants was also an essential element of the reciprocity element of this research, participants shared with me details of their life. I returned this trust through the sharing and entrusting of my own story with participants. The sharing of common experiences resulted in the participants as seeing me not as a researcher but as someone not too removed from themselves, an experience also shared by Oakley (1981). This common experience was an important factor in the development of friendships between myself and participants.

their story, an offer for a copy of the completed thesis was also made though this was declined by both.

4.7 Writing up the Stories

Maintaining the voice of the story teller within the story is paramount to this research. During the writing of the story it was a constant concern of mine that I may unintentionally impose too much of my voice within the story although I recognise that the story will be partly my construction and therefore contain my influence. To ensure the authentic story was told meant using participants' language, the way they spoke throughout the story sessions. It was my intention that when the audience read these stories they would be able to hear the voice of the storyteller within the story adding depth to the visual images evoked throughout the story. Emphasising the importance of the study that the low literate adults' story is told in their words and their language. While of course it is acknowledged that written language is very different to oral language I justify my decision to use the participants' oral language because at this stage in their literacy development the participant was unable to write their story.

I was extremely conscious that the audience to this research would predominantly be white, highly successful middle class language users, while the contributors to the research were from minority cultural groups of lower socioeconomic status. This provided me with a dilemma. If I changed the language to that which was more acceptable to the intended audience then I would be continuing the disempowerment

5.1 Lisa's Story

Arriving in Western Australia

My Parents and their families came from South Australia but mum and dad shifted across to Western Australia before I was born. They worked their way across the Trans Australian Railway Line until they arrived in Kalgoorlie where they lived for a few years. Mum and dad had Paula and Melcom in South Australia before they moved. During the time they worked their way across the rail line Mum lost a baby, they also lost another baby but I'm not sure where.

I was born in Kalgoorlie and was named after the baby who had died while mum and dad worked their way across the Nullarbor. In Kalgoorlie we lived at the Inland City Bedrooms, which Mum used to run. Mum used to do the cooking and cleaning and dad used to do the gardening and cut the wood. We stayed in Kalgoorlie until I was about four, my sister Cate, who is a year older than me started school at Kalgoorlie. I remember walking down the lane ways with Cate and mum on the way to school. One day Cate picked all these berries and fed them to me on the way home, I ended up getting poisoned.

A Brief History of School

We left Kalgoorlie for York when I was four and lived on farms around York, Clackline and Northam for the next six/seven years. Because we kept moving around we went to lots of different primary schools. I started off school at York when I was five but wasn't there very long, after York I went to Clackline and Northam for grade one, two, three and four where we lived on a farm at Clackline. In grade four we left the farm and shifted into Northam. During the time I was at Northam I stayed back a

year. In grade five we shifted down to Perth and I went to a school in Victoria Park. I stayed there until I left school at the end of grade seven. When I was at York, Clackline and Northam schools I missed a lot of school, it wasn't until I went to Victoria Park that I went to school all the time.

Share Farming – York, Clackline and Northam

Mum and dad share farmed the farm we lived on at Clackline, clearing the bush, and growing a few pigs. The other farms we lived on at York and Northam they were just workers, clearing bush and rocks. To earn more money dad would go away each year for about three months shearing. Mum worked with dad, driving the old tractor and cutting the trees down with an axe, she worked like a man. Because mum was never at home, she used to leave when it was dark and get home when it was dark, my eldest sister used to look after us, not that there was much difference in the ages. My older sister Paula was five, Melcom was four, Cate was three and I was one, then George and Ted came along later. Life was very hard for my parents, they would chop down the trees and split them for fence posts or sell the wood to the old brick kilns at Clackline.

During the time we were at Clackline dad built us a two-roomed house out of old wooden sleepers, which he got from the railway line. To get into the house we'd go in through a door at the back of the house straight into the kitchen. The kitchen had a large old wood stove, tables chairs and cupboards. The floor was a hard earth floor and the windows were covered with hessian bags. The other room was the bedroom, mum, dad and us six kids would sleep in the one room, and we'd put up hessian bags to separate mum and dads bed from our beds. Us kids used to sleep a couple of kids

to a bed. There was no bathroom, when it was time to have a bath the bath tub was a forty four-gallon drum cut in half, which was used in the kitchen, everyone used to share the same bath water, the dirtiest one went last. We had no electricity and no running water, the toilet was an old bush toilet in the backyard. Mum had no garden and there was only bush around the house.

Mum and Dad

Mum and dad never had a lot of schooling, dad hardly went to school at all and mum never talked about her life so I don't know what schooling she had. It never used to worry mum and dad when we missed out on school, especially when we were helping on the farm. I was always glad to stay home from school because I found it so hard to grasp things and being really shy, I was happy just to be around my brothers and sisters. We had our own little circle. Mum and dad never read anything at home. Dad couldn't read, he could barely sign his name, Mum could read and used to do the paper work and bills but she never had the time to read to us or help us with our school work because she was always working outside. We never had any books or magazines in the house.

One Christmas someone gave one of my brothers a book, Robinson Crusoe, it was the only book I can remember having at home except for the readers we used to bring home from school. My sister Paula used to read the book to us kids, we used to sit around her on the floor and listened, we were absolutely rapt in the story. I knew the story backwards. The only homework we ever had when we went to school was reading and us kids used to listen to each other. I never used to ask Mum for help

happen when we were helping mum and dad on the farm we never used to see the doctor. Sometimes it would take months to get better. We also missed out on school a lot because mum and dad needed us to help on the farm, where we used to pick and pile the wood that had been cut down. Because mum and dad worked so hard us kids were necessary to help them with the work.

Another reason we used to miss so much school was the distance we lived from the school and the school bus. On all the farms we lived it always seemed to be a long way from the bus, which we needed to walk to. During our time at Clackline and Northam School we had to walk miles to just get to the bus stop walking down through the bush over the rocks. It would take us about 30 minutes walking to get to our closest neighbour where we used to catch the bus, and then it was a long bus ride to school. We never missed school just for the sake of not going, when mum sent us off to school we used to go, I would have been too scared to have stayed home for no reason. I remember one day we got down the road on the way to the bus stop and my sister sending me back because I had a mark on my jumper, she told me I wasn't going to school. I went home and hid around the back in the old woodshed, mum came out to get some wood and saw me, but I didn't get into trouble.

It didn't worry me missing out on school because I never felt comfortable or happy at school. I never really felt accepted by the other kids, we were always dressed in old clothes and we never had money for any of the things that the other kids had.

Because we used to change schools a lot I never made any friends at school, I was always too shy. Anyway it didn't matter because us kids would just hang around together. We used to have lunch together and play together. They were my friends.

The other kids at school used to tease us a lot, because we were never dressed very flash and none of us ever wore shoes.

Memories of York School

My first day of school was at York where I went for one day, all I remember from this time was screaming and crying while mum and dad drove off and left me. Mum and dad just expected my older brothers and sisters to look after me, which they did.

Memories of Clackline School

After York we went to the Clackline Primary School for a little while before it closed down, the only real memories I have of the Clackline school are that in the mornings when we used to get these really tiny bottles of milk, which came in wooden crates covered in wet hessian bags. The milk was issued to all of us kids, we used to think it was absolutely fantastic. If we ever had milk at home it was ever only powdered milk not like the milk in the bottles.

The school at Clackline was a small white wooden, old building with a rain water tank out the side. It was built high off the ground on wooden stumps with wooden steps going up to the classrooms. The school had two rooms one for the older kids and one for the little kids, the desks were wooden with lids that lifted half way. We used ink to write with and the desks had ink wells in them, at the end of the day we used to take our little ink pots out and wash them. One of the best memories I have of going to school at Clackline was one Christmas us kids went to the hall and Father Christmas was there and gave us all presents, that time was just like heaven for all us kids, we had never had anything like that before. Father Christmas gave me an

me and this other bloke aside for reading, she'd come back in at play and lunch and do a bit extra. It never worked, I could never read it, I used to just get embarrassed.

Sometimes the teachers used to make me do things that was really embarrassing, in grade six and seven we had to read something out of the paper in the morning, I couldn't read it, there was this one teacher who used to practice with me in the morning before the class. I used to find the smallest story in the paper then she used to read it to me then I read it back, she used to say to me "now just remember what I read" then I read it to the class. There was no one I could ask for help, sometimes I wanted to ask for help but there was no one. I stayed down a grade the whole way through, they kept me down just about every grade. They kept me down in grade three, then grade five, then they kept me down in grade six. There was no help in them days as I got older I got embarrassed, it was shame.

In grade six and seven I used to wag a lot, when I wagged I'd sit down the beach all day, or jetty or the beach shop some of the other kids used to wag with me sometimes. I'd wait till I saw the kids go home then I'd go home to. After a while the welfare was after me cause I was wagging school, they'd send letters to my dad wanting to know where I was, why I wasn't at school. Dad used to say just say turn up to school, you keep missing days they'll send you away to a home, school was to embarrassing, it was shame.

I used to make myself know in the class, I was stupid, if there was an excursion there were always three of us left in class, me and my two mates. Mucking up used to make the teachers not notice that I couldn't do the work so much. The more I

body or why I could no longer comprehend school work that I had previously enjoyed.

From this period on my time at school became a quest for survival, finding ways to alleviate some of the humiliation which failing caused me. I developed a number of strategies, which gave me short-term release from the unending threat of failure.

Reading was no longer a joy as I struggled to recognise unfamiliar words in my reading books, to overcome this I learnt to forge mum's signature. While this served the purpose of evading the struggle of reading at home I had no way of avoiding reading to the teacher and would wait fearfully in line. Reading to the teacher while the rest of the class worked quietly at their desks embarrassed me greatly and served the purpose of reinforcing my position of being the worst reader in the class.

The SRA box was another source of humiliation, the teacher would thoughtfully read out the colour we were to use, my colour was always at the front of the box, even then I found them impossible to get correct without assistance from the answer card. Cheating was the only way I could escape the embarrassment of calling out a low score for the teacher to enter in her record book. Cheating became an essential means of survival, which I relied on heavily to get me through primary school. When given a new textbook the first thing I did was to see if it had the answers in the back. Although I understood that cheating was morally wrong the need to reduce the constant humiliation I felt by my academic failure outweighed my understanding of this basic wrong. Both my spelling books and mathematics textbooks were extremely accommodating in this respect.

Mathematics throughout my schooling was undertaken within the pages of a mathematics textbook, this abstract presentation of mathematics was beyond my understanding and there seemed to be no relevance in what I was doing in class and my daily life. Mathematics steadily got worse as I progressed through primary school until I felt I was drowning in my own lack of understanding where the very mention of 'maths' would make me shudder with revulsion. Creative writing was yet another time of stress and unfortunately for me one where I couldn't reach for the answer sheet. While I enjoyed the creative aspects of English – writing stories and poems, my lack of spelling skills made these lessons hell. I have not memory of using any strategies to help me overcome this problem although I don't doubt they were available to me. To overcome spelling to many words wrong, which was most definitely not acceptable, I used and reused a small written vocabulary which I was fairly confident of spelling correctly. This of course limited what I wanted to say and was very frustrating for me.

Escape

To escape the pressures of school I found release in the world of fantasy, drifting into a daydream when academia got too difficult. Through daydreaming I could withdraw into a wonder world where life was not so threatening and the value of myself was not judged by my academic achievement. I acquired the dubious talent of being able to launch into the world of fantasy at anytime or place without drawing the attention of my teachers. The bush was also another refuge for me, and much of my time as a child and young adult was spent exploring the bush either by myself or on horseback.

6. Analysis

Prominent research within the field of adult literacy such as the Australian Bureau of Statistics (1996), *Aspects of Literacy: Profiles and perceptions* and Wickert (1989), No single measure has focused almost exclusively on statistical data gained through survey and testing. There has been very little research within adult literacy using the methodology of narrative and case study with even less from the perspective of the low literate adult. While traditional research has enabled a comprehensive understanding of the state of adult literacy within society, it lacks the 'voice' and perspective of the low literate adult. Research undertaken from the perspective of the low literate adult fulfils the dual purpose of identifying and analysing themes already identified as related to low literacy while providing the storyteller with a voice and medium in which to share his/her story. Such stories provide the reader with an insight that is not available through the world of facts and figures.

6.1 Analysis of Stories

This research was not undertaken with the expectation that it would reveal new and previously unrecorded themes related to low adult literacy. Rather what it does aim to achieve is to record stories of low literate adult's schooling experiences providing a powerful insight into the world of the low literate child at school in relation to previously identified themes. Through these stories the reader is given a privileged and profoundly personal view of how it looks and feels to be a child within the

Mark's access to literacy, which were influenced by the political climate imposed on indigenous Australians within the sixties and seventies.

My parents' economic histories profoundly impacted on my own access to literacy as they had grown up during a period of extreme poverty in Australia's history, the Great Depression. Both had been part of large families whose parents were pioneer farmers in newly established farming districts of the Western Australian Wheatbelt. A consequence of this isolation and poverty was an extremely restricted access to education. My father received two years of formal education while my mother seven years of primary schooling; in many respects both were self-educated. At the age of eight I developed an illness which impacted profoundly on my learning. Although I had achieved well during my first two years of school the onset of this illness and my parents' reluctance to negotiate the world of school on my behalf had a devastating impact on my literacy learning from this period on.

6.3 Themes within the Stories

6.3.1 *Parents' literacy skills*

Lisa - Mum and dad never read anything at home. Dad couldn't read, he could barely sign his name, Mum could read and used to do the paper work and bills but she never had the time to read to us or help us with our school work because she was always working outside.

6.3.13 Teachers did not capitalise on student interests

Lisa - *I played softball in my older sisters Cate's team, that was really good.....The other kids used to look up to me and start to admire me because we used to always win.....but the teachers never said any thing to me about it.*

Mark - *I used to play soccer, I was real good at that...I used to spend heaps of time in the bush, down the beach, swimming, fishing.*

Anne - *My parents discovered that the only way to make me pick up a book was to provide me with books about horses. Anything with a horse in it I would read it....Unfortunately the reading I engaged in at home was not reinforced at school.*

All participants recounted situations in which they had experienced success outside the classroom, unfortunately these successes weren't included within the participants' literacy learning. Both Lisa and Mark experienced success within sporting activities while at school but received no acknowledgment by their teachers. Mark and myself had interests outside of school which could have been used as literacy learning experiences by an informed teacher, a lack of communication between home and the school again resulted in missed learning opportunities.

6.3.14 Sickness, injury and/or death

Lisa - *Because the food wasn't very nutritious us kids used to get a lot of boils, which kept us away from school, we also used to get conjunctivitis a lot When we got sick or injuredwe never used to see the doctor. Sometimes*

which even after all my personal and professional development are often too painful to reveal to an interested audience.

In answering the research question adults who struggle with literacy understand and represent their experiences of school with some difficulty. Without access to the professional knowledge and current thinking of literacy learning, low literate adults are denied the opportunity to access and explore their understandings of why they experienced literacy learning difficulties. This absence of knowledge ensures that low literate adults maintain their sense of blame, thus believing that their own inadequacies are the cause of their low literacy.

Encouraging low literate adults to represent their schooling experiences required a great deal of planning, support and reflection. The use of a methodology, which acknowledged and catered for the difficulty low literate adults have in representing their school experiences, was essential to the collecting of school stories. Participants talked freely of their lives around school where they recounted childhood exploits and family circumstances with little prompting. While engaging participants in recalling specific details of school often required significant periods of reflection and prompting. That is to say experiences of school were not often recalled as a separate memory but drawn into the fabric of their lives at the time. Interestingly, memories of school were proportioned only a very small role of significance within their lives.

Methodology was a key issue within this research, keen attention to the methodology and the consent flexibility of its design ensured that the participants' needs were of paramount importance throughout this research project. The main aim of the

8. IMPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCH

A major implication of this research project is the emphasis it has placed on the need for more research within the field of adult literacy to be undertaken from the perspective of the low literate adults. Inclusion of the low literate perspective within the field of literacy research has the potential to greatly enhance the understanding of issues within adult literacy and to improve the delivery of programs aimed at low literate adults.

Involving low literate adults in the identification and reflection of themes, which have impacted on their literacy learning, was an important aspect of this research project but also one due to the size of the study which was somewhat limiting. Further research projects which are aimed at engaging low literate adults in a similar process will need to pay considerable attention to the time limits of the study, ensuring that sufficient time is allocated to achieving required outcomes.

Throughout the process of story construction research participants revealed on a number of occasions their reluctance to participate in mainstream adult education programs because of their previous experiences with formal education. Negative attitudes towards themselves as learners within formal adult educational institutions has serious implications on the involvement of low literate adults within programs conducted by these centres. In order to provide low literate adults with the best chances of success those involved within the area of adult literacy need to gain an understanding of the impact which these previous school experiences have on low literate adults present quest for literacy.

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