

**"...whiz into the future": Learner Agency
and Teaching Adults Reading**

by

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B. A., University of British Columbia, 1971

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ABSTRACT

This thesis describes a two year classroom-based research project concerned with adult readers' conceptions of reading, focussing specifically on the critical importance of the relationship between conceptions of reading and the acquisition of reading skills. Findings from this research provide the basis for a reflective inquiry into ways to effectively teach adults reading.

That individuals' ideas about reading may serve as learner-constructed 'advance organizers' for responding to texts and for interpreting reading instruction became evident through tutoring R., an adult basic education student who thought good readers "remember all the names". Further research with groups of students enrolled in introductory academic reading classes revealed that conflicting ideas about *what reading involves* along with diverse sociocultural assumptions about language learning and use are commonplace in adult basic education (ABE) and literacy classrooms. This finding suggests that instructors and students may work at cross-purposes far more typically than current research on adult readers acknowledges.

The pedagogical legacy of a 'reading readiness' model favoured by many school-based and ABE remedial reading programs, moreover, gives the majority of adult learners an image of themselves as non-readers, stuck in the stage of

'readiness' associated with 'learning to read'. Despite their existing ability to read, very few of these adult readers have ever experienced *agency* as readers.

Insights from the qualitative research paradigm on meaningful learning as well as sociolinguistic ethnographic studies on literacy are used to trace these ABE students' literacy histories and what is implied for teaching adults reading. In an instructional intervention based on these implications, adult readers' conceptions of reading are challenged directly through texts that capture reader's interests as well as through explicit discussions of literacy and reading specialists' views. Recognizing the multiplicities of literacy provides adult readers with the basis for a fully-articulated, richer, and more comprehensive understanding of what a 'good reader' knows how to do.

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Reading is someone else telling you a ~~story~~ story or an event that happened, but its on paper.

- IT INVOLVES MOVING YOUR EYES
- UNDERSTANDING WHAT YOU ARE READING
- GETTING THE MAIN IDEA
- READING FAST

~~skimming~~
scanning

find meaning of vocabulary words
that you don't know
the meaning of
the
words phrase.

What causes you difficulties in reading?

the language

some times sitting so long on one spot

remember all the names

concentration for a longer period

INTRODUCTION

Oh, reading is a special thing...people can run away in fantasy, escape into the past or whiz into the future. Excerpt from M.'s account

Reading is someone else telling you a story or an event that happened, but it's on paper. S.'s account

[Reading] involves moving your eyes, understanding what you are reading, getting the main idea, reading fast. D.'s account

[Reading is] skimming; scanning; find meaning of vocabulary words that you don't [know] the meaning of; ideas; words; phrases. T.'s account

Four students in an adult basic education (ABE) program expressed these different conceptions of reading in response to my request that they describe 'reading'. M., S., D., and T.'s accounts are typical of many other individuals' views on reading that I gathered as part of a classroom-based inquiry into students' experiences of learning from reading.

The site of my study, Douglas College, where I work as an instructor, is a commuter college in New Westminster on the rapid transit route between Vancouver and Surrey. Douglas College offers students a mix of academic

and applied programs and courses as well as 'upgrading' options such as literacy/ABE. It was on the basis of my experience of teaching adults reading in the Douglas College ABE program, referred to at the College as Developmental Studies (DVST), that I became intrigued by adult readers' ideas about reading. And I wondered whether--and how--reading skill might be linked to a person's *conception* of reading. This interest originated from working intensively with R., a student whose reading difficulties were particularly perplexing--at least until I began to appreciate how her conception of reading influenced how she read texts. Based on R.'s case, I decided to ask individuals to describe 'reading' at the start of two courses I often teach, DVST Introductory Academic Reading and DVST Advanced Learning and Study Skills.

The intent behind this classroom research project was to rethink the way I had been teaching adults reading. I was especially interested in working through the instructional implications of Dorothy E. Smith's characterization of the 'experience of reading' as *what someone knows how to do as a reader* (1990b, p.5). The classroom inquiry begun with R.--and then continued with other adults enrolled in subsequent DVST Introductory Academic Reading classes--suggested that conceptions of reading can act as learner-constructed advanced organizers (Ausubel, 1968) for how reading is "done".

I discovered over the classroom inquiry's two year duration that very few individuals enrolled in the DVST Introductory Academic Reading course from semester to semester, initially thought of reading as an interactive, integrated

activity. D. and T.'s accounts illustrate what turns out to be a common understanding among these students; reading is frequently described as *finding the main idea, knowing the meaning of vocabulary words, skimming, scanning*, responses which suggest a conception of reading as the acquisition of discrete reading 'skills'. S.'s reference to *someone else telling you* also represents a common image of the reader as a passive recipient of knowledge--a view shared by most adults in the reading course. Only M.'s account gives any impression of agency: she interprets texts; she transforms herself through reading which for her is *a special thing*. Unlike the other three individuals, M. was not a student in the course designed to help individuals develop their reading skills. Rather, she was enrolled in the college-preparatory level learning and study skills class where the majority of students could read academic texts with sufficient understanding to meet the requirements associated with college and university transfer courses.

As my thinking about findings from my classroom research developed, concerns about what adult learners believe reading involves and what this might imply about their experience of reading (including their reading difficulties) became a central focus. How are people's acquired reading practices and skills linked to their conceptions of reading and, indeed, to their explicit and implicit conceptions of language?

This question is addressed by this thesis. It does so through a process of interpreting and reinterpreting findings from my classroom research. This thesis is thus a report of a kind of *reflective conversation* (Schön, 1983, 1987), where a

practitioner's professional knowledge-in-action is developed through a reflective process which "spirals through stages of appreciation, action, reappreciation" (Schön, 1983, p.132). The distinction present in Donald Schön's work between *reflection-in-practice* or the thinking about what you are doing while you are doing it, and *reflection-on-practice* or the process of post-hoc thinking where there is an opportunity to reframe the original 'problematic' that caught your interest (Grimmett, 1988), underlies two discrete but related discussions found in this thesis.

The first section, reflection-in-practice, describes the circumstances which alerted me to possible connections between R.'s conception of reading and the problems she experienced when reading academic text. This part of the thesis also describes how both R.'s perceived and actual difficulties were addressed via "on-the-spot experimenting" or "the complexity of knowing-in-practice" (Schön, 1983, p.62) . The telling of R.'s and other students' stories is grounded in messy particulars related to school pasts, individual preoccupations, current learning needs, and the like. In any classroom context, including that of the DVST Introductory Academic Reading course, the immediacy of learning/teaching tends to focus instructor energies on what "works" and what "doesn't" more than why either might be the case.

The second section of the thesis, reflection-on-practice, reinterprets key findings from the classroom research through *reflective exchange* where "the situation talks back, the practitioner listens" and "the practitioner's effort to solve

the reframed problem yield new discoveries which call for new reflection-in-action" (Schön, 1983, pp.131-132). Here, two ways of thinking about students' experiences of learning offer especially valuable insights. One approach, a qualitative perspective on meaningful learning, uses reading tasks as a means to investigate students' various conceptions of knowledge and their consequences for learning. Developed initially by adult educators in Sweden and then by others in Great Britain and Australia (Marton, Hounsell, & Entwistle, 1984; Ramsden, 1988), this research helps situate the relative importance of adult learners' conceptions of reading within the broader framework of conceptions of learning. How these conceptions, in turn, influence methods of learning and learning outcomes is analyzed by these researchers in the context of post-secondary institutions. Another approach, the sociolinguistic perspective on literacy, represents "third generation" literacy studies (Graff, 1986) which explore cultural and class differences in language learning and use--or the "multiplicities...of literacies" (Levine, 1986). Associated with the ethnographic work of Shirley Brice Heath (1983) and other educational ethnographers (Scribner and Cole, 1981; Street, 1984; Street & Street, 1991), this research moves the discussion of conceptions of reading, literacy, and learning beyond classroom doors toward a still broader framework of cultural and linguistic values and assumptions about language.

Since the 'reflective conversation' at the core of this thesis examines DVST students' experiences of reading from the standpoint of my experience of actually teaching adults reading, what I see is shaped significantly by *what I know how to*

do as an instructor. Therefore, what I do is briefly explained below in relation to three complementary sets of practices associated with adult education in general, teaching reading in particular, and classroom research.

Influence of Adult Education on Adult Basic Education

In Adult Education, differences that distinguish the adult learner from the child have long been recognized and are based on a variety of factors related to theories of cognitive development, histories in the education system, and life experience (Cross, 1981; Kidd, 1973; Knowles, 1970; Tough, 1971). What this might imply for teaching adults as compared to teaching children has been articulated in general, but rarely in relation to the teaching of specific language-related skills such as reading and writing. Until recently, children were expected to master these basics through schooling. However, despite the public attention given to the so-called literacy 'crisis' (de Castell, Luke, & MacLennan, 1986, pp.2-3), research on adult learners and language-related, basic skill acquisition remains underdeveloped. A review of the literature on adults and reading indicates that few research studies address how adults learn to read or, if adults are not beginning readers, how they can best develop their reading abilities. For instance, much of the research on metacognitive development and reading, with its emphasis on cognitive strategies and cognitive skill training, has been done with younger learners. This example is not atypical. Consequently, ABE instructors interested in improving teaching through an understanding of current theory have often had

to recast findings from research done primarily with children into the mould of adult education.

Some studies on adults and reading do address the question of adult readers' reading attitudes and habits, but *what adult readers think reading is*--that is, their conceptions of reading--have seldom been investigated. In fact, conceptions of reading tend to be conflated with adults' views on "reading purposes" (see Gambrell, Heathington, & Boser, 1981; Johnson, 1985; Keefe & Meyer, 1980; Norman & Malicky, 1987; Malicky & Norman, 1988). Accordingly, in this research literature the relationship between conceptions of reading and reading practices, including how the content of a specific text has been understood and why, has, so far, not been systematically discussed.

Perspectives associated with adult education, despite their general nature, have influenced teaching/learning practices and instructors/students relationships in ABE and literacy classrooms for several decades. Even in the mid-sixties when many ABE instructors in British Columbia came from elementary and secondary schools and "continued with methodologies from these experiences" (Stewart, 1990, p.46), an emerging adult education movement already had an impact on individuals working within the fledgling ABE field. According to a survey among practitioners at the time (Davison, 1969), ABE administrators and instructors recognized that along with subject matter expertise, effective teaching in ABE required an in-depth understanding of adult literacy, a knowledge of economics and

its consequences on individuals as well as a knowledge of adult learning principles and the adult education process.

By now what Maurice Taylor refers to as "principles in adult education" are regarded as fundamental to literacy/ABE (1992, p.22), the common ground being a conviction that adult learners are not simply older, more accomplished children or, in the case of an ABE student, a stunted adult whose learning needs are those of the child. In adult education and adult basic education literature, typical adult learners have been portrayed--at least in some aspects of their everyday lives--as "autonomous, experience-laden, goal seeking, 'now' oriented, and problem-centred individual(s)" (Adult Basic Education Literacy Curriculum Guide and Resource Book, 1987, p.241). The possibility of taking charge of one's own learning, according to Malcolm Knowles (1970), represents an essential difference between the child's and the adult's concept of self and a related capacity to move from dependency to independent decision-making: "To be adult means to be self-directing". For Knowles, the development of self-directed learning is the primary goal of adult education.

My own teaching philosophy has been shaped in part by ideas associated with adult education. I want students to become empowered learners--in control of their learning--and *meaning makers*. I do not think knowledge can be 'taught' by someone to someone else; instead, learners 'construct' knowledge. An instructor in a formal educational setting creates conditions where the potential for the kind of learning which *changes* a person's thinking and practice can be accomplished.

An analogy representative of my educational philosophy--teaching is to learning as scaffolding is to building--underscores the useful yet impermanent and secondary role played by teaching in the learning process.

Indeed, most literacy/ABE instructors would agree that, irrespective of their instruction, the "psychological limit" adult learners impose on themselves is far more restrictive than a "practical limit" related to "maximum ability or potential capacity", a point Roby Kidd emphasizes in How Adults Learn, published first in 1959 (1973, p.17). Adult learners also have a different perception or understanding of *what* they are learning compared to children. And, according to Kidd, most problems adults face do not have a "correct" answer or, more precisely, "correctness" may be based on religious, cultural, or other traditional beliefs. He further notes that "the adult may and often does bring quite different views to the classroom from those held by the teacher. This may result in conflict" (ibid., pp.37-38). Adult students and literacy/ABE instructors, for instance, do not always agree on *what* should be worked on, whether to 'improve' reading (see Fagan, 1988; Norman & Malicky, 1987), or to learn how to read (Rigg, 1991).

Moreover, as Kidd (1973) indicates, for the adult learner the changes learning brings may not all be welcome:

It is not simply a matter of accretion--of adding something. There is always reorganizing or restructuring. There may be **unlearning**...what there is of pain in learning is not so much coming to terms with what is new, but reorganizing what has been learned. [p.15]

In fact, aspects of what an individual *knows how to do as a reader*, described earlier as someone's experience of reading (Smith, 1990b), may have to be

"unlearned" in the process of becoming a skilled reader of academic text. In short, "*doing reading*" does not exclude *misunderstandings*.

Yet the adult learner, in comparison with the child, has far greater capacity for self-reflection. Indeed, Jack Mezirow (1975) argues that "learning how we are caught in our own history and are reliving it" (p.101) represents a kind of learning that is unique to the adult. This capacity for critical self-consciousness which Mezirow (1981) names *critical reflectivity* (p.11) makes "meaning transformations" and changes in beliefs and actions possible:

Awareness of *why* we attach the meanings we do to reality, especially to our roles and relationships--meanings often misconstrued out of the uncritically assimilated half-truths of conventional wisdom and power relationships assumed as fixed--may be the most significant characteristic of adult learning. [Ibid.]

Adults' capacity for critical awareness, Mezirow claims, is "an essential function of learning in adulthood" (ibid.). Teaching adults, then, far more than the teaching of children, needs to facilitate intentionality, agency, and an empowering 'critical reflectivity'.

Teaching adults reading

The adult learners usually found in literacy/ABE classes are not the adult learners who move easily from secondary school to post-secondary institutions, take academically-oriented continuing education courses, or return to graduate school. The adults that ABE instructors mainly work with are people whose formal learning experiences have often shattered their concept of self and

extinguished their self-confidence in respect to schooling. In recognition of this, Adult Education's continual references to "characteristics of adult learners" often surface as 'instructional objectives' for teachers of adult learners within the literacy/ABE field (see Draper, 1992, pp.22-27). M. reads to "whiz into the future"; she experiences reading as a form of self-directed learning. But, this is not the case for D., T., and S. who, in relation to the specific kind of reading they have in mind, would hardly represent themselves as empowered learners or readers. Effective teaching as it is understood in the literacy/ABE field, then, includes the ability to engage and encourage reluctant or frustrated learners (Thomas, 1990), to help them develop the skills to become *independent, life-long learners* (Adult Basic Literacy Curriculum Guide and Resource Book, 1987) by emphasizing *learning how to learn* strategies (Bransford, 1979; Brown, 1980), and to organize *learner-centred* or *learner-directed* courses of study where Paulo Freire's challenge (1987; 1989) to treat people as subjects--as agents--in all aspects of their education might be realized.

Learner-centred teaching, however, need not mean 'starting from where the learner is', an idea discussed later in the thesis. Michael Cole and Peg Griffin (1986) make a telling distinction between *being where a learner 'is'* and *being 'with' a learner* as part of a critique of standard remedial practices which in their view perpetuate an incremental, "bottom-up", skill-based approach to reading instruction (p.118). As Cole and Griffin have so eloquently indicated in relation to teaching reading to a particular child:

We were particularly fearful of starting where Deanna and her friends were, lest it lead her, them, and us to some activity that we might no longer recognize as the sociohistorical entity we call reading. We wanted to be *with* her, but not where she was. [p.122]

Moreover, Cole and Griffin's distinction implies that what a literacy/ABE instructor knows about adult learners' reading preferences and concerns can serve as general orientation to 'who' is in one's class, but such information would not be a sound basis for designing instruction or curriculum for a reading course. For instance, when comments from individuals enrolled in DVST reading classes are examined (see chapters 1 and 2), students' expressed reading preferences do not easily translate into reading materials which are compatible with learning how to read 'academic texts', nor are students' perceived reading difficulties necessarily representative of actual reading difficulties. In fact, where adults would like to begin with reading may not keep the *activity of reading* intact, a critical contention and basic premise of Cole and Griffin's alternative "sociohistorical approach to remediation" (p.127) and of my own approach to teaching adults reading.

In fact, my experience as an instructor suggests that for adults to become avid, proficient readers, the classroom needs to be a collaborative place where talking, reading, writing, and listening about 'something' of genuine interest to those present **happens**. From poetry to prose to drama--texts and parts of texts ought to be read and re-read, films watched, feelings shared, perspectives appreciated. And, throughout this exploration of ideas and visions, vocabulary common to many texts is eventually mastered, key ideas and critical interpretations are noted, individuals' views develop, differences are expressed, and opinions are

supported. In brief, the classroom becomes a place where speakers/readers/writers/listeners are no longer passive recipients of knowledge but active negotiators of meaning. I also think that what individuals 'learn' needs to be validated in other contexts; as part of my course design students attend public forums, do follow-up research at the library, report on discussions outside class, and use writing to clarify understanding. Individuals also pursue issues, interests, and fields of study independently of classmates.

The gist of "genuine literacy", to use Patrick Courts's words (1992), is "the kind of literacy that empowers the individual to make meaning of the world of oral and written language in which we are all immersed" (p.xxix). Within the context of how I teach adults reading, the kind of 'genuine literacy' Courts describes is built through collective and individual experiences of reading; instruction, including curriculum development and course design, functions as scaffolding. It is by **doing reading** that what someone *knows* how to do as a reader becomes evident.

A reader's *knowing about reading* is not fixed. What Lev Vygotsky (1978) identifies as the difference between "actual" and "potential" developmental levels suggests that 'knowing' has two aspects, a distinction that I have tried to operationalize in my teaching. For Vygotsky, the first developmental level refers to what someone can independently do or accomplish on their own; the second developmental level represents what someone can do with the help of capable peers or, in the case of a young child, with the help of adults. Vygotsky names

the "distance" between actual and potential developmental levels, the *zone of proximal development* (p.86). By analyzing this zone, he notes that a teacher should be able to determine "how developmental processes stimulated by the course of school learning are carried through inside the head of each individual child" (p.91). The distinction Vygotsky makes between actual and potential development is related to his conceptualization of the 'instrumentality' of language (1987) whereby language helps us sort out our thoughts about something, and thinking is a way to organize perception and action. This particular interpretation of Vygotsky's ideas about language suggests that what an adult thinks reading involves could 'organize' how reading is practised.

Teaching reading as an activity gives adult learners the opportunity to understand the gist of skilled reading in a context of 'genuine literacy'. What we do as readers, in relation to Vygotsky's dynamic interpretation of 'knowing' as a developmental process, is the basis for analyzing a reader's reading. This is my starting-point for teaching adults reading and for developing learning-focussed (and not learner-centred) curriculum. On the assumption that reading instruction needs to be in advance of individuals' actual reading development, I ask people directly what they are *learning from reading* and *learning about reading* as one way of making what happens inside people's heads 'known'.

Classroom research and reflective practice

Explicit exchanges with students about what they are learning using a variety of means, or classroom assessment techniques as they are currently called (Cross & Angelo, 1993), give students a voice in the classroom and, hence, some control over their learning. The kind of questioning associated with ongoing classroom assessment techniques (CATs) is linked to 'something' an instructor chooses to investigate for a reason, given a particular group of students, in particular circumstances, studying something particular. For instance, an uncomplicated classroom assessment technique such as the "one-minute paper" (p.148) asks students to describe their learning in 'a minute'. Like other techniques, the one-minute paper is adaptable. It can be used to discover if students in a sociology class, for example, understand what socialization means (or do they confuse this key sociological concept with 'socialism' or 'being sociable', two typical misunderstandings). Students' written responses are meant to be anonymous and separate from formal evaluation of individual learning. What students say about *learning something* provides the impetus for improving teaching. Students' learning, as described by them, becomes the raw material for grounding teaching in reflective practice. Classroom research extends CATs inquiries.

Instruction adapted to *what* people are learning supports the transactional or reciprocal connections between teaching and learning within which individuals construct meaning for themselves. The *reading transaction* (Rosenblatt, 1989), in this sense, represents a specific kind of learning transaction (see chapter three).

CATs or similar practices can have a profound effect on teaching simply because they give instructors ongoing 'feedback'. Sometimes I ask students to respond to questions related to the reading of a text such as "what have you learned up to now?", "any issues/concerns?"; each answer is written on one side of an index card. In the next class, I read from these cards to highlight key points students have raised. All ideas are valued and, most importantly, this process demonstrates that learning is collaborative and I am one of many teachers present.

Any snapshots of students' understandings using classroom assessment techniques--along with assigned work, classroom observations, notes from tutorials and appointments--are sources of information for making instructional changes in-the-midst of practice.

Issues located in the everyday practice of teaching reading may become the basis for a more protracted inquiry. For instance, a project to develop a DVST reading and writing assessment, undertaken by myself and three other instructors, illustrates the ties between teaching and classroom-initiated research. Our program had been using the Canadian Test of Basic Skills (CTBS) to establish course entry and exit levels because standings on school transcripts proved to be an unreliable indicator of language competencies. DVST's use of standardized grade equivalency tests, especially for English placement, represented a common (and continuing) practice for determining access to ABE and college-entry courses throughout the Province (Rennie, 1991, p. iii). But the development of an alternative to the CTBS became a priority for us owing to the pronounced

differences we observed between students' and instructors' reactions to a standardized reading test. As instructors, we found the CTBS to be an expedient tool for recommending a course of study, but compared to the understanding an instructor can develop of someone's reading in the context of a course, the CTBS seemed to us to have little to offer as a predictor of reading skill. The CTBS test result, even if certain grade levels did represent an entry/exit standard on official course outlines, was one of several ways adult learners' progress would be evaluated at the end of a semester's work.

For students, by contrast, the CTBS was seen as the litmus test for 'real' reading development. Test results--however devastating or exhilarating for the individual--were regarded as always *authoritative*. Despite people's work throughout the semester, the CTBS test--with its brief reading passages, predictable questions, multiple-choice answers, and imposed time limit--could have a damning effect on adult learners, some instructors believed, whatever the 'grade level' individuals received. For instance, each semester some DVST students' high CTBS scores convinced them they were 'ready' for college-level courses and they registered in these courses only to quit after a few weeks into the new semester. Francis Kazemek (1988) uses the expression "depowering" (p.8) to describe the consequences on adult learners when literacy programs use commercial assessment instruments to measure individuals' learning.

In the earliest stages of the assessment project, I had students in my reading class write three separate and well-known standardized reading tests during a two

week period. Individual test results varied anywhere from three to four grade levels (see Appendix 1 for a comparison among eighteen individuals). A discussion of these results led to a class project where we began to demystify the 'power' of test-generated grades and labels by exploring issues related to self-esteem and learning in the context of educational institutions' grading practices.

The project team's fieldtesting of the new assessment which involved adults from our DVST program, other college classes, and the community (including people who had graduated from university and others who had not finished high school) led to a more realistic understanding of DVST students' reading skills in comparison to other adult readers' skills. A one-day orientation organized for all DVST instructors on the content of the assessment and why it was selected, on holistic marking procedures and course placement indicators, and on student interview protocols led to more intensive discussions regarding our program's approach to reading and writing instruction. Keeping an account of this assessment project, represented my first efforts at systematizing classroom observations related to adult reading.

From that initial effort, my current practice developed. Now, every semester, individuals' reading and writing assessments--along with their responses to questions I ask about reading on the first day of class (see chapters one and two)--become the basis for interviews I have with each student during the first week of classes. These sessions provide an opportunity to discuss students' written responses to my questions as well as their assessments. Keeping notes helps me

'internalize' the new class's reading histories and this becomes my initial orientation to the semester ahead.

Likewise, I ask students at the start of the college-level learning and study skills course I teach about their conceptions of learning and reading. These findings are referred to in chapters two and three. At the end of the semester each person in this course is asked to "analyze yourself as a learner". These papers, thoughtful and thought-provoking as they are, have deepened my understanding of students' experiences of learning.

From the few examples recounted above and from many others in which adult learners' reflections on their own experiences of reading and learning are central, a kind of 'spiralling ethnography' has evolved. Jacqueline Wiseman's (1974) image of "the research web" describes a qualitative research process which is not linear; "all aspects of the research act are going on almost simultaneously" (p.317). The "weaving back and forth...investigating loose ends, trying to make things understandable, non-contradictory, a web of social explanation" (p. 327) is the outcome. Before the web is spun, the qualitative researcher is a detective and with a few clues in hand, develops hunches, asks questions, figures out what happened, adjusts the scenario in the face of new evidence and, as Wiseman gleefully concludes, "the murderer is caught" (p.317). There is a finale: "The facts have been 'organized' to accommodate--with as few contradictions as possible--the largest amount of empirical data" (ibid.). Despite its web-like nature, the classroom research described in this thesis leaves loose ends; practices often

contradict and lag behind beliefs. The reflective process--whether in-the-midst of teaching or afterwards--"spirals through stages of appreciation, action, reappreciation" (Schön, 1983, p.132) and no end is ever in sight.

One constant does exist. My purpose when teaching the DVST Introductory Academic Reading course and my intent, throughout this thesis, is the same: I want to find the best ways to support the efforts of adults such as D., T., and S. to become self-directed, critically aware readers of any and all text. Told from another perspective, the process of reinterpreting and eventually of reframing R.'s case into the new problematic discussed in this thesis, is really a story about *what students have taught me about my teaching* through accounts of their learning.

Chapter one

BEGINNING WITH R.: BACKGROUND TO AN INQUIRY ABOUT ADULTS' CONCEPTIONS OF READING

R. and her classmates had little or no experience with reading 'academic' texts when we met on the first day of the DVST reading course. In fact, few of these students had completed high school. Those who did, got by without doing much reading because they had been in modified programs. While the open door policy of community colleges means anyone can attend, people need to be skilled readers to be successful in career programs or general studies. The aim of the reading course I taught was to help students improve their reading and keep the college's "open door" from swinging shut.

The adults in R.'s class were admitted by two routes: they either met the entry criteria established by the new DVST assessment (requiring among other things that readers be able to distinguish between their own views and those of a writer) or, they had a CTBS score within a 7.5 to 8.0 grade level range. Although students had been grouped together in a conscious way, I did not assume that their experiences of reading would be alike. To get a better sense of this diversity, I asked people to answer three questions on the first day of class: "what have you read in the last two weeks?; what do you like to read?; what causes you difficulties in reading?".

Everyday reading

R. and all eighteen of her classmates said they read newspapers and magazines. The newspaper of choice was The Province, although some read The Vancouver Sun and one read The Globe and Mail. The magazines were special interest publications on fitness, cooking, muscle building, needlework, travel, motorcycles, or romance. These choices reflected the hobbies and tastes of a group of strangers whose ages ranged from late teens to mid-forties, with the majority in their twenties.

Reading threaded its way through people's everyday lives. Some read television guides; others read their children's homework; some read both. A few read unemployment insurance forms; some read work-related pamphlets. Still others read manuals on how to use computers, set-up VCR's, or get a driver's license. People read material from organizations where they were members: churches, the military, narcotic and alcohol-abuse support groups, trade unions, women's centres, the auxiliary police corps, and student politics. Unlike adults who were new readers, these people read well enough in their everyday lives to read store signs or laundromat directions (cf. Proudfoot, 1992) and material related to college registration procedures. Deciphering public text was taken for granted and omitted from accounts of what had been read.

During the two week period before the semester started, very few students mentioned reading books. Of the five who did, four read novels, three people reading ones written by Stephen King, who was each person's favourite writer.

Two students in the class had "never read a book to the end". Follow-up appointments with students revealed that most people only read books occasionally.

This class's reported uses of reading correspond to the framework Shirley Brice Heath (1983) establishes to categorize the range of reading she found in three Piedmont Carolina communities described in Ways With Words. For residents from white, working class Roadville, reading served five of six general functions: *instrumental*, meeting the practical needs of daily life; *news-related*, finding out about third parties or distant events; *confirmational*, verifying facts or beliefs already held; *social-interactive*, knowing about upcoming social events or activities; and, *recreational/educational*, planning outings and holidays (p. 220). Like people from Trackton, a black working class community Heath also includes in her study, Roadville residents--and R. and her classmates--typically did not "read to increase [their] abilities to consider and/or discuss political, social, aesthetic, or religious knowledge" (p. 258). This sixth reading function, *critical/educational*, however, was commonplace in the homes of townspeople, Heath's third community, where blacks and whites from the self-described "mainstream middle class" lived. For these townspeople, popular novels were listed under both *critical/educational* and *recreational* uses of reading (ibid.). By contrast, the longest texts named in the recreational reading category for Roadville residents were preschoolers' bedtime stories (p. 220). In Trackton, neither novels nor children's stories were read (p. 198). In common with people from these working class communities, most students in R.'s class tended to read only what was

needed to solve practical problems, keep up with social and organizational news, know about world events (often by reading headlines), and plan free time.

Reading preferences

What R. and her classmates liked to read pretty well matched what they said they read. Everyone read newspapers to find out more about the people in the news; television was "too quick". Some also read newspapers because, as one person put it, "you get on top of recent news". No specific books or authors were named other than Stephen King (whose books, from what I gathered, had a cult status because they terrified readers and people liked the feeling). Some students enjoyed "reading facts" while a few preferred "fantasy", but I did not explore individuals' reasons behind these preferences.

The time people in R.'s class spent on reading varied from "hardly any" to the commonplace "sometimes" to the rare "whenever I can". Newspapers were glanced at and parts of articles were read if they caught people's attention. While I was not in a position to actually observe whether adults in the reading class had similar reading habits to the working class families Heath describes, her observation about Roadville reveals an interesting contradiction: "Everyone talks about reading, but few people do it; and of those who do read, few follow through on any action which might be suggested in the reading material" (p. 220). She notes that reading was valued and "enthusiastically endorsed by all of Roadville", as was schooling in general (p.219), yet texts of more than one page would seldom

be read in their entirety. Written materials, referred to briefly, were frequently set aside to be read 'later'.

Students in R.'s class, like their counterparts in ABE and high school equivalency programs elsewhere, typically read less than the general population (Rachal, Leonard, & Jackson, 1991; Smith, 1990), but no one said they did *not* like to read owing to difficulties they experienced when reading.

Perceived reading problems

When asked "what causes you difficulties in reading?", a number of students listed reading comprehension skills such as "main idea" or "inference". By their own accounts, these adults did not think their understanding of everyday reading materials was seriously affected by a lack of word analysis/decoding skills. "Words", "pronouncing words", or "understanding words" were only named as difficulties by a few students. One person wrote that she hated reading aloud and then told me at the beginning of our appointment that she would leave the class if I 'made' her. Although this kind of warning is sometimes interpreted as a way for adults to mask substantial decoding problems (Gambrell, 1989), this student 'heard' all the words in her head when she read texts. Like other adults who have been humiliated when reading in public as children (Biggs & Bruder, 1987), she wanted to avoid any activity which involved reading aloud. Other students would also mention the odd thing about their histories as readers during the first week of appointments. Yet, when I tried to find out why a reading skill like the "main

idea" had been listed as a reading difficulty, for instance, few individuals had anything to add. Some seemed to think it odd that an instructor would ask the obvious and simply said, "you know...I just have trouble finding the main idea".

People generally thought their reading was "okay" and a few mentioned that they might not "really need" a DVST course, but they were willing to go along with the recommendation. In fact, what these adults readers knew how to do at this time--since 'skills' are never an entirely individual attribute nor a fixed thing--did not yet encompass what needed to be in place to read and understand college-level assignments. On the second day of the course, for instance, people chose articles to read from a collection where all the articles had eye-catching headlines but 'text readability' varied (Baldwin, 1992). The degree of difficulty of reading materials alone (Huggins & Adams, 1980; Ojemann, 1934), as measured by this single factor, meant that some articles were inaccessible to some individuals. Students, without exception, struggled through ones from The Globe and Mail, preferred those in The Province (which had been the majority's newspaper of choice), and found vocabulary and ideas "harder to get" in The Sun compared to The Province. One person only felt comfortable reading Westcoast Reader, a plain-language, large-print publication for adult literacy students. In brief, students' perceptions of their own reading abilities seemed naive in relation to the academic reading requirements associated with the courses they planned to take.

R.'s reading difficulties

R., whose student number allowed her to enrol in a first year university transfer credit psychology course, felt that if she worked hard enough and read all the materials handed-out in this class she would get a good mark; she did tell me, though, that the textbook was hard to understand because it was poorly written. Like other students in the DVST introductory academic reading class, R. did express some concerns about her reading ability. But, when I originally read her response to "what causes you difficulties in reading?", I did not appreciate the significance of her answer. Listed along with other reading difficulties she named--"the language", "sometimes sitting so long on one spot", "concentration for a longer period"--was a reference to "remember all the names". At the time I thought this concern was similar to those expressed by a few of her classmates where long texts, concentrating when material was uninteresting and, in these circumstances, wondering if you would remember what you read, were frequent worries. In fact, there appeared to be little connection between this account of R.'s and what I took to be her main reading difficulty--a persistent problem in attending to substantive ideas in a variety of texts.

Her preoccupation with details surfaced early on in the course. In the second week of classes, students were asked to read specific texts before class and to come prepared to discuss the writers' ideas. One article highlighted the Canadian mathematician Anatol Rapoport's discovery of a 'tit-for-tat strategy' for settling conflicts cooperatively. In this article, the writer describes the strategy,

illustrates its effectiveness in relation to 'Prisoner's Dilemma'--a famous games theory puzzle, and goes on to discuss the strategy's usefulness in relation to international confrontations and interpersonal conflict. The last paragraph of this one-page article emphasizes collaborating over competition and contrasts a 'we' approach to an 'I' one. Throughout the text, facts about Rapoport's life are mentioned in passing as are other details such as where 'Prisoner's Dilemma' was played, when, and so on. Since the strategy--"cooperate first, then mimic whatever the other person just did"--is not what readers expect it to be, it is easy to misinterpret the key points of the article. I wanted to draw people's attention to the critical importance of knowing *what* the tit-for-tat strategy *is* before discussing its merits. I also wanted them to work together in small groups to read, as many times as they wished, those sections of the text which would allow them to act out the possible deals the two prisoners might make. Then, on this basis, the logic behind the strategy could be better understood. Everyone, except R., became intensely involved in the work; she had focussed on details about Rapoport's life in her reading prior to the class and found the work in class frustrating because people did not pay attention to the 'facts' and could say "whatever they want to". While R. wanted me to tell her what she should 'know' about the article, her classmates went on to discuss their reaction to the comparison the author makes between the tit-for-tat strategy and the ethical rule, "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you".

This example was not unusual. As I became more familiar with R.'s work, a pattern emerged. In a classroom context where an emphasis on "controversial issues" brought the kind of reading activity Heath (1983) describes as *critical/educational* to the fore, R. was floundering. Her relationship to the text was unclear; she still had difficulty separating what the writer said from her own opinion on a topic. On the one hand, her interest in politics and social issues led to animated exchanges with classmates who, in turn, respected her knowledge of current events and the tenacity with which she presented her ideas. On the other hand, despite frequent objections from others, R. continued to substitute her opinions for those of a given writer, her views rarely coinciding with what the writer wrote. Similarly, summarizing a short newspaper article, whether verbally or in writing, was very hard for her to do. When R. did try to describe her understanding of a specific text, meaning was often reduced to unconnected, discrete items. She searched for facts to collect and learn--"I just skim and scan for them like one teacher told me to do".

Compared to her accounts of another ABE class she attended, R. now found herself involved in quite a different classroom dynamic. Where she had once worked through a succession of graduated workbooks featuring brief reading passages and related multiple-choice questions--always following the categories of main idea, supporting details, inference, and vocabulary--she saw and felt **progress**. Thrust into a situation where, as Kazemek (1991, p. 55) puts it,

Literacy is a personal, social, cultural, contextual, gender-related and constructive process whereby a particular individual builds meaning with a particular text depending on her particular purposes for reading and writing,

she found the **process** invisible and messy. Her progress was not linear. She wanted to be told facts; she wanted to be given answers; she wanted to be taught. R. continually asked if the class could use workbooks or computer programmes since she did well 'at reading' with this kind of instruction and "I know other people would too". Given my approach to teaching reading, these were not resource materials that I used as part of the course or in tutorial appointments with students.

A comment of R.'s made me think that her ideas about academic reading might be undermining her efforts to acquire certain reading skills and strategies. She referred to her mounting frustration with the course and the amount of reading she had to do: "I can't remember all the names; I just can't remember everything". When I, in effect, dismissed this concern, R. told me that she wanted to be a *good reader*. Although we met regularly to review course assignments, R.'s **own** notion of what reading involves in an educational setting had not been discussed explicitly. I asked her to describe academic reading. The essence of her response did not differ from what she had been saying all along: each word is a single idea; all the words count; words represent information to be remembered.

R.'s conception of reading

R.'s expectation of what she called "serious reading" was consistent with her memories of academic learning in both European and Canadian school systems. Until she left school halfway through grade nine, knowing dates, names, facts and figures by rote mattered. You proved you understood reading assignments by answering detailed questions without looking at your books, or at least this was R.'s lasting impression of her schooling. Her return to formal learning led to a revised and more extreme version of this impression. Since college was an institute of 'higher' education, 'everything', she reasoned, or at least 'more' details had to be remembered. This, she imagined, was how someone became expert in a field of study.

With a new appreciation of R.'s concerns in mind, I asked a simple question: Could some of her difficulties be traced to her conception of reading? This perspective led me to revise my understanding of R.'s situation.

In many respects, R. had internalized the "banking notion of education" Freire describes, where education is an act of depositing and the teacher is the depositor who fills the "containers" or students (1989, p. 58). R.'s conception of learning from reading, accordingly, was one in which good readers "remembered everything" deposited.

I became convinced that R. 'filtered' what she was learning from the course through her own conception of reading. A telling example involved her interpretation of a self-questioning reading strategy that was designed to develop a

reader's ability to make meaning through *internal dialogue* or what, in effect, is a reader-directed conversation with the text. Instead of applying this strategy in the intended way, R. used it to find 'important' facts and concluded that her own strategies worked better. Given her purposes, she was right; a skim and scan approach is an effective reading technique if you are looking for 'something' known in advance.

In brief, R. did not really know what to do as a reader unless authoritative questions guided her reading. This is why she preferred *doing reading* using reading workbooks or computer programmes where the questions that follow each reading passage trigger familiar reading practices. The search for answers, for example, involves predictable skill-based patterns and pertinent information is typically found near capitalized proper names and dates or other signal words that appear in the questions' text. Indeed, it is possible to have a perfect score without 'conversing' with the text. In other words, the reader's attention does not have to be engaged by the ideas expressed in the passage, nor do the passages have to be understood to answer questions correctly. In fact, a form of *copy matching* (Cole & Griffin, 1986), where bits of text are copied word-for-word to match bits of text from the question, can give the impression of comprehension. The phenomenon of copy-matching and what it reveals about reading difficulties may go undetected (see chapter three for a detailed discussion of 'copy matching'), especially if it is hidden by a multiple-choice format. Certainly, this was the case with R.. Moreover, without the external prompts of predictable, text-driven questions, R.'s skim and

scan techniques did not work in the way she expected; 'what' was she looking for?

My reluctance to ask skilled-based questions effectively left R. without a workable reading strategy. Even if the reader understands the text, the problem with text-driven questions is the shift in emphasis from personally-meaningful reading to reading based on someone else's agenda. When reading becomes a way to answer text-driven questions again and again, at least in the case of adult readers,

The internal dialogue or self-questioning that is the hallmark of a good reader never has a chance to develop, nor are any connections made beyond the confines of the text itself--from the material used in the classroom to the experienced 'world'. Simply put, students' approach to learning is in keeping with the anticipated testing or 'questioning' in most cases.
[Malnarich, 1987, p. 5]

Some questions, of course, can promote critical thinking in the way they are written and how they are used. For instance, at the beginning of the reading course, focus questions help students prepare for class discussions by drawing attention to areas of the text that are particularly significant, open to interpretation, and so on. Likewise, instead of reading or marking individuals' answers to these focus questions, parallels between the kind of individual reading (and preparation) that occurs before the class discussion and the kind of collaborative learning that results can be emphasized. By addressing these types of connections *what 'good' readers know how to do* is made visible using students' own work as positive examples. The point, however, is to make sure questions do not stultify reader curiosity and thinking.

Students in the reading course develop the metacognitive skills to monitor their own understanding of an author's argument through a process in which general focus questions are gradually replaced by paraphrasing assignments and these, in turn, are replaced by paraphrasing 'used at your discretion' (along with other strategies) when the meaning of text is unclear.

By mid-point in the semester, in contrast to the classroom activity described above, R. was still collecting 'important' words to learn. And, she selected them with the skill-based reading workbook format in mind, her internal schema. This initiative represented her version of a new, personal reading strategy. Viewed through her conception of reading, if "each word is a single idea", then learning *key words* would be a way to understand *key ideas*.

Stepping back from the particulars of R.'s case, the differences between her conception of reading and mine--and the consequences of each for *doing reading*--meant that we were working at cross-purposes. Cole & Griffin (1986) capture our two diametrically opposed approaches to reading in comments originally intended for teachers of reading:

...we should be trying to instantiate a basic *activity* when teaching reading and not get blinded by the basic *skills*. Skills are always part of activities and settings, but they only take on meaning in terms of how they are organized. [p.127]

R. had internalized theories and practices of reading which reduced the activity of reading to mastering basic skills. In fact, the repertoire of what she knew how to do as a reader--skim and scan, answer skill-based questions, identify facts--had undergone minor alterations in-the-midst of developmental course work and related

tutorial appointments. Despite my instructional approach, which tries to keep the activity of reading intact, her view of reading had not changed.

I decided to challenge R.'s conception of reading head-on by examining with her *what reading is* in the first instance, and then, in the second, by broadening our discussions to include the specific requirements of academic reading. In other words, I decided to address the conflict between R.'s and my versions and approaches to reading explicitly. As Kidd (1973) suggests, conflict between the adult student and adult teacher is not "necessarily undesirable" but..."can be the basis for effective learning by *both*" (p.38). By challenging R.'s advanced organizer for reading (Ausubel, 1968) and her internal reference for organizing her perceptions and actions related to reading (Vygotsky, 1987), I hoped to provide her with a better foundation for developing another version of *doing reading*. For my part, I expected to learn more about ways to effectively teach adults reading.

The entry point would be through R.'s own *linguistic-experiential reservoir*-the expression Louise Rosenblatt (1989) uses to remind us of our relation to language, "a socially-generated public system of communication" and society's "bloodstream" (p.156):

The individual's share in the language, then, is that part, or set of features, of the public system that has been internalized in the individual's experience with words in life situations. The residue of such transactions in particular natural and social contexts constitutes a kind of linguistic-experiential reservoir. Embodying our funded assumptions, attitudes, and expectations about the world--and about language--this inner capital is all that each of us has to start from in speaking, listening, writing, and reading. We make sense of a new situation or transaction by applying, reorganizing,

revising, or extending elements selected from our personal linguistic-experiential reservoir. [Ibid.]

By plunging, along with R., into personally-meaningful experiences of reading, by tapping each of our 'linguistic-experiential reservoirs', I hoped to replace a view of reading as basic skills with a view of reading as an activity--a *whiz* to wherever you want to go.

We would explore "reading" using written material that each of us liked; and, we would discuss what literacy specialists and adult educators say about reading.

A different instructional approach

I brought books from home and photocopied excerpts for R.. The selections were eclectic, chosen to illustrate ways of thinking about reading and to tantalize her curiosity. R. came prepared to discuss *what reading is* in relation to these various texts. I wanted her to realize that a skilled reader--someone with "the capacity and disposition to read freely" (Adams, 1991, p.5)-- has an opportunity to learn rather marvellous things through reading.

We started with Marco Polo's travels from the "Polar Sea to Java, Zanzibar to Japan", his first impressions preserved through written language. R. joined the reading public of the late thirteenth century--a select few--who could read his journal:

Emperors and kings, dukes and marquises, counts, knights, and townsfolk, and all people who wish to know the various races of men and the peculiarities of the various regions of the world, *take this book and have it*

read to you. Here you will find all the great wonders and curiosities of Greater Armenia and Persia, of the Tartars and of India, and of many other territories... For I would have you know from the time when our Lord God formed Adam our first parent with His hands down to this day there has been no man...who has known or explored so many of the various parts of the world and of its great wonders as this same Messer Marco Polo. For this reason he made up his mind that it would be a great pity if he did not have a written record made of all the things he had seen and had heard by true report, so that others who have not seen and do not know them may learn them from this book. [Polo, 1958, p. 33; emphasis mine. Original work published 1295]

R. spotted the reference to "take this book and have it read to you", but *it is R.* who reads and discovers a world through the eyes of a European male of several centuries ago, who introduced and wrote about himself as if he were another person. And, it is R. who questions the exclusion of women and the racial prejudices so starkly revealed. She reads Polo's journal entries, rich in detail, and shares the wonder with her classmates.

We went on to oral histories. Let Me Speak, the testimony of Domitila --a woman of the Bolivian mines and community activist, a favourite of R.'s. She reads stories, essays, political commentary, and poetry written by women who value ordinary women's lives--the heroic in the everyday--the breaking with silences: Meridel Le Sueur, Tillie Olsen, Madelaine Parent, Dorothy Livesay. R. is *reading freely* and 'freeing' herself through reading; she reads about working women's lives because she works part-time in a cafeteria and wants to be a union organizer. Now in her thirties, R. feels truly empowered by the stories of women who have taken risks to transform their adult lives. Reading that moves her, reading that allows her to meet people she would never meet otherwise, reading

that she wants to tell everyone about...this kind of reading she cannot reduce to names/dates/facts/figures.

We went on to explore other texts that speculate about scientific discoveries and where, for instance, accounts of how things work from zippers to light switches direct R.'s attention to the ideas behind formulas in physics.

We made the most headway by examining the fit between experiences of writing, *what someone knows how to do as a writer*, and experiences of reading, *what someone knows how to do as a reader*. R.'s description of herself as a writer--'it' being any topic she writes about--gave direction to our inquiry: "You think about it, you write it down, you read it to hear if your own writing of it makes sense, you correct it so that other people can understand". This account of writing led R. to revise her version of reader expectations. By understanding writing as a way to convey meaning, she realized that through reading, readers 'reconstruct' this meaning. Finding and understanding the bigger *it* in each text became a critical aim, not finding 'important' facts.

R. moved towards a version of reading where both communicating ideas and interpreting these ideas in a personally meaningful way has value. Names were no longer important in themselves, nor were dates, nor was matching every word to a distinct idea. And, what R. chose to read outside of class eventually included some fiction. Of all the various accounts of what reading and literacy involves from decoding to metacognition, the phrase "reading the word and the world" (Freire & Macedo, 1987) captured R.'s imagination and helped her conceptualize

another, less restrictive view of *doing reading*. Her pleasure in her reading successes made me think we were on the right track. She was a less anxious reader and approached text in an inquiring way--what does this writer want to tell me and what do I think about these ideas?

This development marks a significant breakthrough in R.'s approach to reading. What she now knows how to do as a reader broadens R.'s "zone of proximal development" (Vygotsky, 1978). Her experiences as a reader now include the gist of reading as an activity. She reads not to select and memorize bits of text, but to understand the writer's views, herself, and her own possibilities. She understands the purpose of paraphrasing and is working with the help of others on paraphrasing assignments; she knows what it means to use 'context clues' to figure out the meaning of some words; she takes more interest in classmates' interpretations of texts. R.'s reading is in flux, new reading skills are 'in development'.

R. in transition

For R., the writings of Tillie Olsen and Meridel La Sueur, in particular, valued and validated her experience. Reading their words, she 'rewrites' events in her life and 'reconstructs' the text as part of this reading process. She has been introduced to another version of *what reading is*. This discovery is pivotal to her development as a reader.

Rosenblatt (1989) helps us understand why this may be the case for R. "Reading", she writes, "is an event, a transaction involving a particular reader and particular configuration of marks on a page, and occurring at a particular time in a particular context" (p.156); "meaning...happens between reader and text" (ibid.). But, depending on whether reading is one of two kinds, the reader's stance and the reading process associated with each, differ.

The type of texts R. had mainly read before she enrolled in the DVST reading course, for instance, represent *efferent reading*, where "attention is centred predominantly on what is to be carried away or retained *after* the reading event" (Rosenblatt, 1989, p.159). All five of Heath's (1983) categories that describe the range of reading found in the three Piedmont communities--and among R. and her classmates--are types of efferent reading. Heath's sixth category, 'critical/educational', where readers read to increase their "abilities to consider and/or discuss political, social, aesthetic, or religious knowledge" (p.258), which is not in evidence in the two working class communities, represents both efferent reading and another type of reading. This kind of reading which moves R. and cannot be reduced to facts, Rosenblatt (1989) refers to as *aesthetic reading*, where "attention [is] on what is being lived through *during* the reading event" (p.159). What distinguishes one type of reading from the other is not the texts themselves--for instance, Livesay's poem "Day and Night" compared to Rapoport's journal article on the tit-for-tat strategy--but rather the reading process which "produces the

meaning" (p.158) associated with each. And, it is the reader who produces this meaning.

Rosenblatt describes the relationship between the reader and the text in this way:

Essential to any reading is the reader's adoption, conscious or unconscious, of a stance. As the transaction with the printed text stirs up elements of the linguistic-experiential reservoir, the reader adopts a selective attitude, bringing certain aspects to the center of attention and pushing others to the fringes. A stance reflects the reader's purpose. The reading event must fall somewhere in a continuum, determined by whether the reader adopts a "predominantly aesthetic" stance or a "predominantly efferent" stance. The difference in stance determines the proportion or mix of public and private elements of sense that fall within the scope of attention. [Ibid.]

While any linguistic activity within the 'efferent-aesthetic continuum' has two components--a public, or "lexical, analytic, abstracting" one and a private, or "experiential, affective, associational" one (p.160)--R.'s experience as a predominantly aesthetic reader represents an entirely new and 'private' experience of reading for her. This is pivotal in her development as a reader because she reads and experiences *making meaning* that matters to **her** for the first time; she reads and she *interprets* texts.

But this experience of agency did not automatically redefine R.'s practices as an efferent reader. Adopting a stance is something she does as a reader in particular circumstances. Moreover, as Rosenblatt points out, "a stance reflects the reader's purpose" (p.159). Yet, in school, where efferent reading--or reading to learn and remember--is the norm, the purpose a reader 'chooses' is dictated in many respects. R.'s conception of reading, for instance, had already been shaped

by such a context, in which what she knew how to do as a reader was dependent on external prompts--the question format of reading workbooks, text-driven questions, and instruction where reading as an activity had been reduced to discrete reading skills. In these circumstances, the locus of power is separate from R.. The reading she does is 'public' and it has also been reified. Someone other than R., the teacher, acts as the intermediary between her and reading. The teacher selects, directs, and legitimizes (that is, 'marks') what reading is. R. has been denied the right to construct knowledge (she is taught) or to be in charge when reading (she depends on external prompts). In short, until the DVST reading course, R.'s schooling had not *authorized* her to be a maker of meaning at any point in the efferent-aesthetic continuum.

Texts, agency, and authority

The links R. drew between reading and memorization (her version of reading and remembering) were difficult to sever once and for all. Like any other student, she moved in and out of contexts where quite contrary ideas and practices about teaching and learning coexist within the same educational institution. R. was caught between two entirely different classroom situations where different approaches to learning and reading informed curriculum, instruction, and evaluation. In one, the DVST introductory academic reading course, her conception of reading was being challenged. In another, more prestigious first-

year university transfer course, her conception of reading as memorization resurfaced and flourished.

To complicate matters, as R. moved from a DVST course where her progress was based on a mastery model to a university-transfer course which used a grade-point marking system, her questions about text veered off in a predictable and familiar direction: How can you tell what will be on a test? How many questions will be trick questions? How do you study for these? In a relatively brief period of time R. had joined the ranks of "cue-conscious students" (Miller & Parlett, 1974) whose learning was driven by how they were examined. R.'s scouring of the psychology textbook for items to memorize was not just a throwback to an earlier conception of reading. She was also driven by pressures to "make the grade", an externally-imposed but highly-potent constraint to students' self-directed, independent learning (Becker, Geer, & Hughes, 1968).

Earlier reading practices and the desire to do well in college courses proved to be a volatile mix. Five of six major assignments in her introductory psychology class, for instance, were based on tests compiled from a battery of multiple-choice questions instructors ordered with the textbook. To get good grades, so R. claimed as did other students, you had to memorize definitions of terms since learning the exact phrasing made the difference between identifying the best answer instead of one that was almost right. For R., one way of doing reading matched the 'cues' she was getting in a course where her results would determine whether she would

be on probation or not; another way of doing reading--the reader as meaning maker--had less immediate returns.

The reinforcing of R.'s earlier ideas and expectations about reading happened on many fronts. Common to them all, though, are practices related to how texts are typically regarded and used in school contexts. These practices prevent the development of reader agency.

Texts, especially those associated with a predominantly efferent reading process--and particularly textbooks, exude authority (a description that already implies the reified 'power' of the text). The linguistic properties of the textbook, David Olson (1989) notes, "separate speech from the speaker, and that separation in itself may make the words impersonal, objective and above criticism" (p.239). Furthermore, as Carmen Luke, Suzanne de Castell, and Allan Luke (1989) point out, the authority vested in textbooks relies not only on the words themselves but on how textbooks are used and related expectations. For instance,

various 'markers' inserted by authors and editors for instructional purposes... constrains what is to count as "being in the text". Very different information is rendered explicit, with the textbook's editorial and graphic format *modifying as it does the reader's response to the prose itself*. [Luke et al., p. 250; emphasis mine.]

R.'s introductory psychology textbook did combine editorial and graphic devices to indicate what sections of the text should be read and retained; bold print, italicized words, mini-summaries, lists of terms to know, fill-in-the-blank and multiple-choice review questions all indicate acceptable 'knowing'. Her textbook also came

with a study guide which provided even more opportunities for repetitive learning of terms and pre-selected facts.

A skilled reader *knows how to read these signals* but R. had never 'read' a textbook; in this respect, she was like many college students. For this reason, most college-level reading and study skills courses emphasize the use of step-by-step textbook reading and studying strategies (see, for instance, Langan, 1982; Pauk, 1984; Weinstein, 1988). Unlike what R. first thought learning in higher education involved, 'every word is not an idea'; nor as Claire Weinstein (1988) advises students, should every sentence be treated "as if it were just as important as every other sentence" (pp.50-51). To avoid having textbook reading turn into "an impossible task", she recommends,

that students understand what different tasks require them to do and think about. Are we trying to recall as many facts as possible or is our goal to apply a set of principles? Will we be required to demonstrate an understanding or must we simply apply rules in a mechanical fashion?
[p.51]

Nevertheless, as Luke et al. (1989) argue, within the prescribed social structure of schools,

how and what the student learns from the text is highly dependent on the specific manner in which the text is taught; instructional practices delimit the pragmatic context within which the text is read and interpreted. [p.251]

In fact, teachers in textbook-driven courses direct students in their textbook reading via "a running metatextual commentary" (p. 252). The textbook,

is always the object of teacher mediation...inasmuch as the text for a particular subject, theme, or topic constrains the content of classroom information exchange, so does the teacher mediate the exchange between

student and the text. And within this communicational system of the classroom--a system supporting a particular structure of information exchange--the student assumes an acquiescent, *nonauthoritative status* in relation to both text and the teacher. [Ibid.]

For R., the single psychology textbook from a 'real' college course, as compared to many different articles from many diverse sources, represented authoritative knowledge you could count on. What she knew how to do as a reader--before I began to challenge her conception of reading--'fit' a classroom where knowledge is taught to students by an authoritative instructor, where objective questions have right or wrong answers, and where there is no ambiguity and therefore, no opportunity to interpret something incorrectly. In the quest for certainty through fixed rules and unvarying methods, R. neither differed from classmates nor from many adults involved in learning something new. William Perry (1970) describes students' preference for right and wrong answers and for certainty and absolutes as "dualism", a first position in a process of intellectual and ethical development.

R. memorized lists of terms for her psychology exam (she had stacks of flash cards) and she did well, but the general conceptual framework and parameters of what psychology is, what psychologists do, and what constitutes different psychological perspectives, eluded her. Her approach to reading text in her university-transfer credit course did not give her the intellectual base from which to discuss ideas in depth. Whether R. could make her way through the complex and contradictory demands of higher education to other positions on Perry's chart

of development remained to be seen. And indeed, despite having done well on multiple-choice tests, R. was ill-prepared when faced with her first research paper assignment.

R. had learned a successful strategy for dealing with her psychology class tests. However, this strategy failed for other requirements. Becoming an independent, self-directed learner within an educational institution includes knowing how to navigate among conflicting course requirements and expectations. Becoming a skillful reader includes knowing when it is or is not appropriate to adopt a certain reader's stance, to concentrate on parts of a text, to use a particular reading technique. *Conditional knowledge* (Paris, Lipson & Wixon, 1983)-- knowing 'when' to do something as well as 'how'--defines a "strategic reader". By the end of the semester, R. had learned, under some circumstances, to create meaning for herself. Yet, she still lacked the flexibility of a skilled strategic reader.

How unique was R.'s case? R.'s underlying conception of reading impeded her ability to become a strategic reader. Challenging R.'s conception of reading allowed me to see what she knew how to do as a reader in a new light. I also realized that contradictory views of reading could coexist undetected within a classroom or tutorial unless conceptions of reading were discussed explicitly and openly confronted. I now wanted to know if what I had learned could be helpful to other students: what significant connections might exist between conceptions of reading and reading difficulties? And related to this, how are conceptions of

reading linked to reading practices? Work with R. raised yet another question: if the instructor and students' conceptions of reading differ--and as a consequence what each considers to be reading difficulties requiring attention--are we working at cross-purposes, no matter how 'learner-centred' our instruction appears to be?

Chapter two

FINDINGS FROM DVST CLASSROOM RESEARCH: ADULT READERS' IDEAS AND CONCERNS ABOUT READING

From working with R., I learned that a conception of reading could serve as an internal organizer for what someone knows how to do as a reader. This insight--and the decision to challenge R.'s particular conception of reading explicitly--marked a critical juncture in her development as a reader; her potential to be a *meaning maker* was realized, albeit briefly. This chapter goes beyond R.'s experience to explore those experiences of other DVST students, for whom notions of agency and authority are embedded in their ideas about reading. Possible links between conceptions of reading and reading difficulties are examined using findings from my classroom research. This discussion reflects the web-like character of classroom inquiry that weaves back and forth from semester to semester and, concerning a course, from group to group.

With R.'s case in mind, I asked people in the next DVST reading class the same questions I had asked R. and her classmates about the reading they did, about their reading preferences, and about their perceived reading problems. And I asked this additional question: what is reading or what does reading involve? By finding out students' ideas about *what reading is* at the beginning of the semester I hoped to have a better understanding of the scope of individuals' knowledge as readers,

including what people in the class could do on their own or might be able to do with the help of capable others (Vygotsky, 1978). I intended to organize classes and peer groups based on these individuals' experiences of reading. I also wanted to adapt the instructional approach developed during tutorials with R. for use in a collaborative classroom setting.

Throughout this chapter, the views of these twenty-one adult readers who enrolled in the reading course immediately after the one R. attended, are the main point of reference. After briefly comparing R. and her classmates' and this new group of students' reading habits, preferences, and perceived problems, this class's ideas about reading are reported in detail along with their concerns about reading. The profile of adult readers' views that emerges is also looked at in relation to students' views from other DVST introductory reading classes and from a college-level DVST learning and study skills course. The initial implications for teaching adults reading are then discussed.

Reading habits and preferences

Just as individuals in R.'s class liked to read newspapers, magazines, and other written material based on personal interests and everyday living, so did the students in the next DVST reading course. Within the new group, though, individuals' reading preferences tended to be more diverse. The comments of three students indicate the range in reading experience found in this particular class. One

person read "anything", while another wrote: "The truth is I never really read."

Still another was in-between: "I haven't really tried different books yet".

Unlike R. and her classmates, fewer than one-third of whom read books, the adult readers in the new class split, almost evenly, into those who rarely read books and those who read books occasionally or regularly. The students who read books tended to list different kinds of reading when asked about their reading preferences. Interests included "autobiographies", "romance novels", "history books on Japan and Israel", "fantasy and horror", "science fiction", and "mythological study materials". During appointments scheduled for the first week of the semester, these same individuals discussed what they were currently reading and referred to certain things they found interesting. Within this grouping, a few students read for *critical/educational* purposes (Heath, 1983); they preferred to read "movie reviews", "articles on politics", or "books that deal in questions and give different theories whether fictitious or serious". Some students, like R. and others in her class, only wanted to read "facts"; three listed the "unknown", "unsolved mysteries", or "scientific wonders" as examples; another referred to "health and nutrition". In contrast to most students who named several relatively specific reading preferences, only two individuals listed "the newspaper" as a reading preference without naming which newspaper or the kind of articles they liked to read.

Conceptions of reading

When I asked people to imagine describing reading to someone who knows nothing about it, individuals' accounts emphasized three distinct aspects of a highly complex process: reading is interactive; reading is a way to gather information; reading is a mechanical decoding. Written quickly without the benefit of discussion during the semester's first class, students' responses reflect their ideas about reading at this time. As the accounts below indicate, students' conceptions of reading focus either on the reader creating meaning, or on the author's intended meaning(s), or on the deciphering of text.

Focus on the reader creating meaning: Five individuals referred to the interactive aspects of reading where a reader constructs meaning and interprets ideas. In these accounts, learning from reading is not confined to the written text; instead of being an end in itself the text becomes a means to broaden knowledge and to explore other worlds. Reading changes the reader and words have an evocative, visual power:

Reading is a way to broaden your knowledge of the world and events around. It is also a good way to use your imagination in fantasy as well as reality. Reading is also a way to understand what the writer is about.

Reading involves many things: vocabulary--level of vocabulary, hard medium, easy (learning new words); speed--how fast/slow you read; language--is it easy to understand? Reading is getting to know the fantasy world as well as the real world around you.

Reading involves concentration, first reading the letter that forms words that are ideas that are translated to the mind and made into visual pictures which form concepts, a point of view or philosophy or understanding or perspective.

First of all, reading is something you do to get informed about something. It can be used as a relaxation method. It involves concentrating on what a person is trying to say, and finding out what the "feel" is in a story.

Reading involves a person looking at words, sentences and piecing them together in their mind and trying to learn as much as you can about the subject. It involves thinking, putting it into perspective, learning why and how what it is that you are reading.

Focus on the author's intended meaning(s): Another ten individuals viewed reading as a way to learn information that someone else knows. In this set of accounts, although reading is described as written communication by some individuals, learning from text is viewed more as a one-way transmission than a dynamic exchange. Information is 'gathered'; writer's ideas are 'understood'. Here, learning from reading is restricted to understanding the text at hand:

Reading is a way of communicating with other human beings. It is to absorb other people's thoughts and ideas without verbally hearing them. To read is to gather someone else's information on paper through 'reading'.

Reading to me is detailed outlook of study.

*Learning different types and styles of writing, different scripts.
Communication = letters, notes, reports, essays, stories. [Reading is]
understanding what the author sees or senses.*

Reading is someone else telling you a story or an event that happened, but it's on paper.

It involves understanding the vocabulary, to learn information or for enjoyment. Being able to read at a normal pace, to find who is saying what.

Reading is words that put together make a sentence that describes what you're reading. Reading gives you information about what you're reading; it can be a story.

It is words that describe or explain something; [reading] makes you understand.

Reading is the mental assimilation of written materials, for study or relaxation purposes.

Reading involves understanding many words (knowing what they mean), and being able to grasp what these sentences are trying to state. Reading tells a story or gives information not by hearing it from someone telling you but by understanding the language which the story is written in on paper.

Reading is a form of communication, a way of learning (storing information), a leisurely way of relaxing.

Focus on the deciphering of text: Six other individuals emphasized the mechanics associated with reading such as "getting the main idea", "reading fast", "skimming", "scanning". In most of these accounts, references to knowing what words mean (vocabulary) or other word analysis and decoding skills dominate:

Reading involves concentration and understanding, to look at the words and sound out the words in a sentence and to know the letters put together in a word.

Letters make words, and put them together, which then makes sentences; then you have paragraphs to read. Then with your eyes you follow one word at a time which then tells your brain the word and meaning and understanding.

It involves moving your eyes, understanding what you are reading, getting the main idea, reading fast.

In order to be able to read you have to know what letters mean. To be able to understand ideas, to have background knowledge about what you're reading helps. To understand the vocabulary in which you are reading. How does it compare to my language?

Reading is a group of words but in sentences and paragraphs to help you with information on an article. Then you understand the article.

Skimming; scanning; find meaning of vocabulary words that you don't [know] the meaning of; ideas; words; phrases.

Based on this reading class's responses to the question *what is reading or what does reading involve*, the following general profile of adult readers' conceptions of reading emerges: a minority describes reading as an interactive process; the majority thinks of reading as information gathering; and a few reduce reading to isolated skills, including ones associated with word analysis and decoding. What might this range in conceptions of reading signify, where the focus shifts from the reader to the author to the text?

Taken together, most adult readers' responses do not mention two fundamental understandings associated with the activity of reading. For instance, few accounts make any reference to the "logic of reading", an expression Richard Paul (1993) uses to describe the 'critical thinking' at the core of reading where as readers, we *translate* the writer's intended meaning into meanings we can understand. And, related to this omission, few of these adult readers think of themselves as readers *doing* reading. Only the five students who describe reading as an interactive, constructive process make any reference to "in-the-head strategies" associated with metacognitive awareness (see Wade & Reynolds, 1989, p.10). In these individuals' accounts of what reading is, references to "us[ing] your imagination", adjusting reading to "fast/slow", making "visual pictures", getting "the feel", and "piecing (words, sentences) together in the mind" suggest that these readers already use some metacognitive strategies, including self-devised 'spontaneous ones' (Wade, Trathen, & Shaw, 1988), to make reading interesting and personally relevant.

By contrast, among all the rest of the students, including the ten who view reading mainly as a way to gather information, only one person mentions anything which suggests the metacognitive dimension of reading:

*Learning different types and styles of writing, different scripts.
Communication = letters, notes, reports, essays, stories. Understanding
what the author sees or senses.*

Even so, this student's reference to "understanding what the author sees or senses" is part of an account of reading which omits any direct reference to 'the reader' and, hence, the possibility of personally-meaningful interpretation of text where "the reader...transacts with the text, not directly with the author" (Rosenblatt, 1989, p.161). Agency is bypassed once reading is conceptualized as the one-sided gathering of information.

As later classroom research would confirm, the profile of reading conceptions held by this particular group of students is representative of the variation and prevalence of different conceptions of reading held by adult readers in subsequent DVST Introductory Academic Reading classes. A dominant conception is that reading is a way to gather information; proportionately fewer individuals view reading as either a mechanical activity or an interactive process.

By contrast, when students in college-level DVST courses are asked what they think reading involves, none **exclusively** refer to word analysis and decoding skills or other mechanics associated with reading; the majority think reading is an interactive process while a minority sees reading as a way to gather information. Almost every account, though, includes references to the "logic of reading" (Paul, 1993) and to methods associated with "in-the-head" reading strategies (cf. Wade & Reynolds, 1989, p.10). This is the case even in accounts where students describe reading as essentially information-gathering; the difference is that the reader is an *active* gatherer of information. For instance, when I asked students from an advanced learning/study skills course--for which the introductory academic reading

course is a prerequisite--to describe reading, references to metacognitive strategies [underlined] are included in account after account. Metaphors related to vision dominate:

Reading to me is a concept of learning through print. Communicating through print that helps us best understand what the person is trying to put forth. Reading sometimes helps us visualize what a writer is trying to tell us.

Reading is going over someone else's pre-recorded data or information or their personal views. To be a well balanced reader you need to take an overview of what you read. Listing topics--headings and subheading categories. Read through your reading; stop at any time and re-read any data which you do not understand. Keep a list of unfamiliar words. Look up these words after and enjoy building up your vocabulary.

Reading involves understanding of content or text, and grasping ideas put across. Reading involves seeking information or to seek answers to questions. It also involves broadening your concept of various subjects.

Taking words in print into your mind and understanding their meaning based on your previous understanding of those words. Putting words in print into images like a picture of the concept or action that you are reading. Reading sometimes involves going over the material numerous times in order to get a clearer picture of what the idea is and pick up more detail.

Reading involves concentration. One hundred percent of your time. Wanting or trying to be involved by involving yourself. Try to picture yourself in relation to what you are reading. If you don't enjoy or try to enjoy what you are reading, you are wasting your time. Reading involves believing in what you are reading and being interested.

Reading is understanding something in print form. If you read a novel, it is like watching a television except you picture the story in your mind not on a television screen. Reading is using your imagination. Reading is

talking without sound. Reading also allows you to look something over time and again until you understand it. It is permanent speech.

Reading involves your interpretation of the article or textbook read. Visualizing, thinking, and retaining all of the information. Reading it over once or twice to understand it fully. Also discussing with another who has read the article or textbook their interpretation of same.

Other students' responses from this college-level advanced learning and study skills course describe personal feelings about reading. In one student's 'minute paper' (Cross & Angelo, 1993), which refers to types of script and the way "eyes and brain work together", the writer makes these observations:

Knowing how to read depends on what it is one is reading. One could even read an expression or look on one's face. But reading from paper and letters placed side by side to make words, and then putting the words together to make sentences and then paragraphs and then taking in what the words say and allowing the brain time to figure it all out so that it all makes sense. And finding out that through your reading your other functions from your emotions to your sense of taste and touch and even to a sense of great excitement or fear or love or pity or to bring one to tears. Oh, reading is a special thing...people can run away in fantasy, escape into the past or whiz into the future.

M.'s fuller account of reading is the only one in which the critical importance of adopting a reader's stance is explicitly stated. The conception of reading expressed is from a predominantly 'aesthetic' stance where, as Rosenblatt notes (1989), "the reader adopts an attitude of readiness to focus attention on what is being lived through *during* the reading event" (p.159). She further notes that "welcomed into awareness are...the sensations, images, feelings, and ideas that are the residue of past psychological events involving those words and their referents"

(ibid.). As in R.'s case, the reading of selected literature envelops the reader, M., in potential meaning-making. Indeed, "the goal of literary work", as Roland Barthes's (1974) essay "On Reading" points out, "is to make the reader no longer a consumer, but a producer of the text" (p.4).⁵ Compared to many of her classmates' accounts of reading which refer to metacognitive skills but remain text-bound, M.'s version of reading is distinctive. When readers *run, escape* and *whiz* through reading, she clearly does not have textbook reading, as practiced in schools (Luke, Castell, & Luke, 1989), in mind.

Self-reported reading difficulties

Although I asked students I taught in the DVST reading course as well as the DVST learning and study skills course *what causes you difficulties in reading?*, Patricia Cross (1981) cautions against the use of such a question since adult learners often say what they think will be "socially desirable" when they are asked about their *own* learning. If these same individuals, however, are asked to comment on what they think other adults like themselves think, their answers are quite different. In one study Cross cites regarding adult participation in educational activities, "lack of interest was a leading barrier (26 percent) attributed to others, but fewer than 2 percent were willing to admit that lack of interest deterred their own participation" (p.107). Unfortunately, I was not aware of this research when I asked students--new to my classes and in some cases new to Douglas College--to describe their personal reading difficulties. Despite the direct

wording of the question, students in the DVST reading course named many reading difficulties. Perhaps, the fact that the DVST programme is known as the part of the College which 'helps' adult learners succeed in formal learning environments accounts for the apparent lack of reticence on individuals' parts to answer such a question; or, many students might regard this kind of questioning as commonplace since their experience in modified programs within the public school system involved similar 'diagnostic' procedures.

By contrast, the relatively proficient readers from the college-level learning and study skills course identified few reading difficulties, save for those related to the quantity of material students are required to read and 'know'. For the majority of these mature students who return to school after an absence of four to fifteen years, meeting course requirements had to be juggled with family and job responsibilities. Most regretted not having time to think about ideas or to discuss coursework with others. Their concerns have less to do with reading in general and more to do with exam preparation and the selective reading of textbooks, since only one or two of these adults would regard themselves as experienced or effective readers of college-level texts.

A contrary picture emerges when the twenty-one students in the reading class answered the question *what causes you difficulties in reading?*. Various reading skills and strategies are referred to repeatedly. Concerns related to decoding dominate some accounts. One adult reader simply writes, "words". Other comments are more revealing: "trying to recognize a word when you are reading at

a fast steady pace"; "being able to understand some of the words when reading"; "I don't know how to pronounce some of the words and know their meanings"; "reading a word __exactly the meaning" (a word has been crossed-out and not replaced); "small letters/vocabulary/reading slowly"; "spelling or words I don't know" (this same student in response to the question 'what do you like to read?' read 'what' as 'why' and, answered, "It tell[s] you things you don't know"). Proportionately more students, though, name difficulties related to reading comprehension: "being able to understand the point in which the author is trying to make"; "not understanding what the author is saying at times"; "main ideas"; "the ideas behind the words"; "lack of background knowledge on a lot of things"; "the authors view in what they're writing, getting my own understanding"; "picking out the most important info"; "I read a large section of something and look back and not remember any of it!". One person, after naming one problem after another-- "vocabulary", "context clues", "main ideas" and so on--ends the list by concluding that "not having the basic skills" causes difficulties when reading.

These students' accounts of their reading difficulties suggest they are wrestling with what David Olson (1986) refers to as the "critical problem in reading", namely the ability to distinguish between *what sentences mean* and *what we mean by them* along with "an explicit understanding of the relations between the two" (p.146). This ability, in his view, is both tied to literacy and a by-product of literacy insofar as "writing creates a meaning problem" (p.156). "Language", Olson notes, "serves as an expression of meaning" (p.145), yet,

with reading and writing, the "meaning" tends to be dislocated from the intentions of the speakers--what *you* mean--to the surface structures of language--what *it* means. School talk is largely about what words, sentences, and texts mean and only secondarily about what I mean, you mean, or they mean...When children learn to read, they are not reading to recover the intentions of a speaker as they do when listening to talk, but rather trying to recover the meanings of words, sentences, and texts. [Ibid., pp.145-146]

Part of the difficulty in grasping the "logic of reading" (Paul, 1993) is tied to the complexities involved in working out the relations between *intended meaning*, *sentence meaning*, and *interpreted meaning* which, according to Olson (1986), has to do with the character of writing where *what was said* or 'sentence meaning' is preserved through writing words, but not the 'intended meaning' of the speaker or writer (p.156). Since the "intentionality" of language rests on the notion of shared meaning, language is the means for expressing our intentions as well as the means for interpreting the intentions, ideas, and feelings of others (p.145). As Olson indicates, a reader needs to be able "to break down any utterance read or heard into two parts, what was said and the interpretation he or she assigns to it. The preferred interpretation is the speaker's intention if it can be recovered" (p.157).

The reader 'recovers' meaning from the text not only in relation to linguistic rules alone, but also in relation to what the reader knows about the world: "the means for going from sentences to intentions is a context--a situation or a possible world" (p.147). Yet, for many students in the DVST reading class, Olson's 'possible world'--conjured up from a personal *linguistic-experiential*

reservoir to use Rosenblatt's term for the "inner capital...each of us has to start from in speaking, listening, writing, and reading" (Rosenblatt, 1989, p.156)--has not been a 'world' broadened nor especially enriched through reading. These students, like R. and most others who attend the DVST introductory academic reading course, do not read widely or often.

A constant factor involved in many adult readers' understanding of their own reading problems is simply "interest in a story". Three people from the class of twenty-one students, for instance, found subject areas "boring" (science, history, world affairs) while four others singled out "novels". One person even went further: "It has to be something that interests me or I won't read it". The following comments are representative of those made by six of the seven people who had trouble "concentrating when reading":

Sometimes I won't be interested in what I'm reading and I'll start to skip the sentence or not pay any attention to what I'm reading.

Concentration. My attention gets easily lured away. Daydream. I read a large section of something and look back and not remember any of it! Especially fiction! Very boring!

Keeping my mind focussed on what I'm reading (usually anything I read).

When students identify "uninteresting material" or "concentrating when reading" as the cause of reading difficulties as the majority of students did (and perhaps more might have 'indirectly' if I had been aware of Cross's caution), it suggests that *what they know how to do as readers* has not tapped their 'linguistic-experiential

reservoir', for as Rosenblatt (1989) notes, "in the linguistic event, any process will be affected...by the physical and emotional state of the individual (e.g., by fatigue or stress). Attention may be controlled or wandering, intense or superficial" (p.156). These factors enter into the reading transaction and "affect the quality of the process" (ibid.). According to Rosenblatt,

In reading, the continuing sequence of words on the page may prod the reluctant or confused reader to move ahead. But if the signs on the page have only tenuous linkages with the experiential reservoir, the reader will often give up the frustrating attempt to make new meanings. [Ibid., p.164]

Reading, in these circumstances, neither taps nor, in turn, enriches an individual's 'experiential reservoir'.

Suzanne Hidi (1990) also views interest as a "mental resource for learning", where interest "is central in determining how we select and persist in processing certain types of information in preference to others" (p.549). As students in the DVST reading class observe about their own experiences of reading, interested readers concentrate better and with less conscious effort (see Hidi, p.562 for a summary of related research). The reading preferences of these students such as "new scientific wonders", "the unknown", "unsolved mysteries", "romance novels", or "theories whether fictitious or serious", support Hidi and Baird's (1986) finding that readers remember what they have read when, for instance, "surprising information" and/or "human interest factors" are present in texts. For many of the students in the DVST reading class, their apparent passivity in relation to reading, from their accounts at least, seems to be tied to the kinds of reading assignments

associated with schooling, particularly whether or not as student-readers they had opportunities to choose texts and interpret texts *for themselves*. As discussed previously in relation to R.'s case, the work of Luke et al. (1989) on textual authority points out that when teachers mediate text-reading, "the student assumes an acquiescent, *nonauthoritative status* in relation to both text and teacher" (p.252).

Once agency is removed from the student-reader, the ability to make a distinction between what Hidi (1990) refers to as the "processing of interesting text segments and the processing of important ideas in text" (p.565) remains underdeveloped. As Rosenblatt (1989) indicates, the ability to make this distinction rests on "the reader's adoption, conscious or unconscious of a stance...the reader adopts a selective attitude bringing certain aspects to the centre of attention and pushing others to the fringes" (p.158). Those readers who remain disinterested and disaffected by what they are expected to read have little opportunity to experience reading as an interactive activity. This 'prior knowledge', though, is the basis from which a reader learns to choose between either a predominantly 'efferent' or predominantly 'aesthetic' reader's stance. This is why of all the reading difficulties named by individuals in the introductory academic reading classes, "lack of interest" speaks to a legacy of *doing reading* without agency; reading becomes a disempowering experience.

Adult readers' understandings of what they know how to do (or not do) as readers--will reflect what they have 'learned' about themselves as readers from teachers. What is striking about students' accounts of perceived reading

difficulties, both written and verbal, is the adept use of words and phrases from the language of reading instruction typically employed by teachers to identify reading difficulties in relation to specific skills and strategies. As Walter MacGinitie and Ruth MacGinitie (1986) note in "Teaching Students Not To Read" if the reading curriculum emphasizes the '*mechanics* of reading' and deemphasizes "writing practice and the reading of literature and content-rich material", then students who have received this type of reading instruction will also emphasize the mechanics of reading since "students learn what the curriculum emphasizes" (p.257). In fact, most of the reading problems mentioned by adult readers from the DVST reading class of twenty-one students can be easily mapped onto a 'fundamental level articulation guide' developed by ABE literacy instructors (Ministry of Advanced Education Training and Technology [MAETT], 1992) as Appendix 2 illustrates. The fit between students' descriptions of perceived reading problems on the one hand, and the language of reading instruction typically used by teachers on the other, as summarized in the MAETT guide, appears to be a good one.

In the MAETT guide, headings, subheadings, and related text indicate various reading competencies associated with 'word analysis/decoding', 'reading comprehension'--*literal, interpretative, inferential, critical*, and 'metacognitive strategies'--*prereading, monitoring, reflecting* (pp.23-24). A self-reported difficulty such as "identifying important information" seems to fall under the 'literal (recalling information)' category of reading competencies since the core skill, according to the MAETT guide, is to "identify subject/topic, main ideas,

supporting details, and sequence" (MAETT, 1992, pp.23-24). Where students report difficulty, one person's wording has been selected as a descriptor for that difficulty (written in italics in Appendix 2). Two major concerns named by students--"uninteresting reading material" and "concentrating when reading"--have also been listed under the 'literal' heading on the basis that bored or uninterested readers are unlikely to recall what they have read.

Once students' comments from the DVST reading class are grouped according to the appropriate skill or strategy associated with "fundamental level" articulation guide headings, it becomes evident that these adult readers' perceptions of their reading difficulties are understood by them in terms of specific skill areas. Such self-reported reading difficulties fall into two categories, word analysis/decoding and reading comprehension (concentrated in the 'literal' and 'interpretative' sub-categories). The third category which appears in the guide--metacognitive strategies--is not included in Appendix 2, since students do not refer to any problems related to 'prereading', 'monitoring', or 'reflecting'. This omission is especially significant since the distinction between a reader's self-perceived reading difficulties and actual reading difficulties is a critical one for instructors to make. For example, adult readers may not refer to the metacognitive aspects of reading, nevertheless, metacognitive research suggests that skill in reading--and differences between "skilled and poor readers" including those who have been designated as "learning disabled learners", rests on reading-related metacognitive skills (see Wong, 1987, p.190). Or, as mentioned earlier, if students

do not read what someone else has written with the fundamental aim of understanding the writer's intended meaning--they have missed the "logic of reading" (Paul, 1993), an essential aspect of what someone *needs* to know how to do if they wish to be a proficient reader. Insofar as students do learn what they are taught (MacGinitie & MacGinitie, 1986), adult readers' perceptions of their own reading difficulties and what they think reading is or involves in an academic setting will be shaped by *the way reading has been 'done'*--and talked about--in schools and in ABE classes they have attended.

Conceptions of reading and self-reported difficulties

A difficulty R. listed, "remember all the names", is both a concern and an expectation quite in keeping with her conception of reading at the time; for R., reading was a way to learn many details about many subjects. Conceptions of reading and self-reported reading difficulties also tend to overlap among the twenty-one students in the reading class as Appendix 3 illustrates.

Individuals who view reading as a mechanical activity refer to problems related to understanding the meaning of words and pronouncing words. For instance, the cluster of word analysis/decoding concerns are greatest for individuals who reduce reading to discrete skills or parts ("letters make words, words make sentences..."). Likewise, the cluster of reading comprehension difficulties at the literal and interpretative levels are greatest for students who view reading mainly as a way to gather information; difficulties are related to identifying important

information, understanding author's ideas, or lack of specialized vocabulary.

Among adult readers in either grouping are those who regard boring reading material as the source of their reading difficulties. In marked contrast, when reading is viewed as an interactive process, no word analysis/decoding difficulties are reported nor do students refer to 'uninteresting' reading materials.

The connections between reading conceptions and perceived difficulties are not unique to the class of twenty-one students. This is especially evident when pertinent sections from a third DVST Introductory Academic Reading class's questionnaires are placed next to one another. Some representative excerpts illustrate this general point:

Reading difficulties: *I need to be able to have a good understanding of what I am reading or there will be a lot of difficulties for me to answer questions about the article.*

Conception: *(Reading is) getting statements or facts from books on topic(s) that you are interested in so you can write a report on that topic.*

Reading difficulties: *I don't tend to have too much problems with the actual reading, except for the fact that when I'm done I can't seem to remember what I read.*

Conception: *Reading is looking at words on a page and transferring them to your brains to promote thought. It's a way for the writer to express his/her creativity.*

Reading difficulties: *Distractions like T.V., radio, people talking, etc.; also I have a hard time concentrating on reading for long periods.*

Conception: *(Reading is) knowledge, insight into other ways of thinking and looking at things. Reading involves discipline and concentration. An open mind.*

Reading difficulties: *When I read, I find I'll skip sentences or words. I can't always remember what I read two or three pages ago.*

Conception: *Reading is understanding something that is written.*

Reading difficulties: *I have difficulties in reading because I cannot understand most words and define them. When I try to read a book I usually end up re-reading a sentence or paragraph many times before I can carry on with the next group. Many times if I try to read a word it looks foreign to me but if someone else speaks the word, I understand its meaning.*

Conception: *When you read, you are taking words and letters off of paper etc. and forming them in your head to make sense of a word or sentence. Reading involves being able to sound out letters and make a word.*

Reading difficulties: *What causes me difficulties is not knowing what words are. That means I don't understand the material. I might know what the word is but not know what it is.*

Conception: *Reading is a bunch of letters that have formed words. You look at these words and they tell you something. It could be something true or not true. Reading involves understanding and time.*

For some of these adults, self-described reading difficulties refer to persistent problems, not with academic text per se, but with any reading. These individuals, however, do not automatically dislike reading. Yet, what they choose to read indicates relative reading skill. For instance, the last two students quoted above said the following about what they liked to read:

I enjoy reading comics, true stories and easy to understand books. I enjoy learning facts.

I like to read true things, things about other people's life. I found it very interesting or even just true stories.

One student's account of his experiences of reading is especially poignant. Asked about his reading preferences, he writes, "The truth is I don't like to read"; he conceives of reading as "the ability to skim over an article, paper or book, and understand the information being stored". As to his own expectations or concerns, he writes:

I have no difficulties in reading, it's just that I lack the interest in reading. I can never read a whole book because of the way most of them are laid out really lacking excitement and suspense. I'm obviously reading the wrong books. Books just seem to be so time consuming.

Some people, including this student from a DVST reading class, can only read text that is simple, familiar, and clearly laid-out. According to Statistics Canada's Survey of Literacy Skills Used in Daily Activities [LSUDA] (1990), these readers "generally do not see themselves as having significant reading difficulties, [although] they tend to avoid situations requiring reading" (p.18). Nor do these individuals read well enough, in the estimation of survey analysts, "to acquire further knowledge using printed material" where literacy is defined as "the information processing skills necessary to use the printed material commonly encountered at work, at home and in the community" (Montigny, Kelly, & Jones, 1991, p.12). The student quoted above, though, **could** and **did learn** from printed materials contrary to the LSUDA 'prediction'.

Developing a common conception through instruction

Not all students whose views have been described throughout this chapter fared equally well in my introductory academic reading course, at least not in terms of the objective of the course and the type of instruction such an objective implies. The instructional strategy I adopted with R., for instance, was less effective for the six students who viewed reading as a mechanical activity and tended to equate reading with decoding (see Appendix 3). Two of these students did drop the introductory academic reading course and I tried to find tutors for them. They enjoyed class discussion and presentations but struggled to read articles the rest of the class often read with relative ease. The other four students from this group elected to stay in the class; I prepared special materials for them on occasion and made sure they did small group work with students who would support their reading efforts.

In general, though, I followed the strategy developed in my meetings with R. and started the course by challenging the entire class's conceptions of reading. We began by looking at diverse ways to write and read the words "reading is a complicated process". To do so, we relied on students' or their family members' knowledge of languages other than English such as Farsi, Mandarin, Punjabi, Cantonese, French, and Spanish. This exchange provided the context for reviewing what the class knew about decoding English, for introducing sound-letter correspondences involved in speaking and writing English, and for addressing misconceptions students had about 'words'. We noted, for instance, that the

number of letters or syllables in a word did not indicate how difficult a word might be to understand ('hippopotamus' as compared to 'id' being one of many examples). Or, related to other vocabulary concerns, we noted how knowledge of the root-affix system would lead to knowing more words than would memorizing the meaning of single words. To illustrate aspects of *what reading involves* beyond the mechanics of reading, I also asked students to choose favourite passages from favourite texts and to briefly describe why they made the selections they did. In particular, I wanted students to realize that as speakers or writers, our purpose is to communicate **what we mean** to others; and, that as readers or listeners, our purpose is to 'translate' other people's intended meaning, expressed in their words, into our own personally-meaningful words.

After a week or so of classes, people re-read a typed version of everyone's first conceptions of reading. I asked individuals to underline what they liked *best* about each account and to note why this was the case in the margin of the text (accounts were not identified by name). We compared views and discovered that although individuals might share preferences, the reasons given are often quite different, that is, each of us 'constructs' meaning for ourselves when reading. After the class, some students took the time to add comments to their original conceptions of reading. Four individuals who had viewed reading as a one-way information exchange, now linked reading to personal involvement or change:

Reading involves understanding what you are reading and learning from it.

Being able to read means to me, opening your mind [to] other people's ideas.

Reading uses your imagination; you make up pictures.

Reading involves almost taking you places you've never been. It expands your mind.

By contrast, one person who had regarded reading as mainly a series of decoding problems, found a brief review of three aspects of reading, as described by some reading instructors, to be noteworthy and simply copied down the text from the overhead:

Reading involves decoding, comprehension, metacognition--to know about knowing.

For this individual, reading remained external at this point, a mystery only an instructor could classify, label, and teach. In fact, this student was one of the two who elected to meet with a tutor once a week instead of continuing in the class: "I want", she said, "to be a good reader sooner".

The majority of the remaining nineteen students' development as readers, over the fourteen week semester, did exceed the course objectives in place at the time. I was especially struck by the range of reading materials most of these adult readers now read and understood, as well as individuals' growing confidence in their ability to monitor their own understanding when reading. These results led me to rethink and revise my own approach to academic reading instruction.

Evidence of a link between conceptions of reading and types of reading difficulties convinced me that a fruitful instructional strategy should:

- Begin with students' conceptions of reading as a way to investigate individuals' expectations about reading;
- Examine individuals' conceptions of reading and their possible connection to perceived reading difficulties;
- Address conceptions of reading in relation to readers' experience of reading texts selected by themselves;
- Involve students in the active construction of new conception(s) using what they know how to do as readers as a basis;
- Emphasize the 'logic of reading' in class discussions of specific, detailed sections of text;
- Focus on developing individuals' metacognitive, metalinguistic abilities in relation to *doing reading*.

My consistent use and ongoing adaptation of this instructional strategy marked a shift in emphasis in my own development as an instructor. I became more attentive to individuals' understanding of key concepts in all classes I taught. For instance, in math courses, depending on the content, we would thoroughly examine the ideas and practice behind such terminology as 'place value', 'fractions', and 'variables' before studying related computational or problem-solving skills and strategies. Likewise, in the college-level learning and study

skills course, what is meant by an 'argument' in an academic context might be the focus for discussion before students would be asked to summarize and then respond critically to an author's viewpoint. And, in the reading course, depending on the topics selected by students for the semester's projects, key ideas referred to in specific articles would be highlighted and discussed in class before individuals read the assigned texts.

Ongoing classroom research revealed that R. was not the only student whose conception of reading influenced the way she read texts; I became aware that many adult readers' ideas about reading affects what they *do* as readers. From an instructional perspective, my classroom research also confirmed that once individuals' conceptions of reading and related expectations are discussed explicitly, adult readers will begin the process of examining what proficient reading actually involves. If this collective and personal inquiry occurs while individuals are reading 'something' that truly captures their interest, then the critical basis for experiencing and developing genuine reader agency is present.

Since many students describe reading initially in relation to finding 'main ideas', 'supporting details', and so on, I soon realized that at the outset of the reading course students ought to be involved in *doing 'real' reading*--the fascinating, complex, and often frustrating activity of figuring out meaning from many kinds of texts which are not written specifically to teach reading. Even if individuals voice a preference for the kind of patterned reading often found in reading workbooks passages, I became convinced that the review or introduction of

selected reading skills and strategies had to occur in the unmistakable context of 'authentic' reading, otherwise students' fragmented versions of reading as one or another reading skill or strategy might be inadvertently reinforced.

But, still, I continued to be concerned by the fact that the instructional approach I was developing appeared to be less effective for some students who were preoccupied by the decoding and word analysis aspects of reading. For instance, those individuals who hoped reading workbooks would be used in the introductory academic reading course generally came from this group. I was also aware that workbooks are designed to represent levels of reading proficiency or what the MAETT articulation guide (1992) refers to as *stages of reading readiness*. In fact, in this guide where reading is described as "a dynamic, interactive process [where] the reader integrates personal knowledge and experience with information from the text to construct meaning" (p.23), the ABE/literacy instructors who wrote this account of reading offer the following instructional advice:

The skills and strategies of reading should be adjusted to accommodate the stages of reading readiness, learning to read and reading to learn. Reading at all levels is facilitated by instruction which presents reading skills and strategies as parts of an integrated process focusing on reading as written communication. [MAETT, 1992, p.23]

The qualitative distinction made between "stages of reading readiness" suggests that instruction suited to whether a student-reader is mainly *learning to read* or mainly *reading to learn* will either facilitate or, presumably, hinder individual reading acquisition. Despite my criticisms of graded or levelled reading programmes, I wondered if findings from my classroom research, especially some

students' perceptions that 'words' are their main difficulty when reading, signal a particular developmental level within "stages of reading readiness" not served by the instructional approach I favoured. In the next chapter, the contention that "the skills and strategies of reading should be adjusted to accommodate the stages of reading readiness, learning to read and reading to learn" (ibid.) is examined in detail, including the implications for teaching adults reading.

Chapter three

INTERNALIZING TEACHERS' TALK: "STAGES OF READING READINESS" AND EXPERIENCES OF READING

As indicated in a previous discussion of my classroom findings, many DVST students' ideas and concerns about reading follow a pattern. To summarize briefly: depending on their course placement, most students describe reading by emphasizing either decoding, comprehension, or metacognition. For instance, in the DVST programme in which individuals enrol in various classes based on in-house reading and writing assessment results, students from introductory academic reading classes think of reading in three distinct ways, but the majority refers to reading as information gathering. By contrast, among more proficient readers from college-level learning and study skills classes, the majority thinks of reading as an interactive, metacognitive process and the minority as information gathering--but no one focuses exclusively on reading as decoding. Some individuals' accounts from reading classes, though, do reduce reading to word analysis skills.

Collectively DVST students' ideas and concerns about reading correspond to the hierarchically-organized categories of reading competencies outlined in the provincial MAETT articulation guide (MAETT, 1992, pp.23-24). In turn, this guide for practitioners is informed by a 'reading readiness' model of reading development, first proposed by Jeanne Chall (1983), where the pivotal dichotomy

made between *learning to read* and *reading to learn* has specific teaching implications, including a "phonics first" instructional emphasis.

To some, my classroom findings may appear to support a reading readiness approach to teaching adults reading. The purpose of this chapter is to question the pedagogic appropriateness of a reading readiness model and to propose an alternative way of thinking about what findings from my classroom research actually represent. The fact that adult readers' conceptions of reading and perceived reading difficulties match the skills and strategies associated with a reading readiness approach to teaching reading, need not necessarily imply that such a model is an accurate account of reading acquisition or preferred reading instruction. Instead, I shall argue that students' familiarity with the language of reading instruction could as easily reflect the fact that teacher's talk has been 'internalized' by many of our students. In other words, adult readers often express their experiences of reading in concepts and terms that are not theirs; in effect, they ventriloquate the authoritative voice of the instructor.

An appropriate frame for this chapter is an image Dorothy Smith (1990a) uses to convey the problematic she addresses when developing a feminist sociology of knowledge. Building on Gail Scott's words for the split relationship to language women experience--"undernurtured woman's voice" compared to the "fathertongue of patriarchal institutions" (cited in Smith, p.3)--Smith understands "our use of the language and conceptual practices of the fathertongue as entering us into those relations as agents or objects" (p.4). Likewise, many DVST students

experience a similar split in relation to language but it is the 'teachertongue' of schooling which reinterprets and overwrites individual experiences of reading and delimits the possibilities for developing reader agency and voice.

This chapter begins with an alternative interpretation of what the fit between students' conceptions of reading, on the one hand, and categories of reading competencies on the other, signifies. Then, Chall's reading readiness model and related organizational and conceptual practices in adult basic education are investigated. The discussion highlights the model's origins and the consequences of its use in remedial reading and ABE classrooms. Finally, whether the model's key premise, the dichotomy between learning to read and reading to learn, is supported by current research on reading acquisition and reading development, is examined. The experience of one adult reader, anxious about his ability to pronounce words and to know what words mean, is recounted in detail to illustrate some of the instructional issues associated with a reading readiness approach to reading development.

Classroom findings and the absence of agency

As my classroom research evolved, I became aware of a striking contradiction between what students *know how to do* as readers and what they *know how to talk* as students in a reading class. In the introductory academic reading course, for instance, individuals would refer to various reading skills such as "finding the main idea" in class discussions and in conversation with me, yet

with few exceptions these same students could not readily identify or discuss key ideas found in instructor-selected as well as student-selected articles and texts.

This 'reading metatalk' diverts attention from a pervasive subtext--the absence of reader agency--which underlies other findings from my classroom research noted in the preceding chapter. In contrast to findings which explore adult readers' conceptions of reading and perceived reading difficulties, these findings are grounded in *experiences of reading*, defined earlier as what someone knows how to do as a reader. As such they illustrate how critical reader agency is to the development of skillful reading.

First of all, few adult readers in DVST reading classes demonstrate a working knowledge of the metacognitive aspects of reading. The fact that most of these students exclude themselves from their accounts of reading is telling. Predictably, reading is experienced as a passive, often indiscriminate information-gathering activity unless an instructor provides question prompts to guide reading; individuals flounder if the relationship between the reader and the text is not mediated by an authoritative teacher or an authoritative question/answer format (Luke, de Castell, & Luke, 1989).

But such authoritative mediation is not necessarily a form of interim support whereby the conditions for developing reader agency are already present and with careful fostering will lead to reader autonomy. Rather, mediated reading instruction which withholds agency can train students to be what Michael Cole and Peg Griffin (1986) call a good "copy-matcher" (p.121). Indeed, I had not

appreciated how many students are copy-matchers until I realized in retrospect that R. could answer specific questions about a text correctly without understanding what she read. She had learned to do this by matching key words (used to name individuals, events, methods, and so on) in a reading test question with the same key words in the text; she then copied out the phrase next to these words. I had not noticed this when first working with R. because her use of a copy-matching procedure was as sophisticated as Deanna's, the fifth grade student whose reading practices alerted Cole and Griffin to this phenomenon in the first place:

She transforms nouns into pronouns and adjusts verb tense and aspect appropriately, but otherwise gives a verbatim copy of the text in her answer, including spelling and punctuation marks.

Interpersonally, in synthesis with the adult, Deanna can substitute the adult analysis of reading (that includes synthesis of abstract representations of sounds into words and comprehension of whole stories) for her analysis of reading as copy matching. Unless special care is taken to engineer the interactions, this "passing" (Goffman, 1959, 1969) goes unnoticed. [Cole & Griffin, 1986, p.121]

Deanna's copy matching was detected when she complained that a question was unfair because the key word (in this instance a person's name) appeared three times in the text she was reading and she didn't know which reference to choose for her answer.

The prevalence of copy-matching may be one reason why most students' initial accounts of reading and their early work in class provides little evidence to suggest that the fundamental, communicative "logic of reading" (Paul, 1993), that is, the reader's responsibility to understand a writer's intended meaning, has been

grasped or, if understood, can be realized in practice. Indeed, given this second finding, when students are able to meet two stated learning outcomes of the introductory academic reading course--identifying the essential points in an author's argument and summarizing these ideas in one's own words--this represents a real advance in individuals' reading ability since both these skills assume a measure of reader agency.

Finally, a reader establishes agency in relation to a text by adopting a stance: "a stance reflects the reader's purpose" (Rosenblatt, 1989, p.158). Most students in the reading classes--and a majority in the learning and study skills classes--have a history, in a school context, of simply reading what teachers give them to read. The type of questions students are asked about this reading signal whether a mainly efferent or aesthetic reader's stance should be enacted. This is one reason why students' ability to differentiate between circumstances which might lead to one stance being preferred over another remains underdeveloped. For instance, when adult readers in the DVST programme are given an opportunity to describe their reading preferences, some students from the reading classes are wary initially of any reading which is not 'factual'. This preference is tied to concerns about evaluation and the belief that if a text is predominantly factual, a reader can only be asked questions that have "right" or "wrong" answers.

Efferent reading as practiced in schools is the kind of reading experience many adult readers recall when they describe reading as "information gathering". Even if most students also read for information in their daily lives, adult readers

who return to school--including those in the learning and study skills course--are concerned about 'how much' of the information they are exposed to should be retained. Opportunities to adopt a stance as a reader, not in relation to school requirements but for oneself, presupposes that individuals are readers; very few individuals enrolled in the reading classes I teach read texts of any length or complexity.

As these findings from my classroom research indicate, the development of skillful reading is integrally linked to the development of reader agency. In the course of learning reading, though, why do some individuals develop genuine reader agency while others do not?

'Reading readiness' in theory and practice

Gary Miller (1993), one proponent of a 'phonics first', reading readiness approach to reading instruction within the ABE/literacy field, states the problem this way: "If a person can't read the words off the page, s/he certainly doesn't have access to the author's meaning" (p.9). According to Miller, "older remedial reading students" (ibid.), who are typically in ABE classes, represent the proportion of the population which requires explicit phonics instruction. "Reading-failure students", to use Miller's expression, have not, he claims, had the benefit of systematic, intensive phonic instruction in grade school.

The reading curriculum Miller has developed and teaches focuses on decoding and encoding skills and includes 'six strands', which he refers to as oral

reading, phonetic dictation, real dictation, silent reading comprehension, listening comprehension, and taped reading. In this reading programme, "the student must achieve mastery of the complicated alphabetic-phonetic structure before we become solely concerned with the comprehension skills" (p.8). He advocates teaching "real phonics" where, unlike "phony phonics", phonics instruction is the instructional focus; student programmes are individualized and students advance based on a 'mastery model' (one step is completed before proceeding to the next):

The decoding and encoding skills must be mastered. Token phonics causes only more frustration and misery. With some severe L.D. students tokenism can be worse than no phonics at all. [Ibid.]

Marilyn Adams (1991) in Beginning to Read: Thinking and Learning about Print, also regards "good phonics instruction" as essential to fluent reading and its acquisition:

...deep and thorough knowledge of letters, spelling patterns and words, and of the phonological translations of all three, are of inescapable importance to both skillful reading and its acquisition. By extension, instruction designed to develop children's sensitivity to spellings and their relations to pronunciations should be of paramount importance in the development of reading skills. [p. 416]

Yet, Adams, who emphasizes the interdependence between meaning appreciation and orthographic facility in acquiring reading fluency, praises children's reading programmes (see pp.419-422) which do not teach the phonemic structure of spoken words and spelling-sound correspondences "in a vacuum". Adams and Miller may not agree on the preferred approach to teaching phonics to children or adults, but their shared concern regarding the omission or downplaying of phonics instruction

in reading curricula--and the consequences for 'at-risk students'--can be traced to the work of Jeanne Chall.

Chall's influential book, Learning to Read: The Great Debate, first published in 1967 and revised in 1983, tackled head-on the question of how best to teach beginning reading. As a result of her research, Chall became an advocate for teaching 'phonics first'. She took this stand in a particular context where, as Adams (1991) notes,

the most widely used reading programs still followed the whole-word, meaning-first, phonics little-and-later approach to beginning reading that had been the mode for decades. [p.32]

During her inquiry, Chall investigated alternative instructional strategies, their assumptions and objectives; she met with different programmes' supporters and detractors. According to Adams,

Each interviewed individual was asked to present his or her own convictions on the definition of reading and on the ways its nature or process might change with skill, age, or experience. They were asked to give their thoughts on reading readiness and to discuss the proper balance between emphasizing meaning and emphasizing code in terms of both pedagogical considerations and the motivations and interests of the beginning reader. They were asked to reflect on issues of vocabulary, content, illustrations, and the roles of connected reading (oral and silent) and writing in reading instruction. They were asked to comment on the classroom logistics of teaching reading and the appropriate level of parental involvement. They were asked to explain why some children fail to learn to read and whether children, in general were learning to read less well than they had been fifty years before. [Adams, 1991, p.33]

But, as Adams observes, the people interviewed did not think ineffective or sub-standard reading instruction was the problem; instead, people needed "to read more and better than ever before" (ibid.).

Chall extended her investigation to find out the best and most effective ways to teach children to be skilled, independent readers. She examined classroom materials and teaching manuals from twenty-two different reading programmes; she visited over 300 classrooms from kindergarten to grade three and from poor to well-to-do school districts in the United States, England, and Scotland. In effect, Chall's work reconceptualized and reorganized familiar ground for instructors; she spoke the language of practitioners and gave voice to 'their' issues which emerged from a graded, school context where instruction--save for foreign language classes--was exclusively in English.

Hence, Chall's reading readiness model and its derivatives are bounded by a uni-lingual school context; in this model reading is only learned and taught at school. Stages of reading readiness are tied to grade levels, determined initially by age, and then these constructed grade levels are tied to the mastery of designated reading skills and strategies. The fundamental distinction in Chall's model between *learning to read* and *reading to learn* serves as an instructional short-hand for school and classroom management: broad and narrow teaching and learning objectives are established for the 'graded' reading curriculum; reading level or 'grade' placements are assigned and reported-on; and, within this thoroughly graded classroom, problems related to uneven reading development are temporarily solved by sending 'at risk' students out of the home room into remedial reading classes.

Reading stages and 'appropriate' remedial instruction

Many DVST students in my reading classes are graduates of the special classroom (as they are in Miller's and every other ABE programme). As such, much of what these adults know how to do as readers, along with their conceptions of reading and perceived reading problems, can be traced to the relative effectiveness of standard reading remediation instructional practices.

In a paper titled, "The Effect of Early Reading Failure on Acquisition of Knowledge Among Students with Learning Disabilities", Vicki Snider and Sara Tarver (1987) sketch out the kind of remedial reading instruction which facilitates "acquisition of increasingly complex reading skills and strategies" (p. 351). Their model is based on five of Chall's six stages of reading readiness. These correspond to the stages of the original model which Chall thinks apply to the reading development of adults (she omits Stage 0, where knowledge-based strategies are used to reconstruct stories).

Like Chall, Snider and Tarver believe that if phonetic instruction is delayed--specifically an explicit, age-appropriate teaching of **how** the English alphabet works--students who have not *learned to read* cannot *read to learn*:

...accurate decoding (stage 1) is a prerequisite to fluency (stage 2). Both accuracy and fluency are necessary for the acquisition of knowledge in stage 3. Stage 4 builds upon the knowledge acquired in stage 3. The acquisition of the highly specialized knowledge in stage 5 is dependent upon the rich base of information acquired in stages 3 and 4. [Snider & Tarver, 1987, p.351]

Indeed, in Snider and Tarver's account, children who do not move from stage to stage at the expected pace are described as 'poor readers' by grade 1 and, by

grade 3, they are considered 'learning disabled'. Unfortunately, this kind of spurious diagnosis is familiar to many students who end up in ABE.

The remedial instruction Snider and Tarver alternatively summarize and recommend represents a more intensive implementation of Chall's reading readiness model, as does Miller's (1993) reading programme for "reading-failure" adults. Snider and Tarver (1987), in keeping with a reading readiness approach to reading development, regard reading as "a continuously developing skill" that follows specific stages:

Learning to read does not stop when a child is able to decipher the printed code. Once children become competent decoders (i.e. able to decode both quickly and accurately) reading becomes a tool for reading and understanding. Such understanding is, to a great extent, dependent on prior knowledge. [p.351]

In the initial decoding stage (Grade 1), poor readers have difficulty "grasping that words have parts--phonemes, syllables, morphemes" and lack metalinguistic awareness. Without intensive prephonics and phonics instruction, basic decoding skills will not be acquired and deficiencies and/or delays "can interfere with the development of reading fluency" (p. 352).

In the fluency stage (Grade 2 up to the end of Grade 3), the ability to decode rapidly and accurately is now considered a "necessary prerequisite to comprehension". Students with 'reading disabilities' require more practise and repetition to reach the degree of familiarity associated with automaticity.

Decoding is still a problem when these students are given complex stage 3 reading materials associated with *reading to learn* (begins around Grade 4). Before moving

from stage 2 to stage 3, Snider and Tarver think students should meet specified reading speed and accuracy norms.

In stage 4, the reading for meaning stage, emphasis is no longer on "deciphering the print" but on "understanding the content", the knowledge base expanded through the understanding of vocabulary concepts and passages: "...prior knowledge facilitates comprehension and comprehension enriches and expands the knowledge base" (p. 354). Inaccurate and laborious decoding affects the acquisition of knowledge since the "rich knowledge base...essential to comprehension of stage 3 reading material and to further development of reading in stage 4" remains undeveloped (ibid.).

In the relationships and viewpoint stage, (entry to high school) metacognition becomes critical, especially readers' ability to monitor their own comprehension and, if problems arise, to know how to compensate. For 'learning disabled students', self-questioning does not improve comprehension since more basic skills associated with stages 1, 2, and 3 have not yet been mastered.

In the final synthesis stage, intensive study in a specialized subject area is a pre-condition for synthesizing information from many sources as a basis for proposing hypotheses. This integrative reading does not occur in all domains; an accomplished reader in one area can read at a lower stage in another, given unfamiliar topics.

Researchers, who have pieced together underachieving learners' experience, claim the picture is relatively consistent; initially poor decoding skills far outweigh

other deficits. And, what later appear to be comprehension problems can be traced to inadequate decoding skills dating from the beginning stages of learning to read. Poor decoding skills make it hard for students (now labelled learning disabled) "to acquire the prior knowledge (i.e., vocabulary concepts and information)...essential for higher level reading comprehension and intellectual development" (p. 351). As Snider and Tarver indicate, for individuals who remain in initial decoding and fluency stages throughout their school attendance--"who spend many years reading slowly, painfully, and as little as possible"--the educational implications are profound :

...knowledge of the world and vocabulary concepts remains pitifully immature and incomplete. In view of this, it is not surprising that follow-up studies conducted on LD populations provide little cause for optimism regarding their chances for success in later life...The majority of students cannot pass competency tests even when tests are modified...They seem to plateau at the fourth- or fifth- grade reading level early in high school and show no further progress. [p. 355]

Another perspective: L.'s case

L. is familiar with this kind of prognosis. Described as a 'slow learner' or sometimes referred to as 'learning disabled' early on in his school career, he now takes college courses, maintains a B average, and works at a regular job. He also has experienced a version of the kind of reading instruction Snider and Tarver recommend.

I first met L. when he was in the DVST reading class of twenty-one students referred to in the previous chapter. He did not recall being tested for

learning disabilities--other people I've taught typically remember day-long testing and parental reaction to the diagnosis. He did, though, recall being asked to tell his parents to read to him so his reading would improve. The first one in his family to be born in Canada, English is L.'s only spoken language. As a child, he could understand when his parents talked in their first language but he only could say a few words. His Mother spoke enough English to manage outside the home; his Father was more fluent but neither parent was literate in English and only his Father was literate in his Mother Tongue.

At the stage where *learning to read* is supposed to become *reading to learn*, judging from the grade level associated with these stages, L.'s progress was thwarted. He was moved into a classroom where teachers using Direct Instruction packages (Engelmann et al., 1975; Lloyd, Epstein, & Cullinan, 1981) drilled him on decoding and word analysis skills and strategies. Like other children in special classes, he was caught in a contradiction: the majority of school time was spent *learning to read* while, as Snider and Tarver acknowledge, these 'special' learners "are deprived of 6 or more years (grades four through nine) of reading to learn fundamental vocabulary concepts and information" (1987, p. 355).

A discussion of some of the complex issues touched on by L.'s account--such as language learning and use in linguistically and culturally diverse family contexts (Field & Aebersold, 1990; Klassen, 1987) and whether these are at odds with school assumptions and practices--is not included in explanations of why some children do not become fluent decoders of text in the allotted time frame.

Nor is the school system's penchant for "mak(ing) something of differential rates of learning to the point that the rate of learning rather than the learning is the total measure of the learner" questioned (McDermott, 1991, p. 4). Instead, judgements which personalize reading difficulties are prevalent; youngsters like L. are "less insightful" than their peers (Lieberman, 1985, p. 101) or less able to deal with the "cognitive demands" of learning to read English (Gough & Hillinger, 1980; Lieberman, 1985; Mann, 1986; Stanovitch, 1986; Williams, 1986).

Results from this research, however, indicate that unless individuals understand the complex correspondence between letters (graphemes) and sounds (phonemes) they will not learn to read English in the early grades of school since this metalinguistic awareness is the basis for developing a reading vocabulary that is not limited to sight words. Without this awareness, children will continue to memorize the graphic pattern of words and will fall behind their peers because their way of processing words is cumbersome and time-consuming. Lieberman (1985) suggests that,

...most children who have difficulty learning to read are probably those who have been using a whole-word strategy already, never managing to see the alphabetic principle on their own, and thus falling farther and farther behind their more insightful classmates. [p. 101]

Some researchers argue that this situation rarely improves with time, citing the few existing longitudinal studies which have tracked children with reading (and spelling) difficulties (Rutter, Tizzard, & Whitmore, 1976; Satz, 1978).

But L. is insightful, as his written comments on the original questionnaire I handed out demonstrate. When he was in the introductory academic reading

course, he was the student who said, in response to a question about his reading preferences, "I haven't really tried different books yet". L. thought of reading primarily as a way to obtain information. Compared to nearly all other students, his account of reading difficulties contradicted his conception of reading; he referred exclusively to problems associated with a limited vocabulary and underdeveloped decoding skills. He used phrases that reading teachers might use, as did others in his class, to describe perceived reading difficulties.

Yet his description of a technique he devised to help him "pronounce and know words" distinguished L.'s comments from all others: "I read slow. I pretend someone else is reading". He explained later, during an appointment, that he was tired of being held back so he pretended he was a fluent reader **so he could get on with reading**; he insisted that he had made great progress as a result. What was first a confession (he had not spoken of this 'deception' before) became a source of pride in his own ingenuity and good sense. This appreciation of the technique he invented freed him from a restricted conception of his own abilities; he had a chance to model and monitor an effective reading technique of his own making.

For someone destined to remain in a *learning to read* mode since he had not mastered the stages needed to progress, L. had been *reading to learn* for a long time. His everyday reading practices demonstrated a facility with skills and strategies associated with all stages of a reading readiness model: by kindergarten he read words on signs and papers to help his mother out; by grade school he read texts associated with daily life and this included checking legal documents, on his

mother's behalf, after his father died; for years he had read everything he could about cars--physics and engineering principles, manuals on designing and building your own custom vehicle, and more. He was recognized as an expert by peers because of his extensive knowledge.

The technique he devised to handle school texts demonstrated a practical knowledge of metacognitive skills. And, once the DVST reading class introduced him to paraphrasing as a way to monitor text understanding, he used this method extensively when reading.

What L. thought reading involves was what he had wanted most of all from school--to be able to find out things and to know what other people knew who attended regular classes. The special classes and modified programme represented an exclusion from knowledge. His 'reading difficulty' represented what he had learned at school from teachers about his reading in only this domain; his disclosure of the 'I pretend someone else is reading' technique was an argument for inclusion.

Adult Basic Education and 'reading readiness' models

L.'s contradictory experience of reading in and out of school is not exceptional among adults attending ABE/literacy classes. Taken together these diverse experiences should call into question efforts to delineate stages of reading development where literacy is treated as "a single unified competence" instead of a "multiplicity or hierarchy of literacies" (Levine, 1986, p. 4). In fact, there is

mounting evidence that spoken and written language practices vary from place to place and within communities depending on specific contexts (Graff, 1979; Heath, 1983; Levine, 1986; Scribner & Cole, 1981; Street, 1984). This understanding of language acquisition and literacy from sociolinguistic research is discussed later on. For now it serves to shake the very foundation of any model which conceptualizes reading development as an exclusively school-based, linear, unified and general construct where the activity of reading depends on the acquisition of sequential skill and sub-skill hierarchies.

Nevertheless, a number of adult educators and researchers have tried to reinterpret or revise Chall's reading readiness model for adults (Jones, 1981; Norman & Malicky, 1987; MAETT, 1992). Controversy exists over whether the sequence of stages should begin with language experience or intensive phonics instruction (Jones, 1981; Malicky & Norman, 1989; Rigg & Kazemek, 1983).

Given my own classroom research, Charles Norman and Grace Malicky's (1987) use of adults' comments and conceptions about reading to justify their model's recommended instructional focus is especially interesting:

There is little doubt that the people in our study who were at Adult Stage 1 believed in the power of print based strategies. This was reflected both in their miscues and in their comments about the importance of "sounds" and "words" in learning to read. Clearly, then, some focus in this area is indicated, but in light of the need for adults to integrate print and meaning based strategies before they can move to a more advanced stage, it is questionable whether instruction should focus exclusively or intensively on cues within words as many programs do. [p.303]

But, unless adult readers' experiences of reading are carefully analyzed, a belief "in the power of print based strategies" and the "importance of 'sounds' or

'words' in learning to read" would not provide sufficient evidence to support either a reading readiness model in general or, in particular, the placing of individuals at one or another developmental 'stage'. A distinction I made previously between learner-centred and learner-focused instruction suggests that adults' conceptions of reading and their self-reported reading difficulties need to be compared to what they actually know how to do as readers. If we recall R.'s case, for instance, she thought her reading problems would be solved if she could "remember all the names"; I thought that by looking for discrete items to memorize, R. missed the substantive, intended meaning of most written texts. I doubt that placing her at a particular stage in a model of adult reading development--based on her own ideas and concerns about reading--would lead to the instructional strategy which did allow R. to experience reader agency.

Norman and Malicky (1987), along with Chall (1983) and Jones (1981), expect students who move on or are placed in Adult Stage 2 to "direct their own learning" for "without this independence adults may learn how to read but never become 'readers'" (Norman & Malicky, 1987, p. 307). The basis, though, on which adults will *direct* their own learning is unclear. Findings from my classroom research indicate that conceptions and expectations about reading can function as extraordinarily influential 'advanced organizers' which affect what adult readers think they are supposed to pay attention to when reading texts. If individuals are stuck at the beginning stages of a reading readiness model, what will their experience of reading and, hence, their conception of what reading

involves, be? The effects on adults are no less damning than those on children. As Cole and Griffin (1987) point out,

any curriculum that requires children to work resolutely on one level at a time would be minimizing the possibilities of producing adequate reading. The results of such school instruction have a good chance of becoming self-contained; the conditions for transfer of training to the full act of reading do not appear to be available. [p. 119]

In fact, the 'what' and 'how' of students moving from one stage of the reading model to another--and the overall pedagogic implications of these supposed transitions--are not discussed in Norman and Malicky's (1987) account of their model, despite the concern expressed by them in the quotation above regarding the "need for adults to integrate print and meaning based strategies before they can move to a more advanced stage".

But, this oversight reveals what may be the actual interest and utility of importing a reading readiness model into adult basic education which, as supporters of this approach indicate--to use Norman and Malicky's words, is for "planning and implementing programs for adults engaged in literacy programs" (ibid., p.303). In other words, one of the attractions of an adult-oriented reading readiness model--and Chall's original model in relation to the public school system--is that it provides adult basic education teachers and program coordinators with a quasi-instructional rationale for implementing proven and effective classroom management strategies. With the growth of adult basic education, instructors have to cope with a situation public school teachers already experience daily--fewer

teachers for more and more students whose increasingly diverse language learning needs do not fit conventional reading acquisition or reading development models.

The learning to read/reading to learn dichotomy and PDP models

To regard reading as a set of generalized, ordered skills is not the only flawed assumption on which reading readiness models such as Chall's rests. Part of the appeal of the learning to read/reading to learn dichotomy is the belief that fluent reading and its acquisition follow a 'bottom-up', simple to complex order, starting with the mastery of decoding and encoding skills; if you cannot decipher text, you cannot read for meaning.

Yet the advent of computational and mathematical reading models (Rumelhart, 1977), based on *parallel distributed processing* or PDP theories on how the mind works (Rumelhart, Hinton, McClelland, 1986), undermines any notions about the development of reading that are essentially linear. PDP models show that conceptualizing reading acquisition as a sequential, 'bottom-up' process misrepresents the natural processing tasks humans excel at which involve the "simultaneous consideration of many pieces of information or constraints" (McClelland, Rumelhart, & Hinton, 1986, p. 3). Understanding in a distributed model occurs as a consequence of an "interplay" among different knowledge sources, within and between levels, so hypotheses can influence one another over a large output expanse. Processing is described as 'bottom-up' and 'top-down', the

mechanisms at work giving rise to powerful emergent properties where "learning can occur spontaneously as a by-product of processing activity" (p. 4).

The successful development of interactive PDP reading models show that reading involves "simultaneous processing at a large number of levels, including visual feature, letter, word, syntactic, and semantic levels" (McClelland, 1986, p.122). For instance, in one model called HEARSAY, "activation of hypotheses was guided by a set of structures called 'knowledge sources', each of which had expertise with respect to a particular aspect of reading" (ibid.). These included a lexical knowledge source, syntactic and semantic knowledge sources, and an orthographic knowledge source. Syntax and semantics, for instance, exercise a 'mutual influence' regarding meaning in language: syntactic rules make meaning clear as in "the boy the man chased kissed the girl", while semantic relations suggest syntactic structure as in "I saw the grand canyon flying to New York" (pp. 6-7). Constraints are sufficiently strong in these models--and in our own language practices--to force a noun interpretation following 'the' and a verb interpretation following 'to', even if the words selected are not nouns or verbs.

Even if all PDP models are not designed to demonstrate the diversity and complexity associated with expertise, all PDP models embody the principles of constraints and connector strengths which lead to expertise:

If...knowledge..is the strengths of the connections, learning must be a matter of finding the right connection strengths so that the right patterns of activation will be produced under the right circumstances... This is an extremely important property...for it opens up the possibility that an information processing mechanism could learn, as a result of tuning its

connections, to capture the interdependencies between activations that it is exposed to in the course of processing...

We do not assume that the goal of learning is the formulation of explicit rules. Rather, we assume it is the acquisition of connection strengths which allow a network of simple units to act *as though* it knew the rules.

[McClelland, Rumelhart, & Hinton, 1986, p. 32]

One model on learning the past tenses of English verbs, developed by David Rumelhart and James McClelland (1986), illustrates how implicit knowledge of a linguistic rule is produced and, in turn, suggests how beginning readers of English come to learn letter-sound correspondences to the point of apparent automaticity.

Using the idea of connection strengths to reflect the "gradual change characteristic of normal acquisition" (Rumelhart & McClelland, 1986, p. 221), the past tense distributed model simulates a three-stage learning process based on a set of 506 verbs. The root forms of the verbs to be learned correspond to the input pattern while the output pattern represents the model's "current guess" of the past tense form. Beginning at stage one, 10 high frequency verbs are known--8 irregular and 2 regular. Since irregular verbs dominate--such as come, get, look, take, feel--each one is treated individually and generalization is not feasible. By the second stage when 410 more verbs are introduced--76 irregular and 334 regular--the predominance of regular verbs with 'ed' endings results in the model 'learning' the regular pattern, "temporarily 'overregularizing' exceptions that it may have previously learned" (p. 231). At this point only one learning trial out of eighteen exposes the model to the exception to the past tense rule. Whenever the model gets a wrong answer, connection strengths are adjusted between input and

output units to reduce the probability of making future errors. In the third stage of acquisition 86 low frequency verbs are introduced--14 regular and 72 irregular--and when few mistakes are made on seventeen regular patterns, exceptions can be accommodated. By this stage, the model responds accurately to regular and irregular verbs it knows as well as to those seen for the first time (see pp. 232-245 for details of the transition from stage two to stage three). After 500-odd cycles, the correct answer is arrived at almost all the time even though no rule has been learned explicitly.

Of course, the implicit learning of the linguistic rule is not a by-product of neuronal organization per se but instead involves active processing and learning. Eventual expertise in the past tense distributed model depends upon definite preconditions that are representative of other PDP models and, to a degree, human learning: exposure to a knowledge base occurs over time, feedback on answers leads to corrections, and the capacity to generalize based on a classification system is under continual refinement.

The past tense distributed model's simulations are identical to findings from Bybee and Slobin's study of children's acquisition patterns for nine classes of irregular verbs and three classes of regular verbs (cited in Rumelhart & McClelland, 1986). For instance, once children learn early on that 't' and 'd' are usual endings for past tense verbs in English, they can also respond correctly to no-change verbs like 'beat' or 'cut'. Apparently the mistakes children make are based on an incorrect generalization of this no-change rule to verbs where the

present and past tenses differ. In PDP models the exact results occur, with the error rate on no-change verbs equal to that found in relation to the most difficult regular verbs. The model's output also shows that "during most of the learning period the difference between high and medium-frequency verbs is not important. Rather, the differences between different classes of verbs is the primary determiner of performance" (Rumelhart & McClelland, 1986, p. 245). In other words the ability to categorize based on distinctive features appears to be key. Moreover, classification becomes more discerning and accurate in relation to an expanding knowledge base.

Within this context, the PDP past tense model explains why children can generate logical past tenses for invented words (bick, bicked) but give irregular verbs, known earlier, regular past tense endings (comed; came). What appears to be forgetfulness, however, is associated with the model's stage two when all verbs tend to be regularized although the "correct use of irregular forms [is] never completely absent" (p. 221). The actual transition to stage three where regular and irregular forms coexist is quite protracted and, according to Rumelhart and McClelland, covers several years. This stage represents 'automaticity'; the retrieval of information is rapid, relatively effortless, and free of errors.

Poor automaticity is thought to account for many learning difficulties, especially 'slowness' in learning (Gerber & Hall, 1987; Kolligian & Sternberg, 1987; Pellegrino & Goldman, 1987; Samuels, 1987). PDP models, though, demonstrate that individual performance is affected by the extent of an individual's

knowledge base. Contrary to previous ideas, then, slowness in processing information is not a result of too much information; instead, more 'items'--or additional constraints--would actually shorten processing time since information to be interpreted would be less ambiguous and classification of information is more developed.

Automaticity also represents changes in what knowledge is acquired and how it is used. For instance, children who are described as "math disabled" and "slow" at solving problems continue to use pre-school, reconstructive counting procedures when other children are retrieving basic adding and subtracting facts to calculate answers (Pellegrino & Goldman, 1987, p. 32). This parallels an observation Liberman (1985) makes where children who are poor decoders are relying on their ability to read words based on graphic patterns. Shifting from one way of adding and subtracting or one way of reading words to another has less to do with an ability to conceptualize the principle at work and more to do with exposure to appropriate 'information to process' combined with corrective 'feedback' using a method which links new learning to previous learning. Expert knowledge in both addition and subtraction "emphasize(s) the gradual acquisition of declarative knowledge facts, changes in procedural knowledge, and the shift from solution of problems by calculational methods to solution by direct retrieval of addition and subtraction facts" (Pellegrino & Goldman, 1987, p. 25).

PDP models demonstrate how the gradual acquisition of implicit, emergent learning occurs, "thus, at any point in time from preschool age through at least the

fourth grade, a child will have some facts that can be retrieved and some that need to be calculated" (ibid.). As Pellegrino and Goldman note, "math disabled fourth graders have bugs similar to those exhibited by normal, younger children... (but they) are at the lower levels of expertise representing the knowledge and performance of younger children" (p. 28).

Discrimination and automaticity in parallel distributed processing suggests that learning sound-letter correspondences depends on the extent of an acquired knowledge base and connector strengths. But the 'failure' to develop orthographic facility in a specified time frame is not related to having less personal "insight" than other children into the implicit rules that govern sound-letter correspondences in English (Liberman, 1985). Instead, reliance on another system, in this case a graphic one, interferes with the 'new' learning and implies a more protracted learning period since a system is already in place. This delay is interpreted as failure and, then, this school-constructed failure is established as an individual trait. By these means students whose ways of knowing do not fit the school's are held responsible for a system's instructional inadequacies.

School and the learning to read/reading to learn dichotomy

By characterizing the activity of reading and its acquisition as almost exclusively school-based, the opportunity to use individuals' experience of reading outside school to support their efforts to become more skilful readers of different kinds of text for different reasons is lost.

In the first instance, the learning to read/reading to learn dichotomy assumes children do not read before they attend school or, if they do, they are merely 'prereading'. But, as Heath (1983) discovers while investigating literate traditions in a black working class community in the Piedmont Carolinas, "jointly or in group affairs, the children of Trackton 'read to learn' before they go to school to 'learn to read'" (p. 191). They read so they could figure out how to build new toys from old ones, to check price tags at the local store for their parents, to deliver mail in the neighbourhood, to read labels when buying groceries, and so on. Children found their own reading and writing tasks and, "reading is almost always within a context of immediate action" (ibid.). As a consequence, Heath realizes,

Trackton children had learned before school that they could read to learn, and they had developed expectancies of print. The graphic and everyday life contexts of writing were often critical to their interpretation of the meaning of print, for print to them was not isolated bits and pieces of lines and circles, but messages with varying internal structures, purposes, and uses. For most of these, oral communication surrounded the print. [pp. 194-195]

The Trackton children read environmental print without being taught at school.

Heath (1986), reflecting on the significance of this accomplishment, writes:

For these children comprehension was the context rather than the outcome of learning to read. They acquired the skill without formal instruction or reading readiness activities generally used by school-oriented parents with their preschoolers. [pp. 20-21]

Despite this beginning, Trackton readers did not fare well at school. Basic decoding skills and phonics instruction did not make sense (Heath, 1983, p. 268).

Liberman's (1985) observation that "most children who have difficulty learning to read are probably those who have been using a whole-word strategy **already**" (p. 101; emphasis mine) unwittingly focusses on this irony.

Yet, Heath's (1983) account also describes her work with teachers who attended her graduate courses at a teacher-training institution. Heath used her ethnographic research on language socialization processes as an impetus for teachers to explore their own language habits and practices. In a marvellous chapter in Ways With Words, titled "Teachers As Learners" (pp.265-342), Heath documents what her students did to transform their teaching practices

to help their students learn to see their daily actions in new terms: as the recording of events, discovering of patterns, and figuring out of options in making decisions. Then teachers helped students transfer these ways of investigating and analyzing information to the content areas of science, language arts, social studies, English, and mathematics. Within class work the stress was on making linkages between how the students learned information in their daily lives, and ways they could talk about these ways of knowing at a "meta" level.

[p. 339]

For instance, Mrs. Gardner, angered by the fact that her nineteen black first graders had "no chance for success", brought their ways of using and learning language into the classroom and the school's ways of thinking about language into their lives. She taught them decoding skills by connecting their way of reading words by shape to the school way of reading words by sounding them out. By the end of the year all children read at least at grade level with fourteen reading at second or third grade levels. They read stories that were fun and suspenseful; they talked about what they read and tried to figure out what would happen next; and, as she

explained, they "take apart all the pieces of what they've had to use to read for fun" (p. 286).

But, these students' conceptions of reading would not be limited to the 'pieces' they pored over--the shapes of words, the sounds of letters, the words with unusual shapes, the words with identical phonemes, and so on. The approach to teaching reading kept the activity of reading as well as its acquisition intact. By contrast, many of my students' conceptions of reading represent reading to learn, not in full flight, but in its protracted, decontextualized, 'learning to read' steps.

Cole and Griffin (1986) realize that children who have difficulty reading,

have an incorrect conception of the process of reading; instead of using print to help them mediate future activity, they conform as closely as possible to the precise level of the system that their educational experience encourages them to concentrate on. The very tenacity with which they subordinate themselves to instruction fatally cuts them off from the insight that reading means comprehending. They become "text-bound", parroting the sounds of letters and words. [p. 119]

The experience of adults attending DVST reading classes supports Cole and Griffin's observation. Moreover, these students had internalized teachers' talk. As recipients of various kinds of reading instruction, their conceptions and expectations about reading told me what they had been told was important. I knew the school-based 'stage of reading development' where they stalled-out. The fact that no DVST reading students referred to the metacognitive aspects of reading in their initial comments on what reading involves was not because they did not know any metacognitive strategies (using conceptions of reading to monitor how text is read is an example of such a strategy as is L.'s "pretend I'm a good reader"

approach). Instead, the majority of students never 'reached' this stage of the reading readiness model.

As Heath (1986) concludes from her own research and other social and historical studies,

all normal individuals can learn to read and write, providing they have a setting or context in which there is a need to be literate, they are exposed to literacy, and they get some help from those who are already literate. This help, however, need not be formal instruction, nor must it necessarily follow what are frequently believed to be the basic tenets of reading instruction in school graded tasks, isolated skill hierarchies, and a tight, linear order of instruction in sets and subsets of skills. Within this system of instruction, a student's success is measured by a sequenced move through a hierarchy of skills and it is believed that acquiring skills--that is 'learning to read', is necessary before a student is 'reading to learn'. [p. 23]

Most of my students' experience of reading at school, far from being meaningful, stultified learning from reading. L. freed himself by pretending that an authoritative 'someone else' was reading. Robert Hartley (1986) used a similar technique in his youth and transformed his inner voice (and its working class dialect) to that of a BBC newsreader and "good writer" when he had to rewrite his O levels. Years later, when he asked disadvantaged children to "imagine you're clever" before doing a school assignment, their advances were as impressive as L.'s (p. 393).

For many DVST students, anxieties about reading and especially loss of voice are legacies from conceptual and organizational practices associated with a reading readiness perspective. Rarely are children's reading practices prior to attendance at school taken into account; early on the language of difficulties,

deficits, and disabilities is used to label individuals' experiences of reading. In effect, *what someone knows how to do as a reader* has been publicly devalued. In these circumstances, how can reader agency develop? Dorothy Strickland and Bernice Cullinan (1991) highlight the shift in thinking that is required:

Rather than classifying children as readers or nonreaders, we believe it is more important to consider their literacy development as being on a continuum of increasing competence. [p. 427]

Yet most DVST students have been classified already and, although they can read, many do not think of themselves as readers.

In these circumstances, designing an instructional strategy to transform students' existing reading practices through an explicit examination of their ideas about reading made sense to me. While I had no reason to abandon this approach, I still wanted to have a better sense of why some instructional strategies, compared to others, might lead to reader agency and 'increasing competence'. This issue is addressed in the next chapter based on findings from a series of studies done in Sweden which then attracted the attention of British and Australian researchers who report similar results.

Chapter four

EVALUATING LEARNING FROM READING: THE GOTHENBURG STUDIES AND CONCEPTIONS OF KNOWLEDGE

After nearly a decade of research investigating students' experience of learning in higher education, a group of adult educators from Sweden, referred to here as the Gothenburg Group, reached this conclusion: individuals' ideas about learning influence what they think they are supposed to learn and, as a consequence, what they actually learn (Säljö, 1979; Marton & Säljö, 1984; Van Rossum & Schenk, 1984). The implications of this finding for understanding the relations between conceptions of reading and how these affect reading practices and reading comprehension will be explored throughout this chapter.

The groundbreaking Gothenburg research examined individuals' learning of *something* mainly through assigned reading tasks. Students read texts and then described their understanding of an author's intended meaning. Accordingly, the complex endeavour of learning from reading becomes the common ground between students whose experiences of learning in higher education have been documented in the Gothenburg studies and DVST students whose experiences of reading have been the focal point of my classroom research. In fact, the Gothenburg Group's work to reconceptualize learning theory (cf. Shuell, 1986) and mine to support students' efforts to become skillful readers of academic text also share a common

starting-point: *what* someone learns is analyzed first, followed by *how* this learning occurs. Learning (and teaching) are treated as content-specific, not generic practices; and, what students have to say about *their specific learning of something* takes precedence over instructors' views about student learning.

This chapter starts by providing a more detailed orientation to the parallels found between my own classroom research and studies associated with "the qualitative research paradigm on meaningful learning" (Marton, Hounsell, & Entwistle, 1984; Ramsden, 1988) of which the Swedish work is a part--the word 'qualitative' referring to a specific conception of learning and not a research methodology. Selected Gothenburg studies which used reading tasks to analyze learning outcomes are summarized with special attention being paid to accounts of different instructional interventions and their effects on student learning. Lastly, findings related to instructor evaluation of student learning are examined, and the question of the extent to which evaluative practices help or hinder the development of learner and reader agency is considered.

Meaningful learning and conceptions of knowledge

The Gothenburg researchers, influenced by the work of Carl Rogers (1969) and David Ausubel (1968), place *meaningful learning* at the core of their conceptual framework. Rogers's classic question, "Learning: What kind?" (1969) draws attention to what he claimed are two learning extremes along a continuum of meaning: at one end, "the lifeless, sterile, futile, quickly forgotten

stuff...crammed into the mind" which he compares to learning nonsense syllables in a psychology lab and, at the other, "insatiable curiosity" (p. 3). Rogers doubted whether "what is taught is what is learned; what is presented is what is assimilated" (p. 104). Like Rogers, Ausubel also questioned the usefulness of behavioral theories on learning and memory. For him, the learning process has two distinct dimensions as well, 'rote' or memorization and 'meaningful learning'--when a non-arbitrary and substantive relation is made between what is being learned and what is known (1968, p. 22). That meaningful learning involves personal reinterpretation or construction of meaning is mentioned by Ausubel, but he does not develop this idea further.

Ausubel's notion of meaningful learning, along with Rogers's speculation that what is learned probably does not match what is taught, laid the groundwork for the Gothenburg Group's first studies. This research documents students' understanding of key ideas from written texts they have read and from courses they attend. For instance, in one study students in an introductory economics course are asked by Lars-Owe Dahlgren "Why does a bun cost about one (Swedish) crown?" (1984, p. 30). Some students explain 'price', a phenomenon in everyday life, by relying on a commonsense explanation where price is equal to the true value of the bun; others, by relying on ideas from economics, note that price is dependent on the relationship between the supply of and demand for buns. Why students exposed to the same ideas could have such different understandings

led researchers to investigate how 'learning outcomes' might be affected by what students think they are supposed to learn.

Researchers, who had previously overlooked the significance of references made by students to conceptions of learning during interviews in which they discussed their understanding of specific texts, now investigated these students' comments. After extensive investigation, they found that what students say about learning ('conceptions of knowledge') influences what they think they are supposed to learn ('approaches to learning') and what they actually learn ('learning outcomes'). As was the case with R.'s ideas and expectations about reading, students' views on *what learning is* affects their learning. These findings have since led to a number of research and teaching effectiveness projects in Australia, Britain, New Zealand, and the United States (Ramsden, 1988; "Deep Learning", April 1993).

For Dahlgren (1984) and other researchers associated with this research perspective, individuals whose conception of price changes from 'value' to 'supply and demand' experience meaningful learning or *qualitative changes in thinking*: "...the phenomenon of price is now looked at in a fundamentally new way" (Dahlgren, 1984, p. 31). A direction is given to human learning: "To learn is to strive for meaning, and to have learned something is to have grasped its meaning" (ibid., p. 23). Likewise, when students in the DVST Introductory Academic Reading classes become genuinely interested in what they are reading and also begin to include references to personal involvement in their accounts of

reading ("reading expands the mind"; "reading opens the mind"), this marks a decided change in individuals' thinking given their original conceptions of reading.

According to proponents of this qualitative research perspective, however, the dominant rationale for what happens in schools is not based on the centrality of meaningful learning. Rather, schools legitimize a quantitative and reproductive conception of knowledge. Dahlgren (1984) uses the image of the quiz show to suggest the trivialized kind of learning that results: answers are right or wrong; no analysis is wanted so no thinking is required. Conceptions of knowledge, as he indicates, are part of a society's cultural underpinnings and "in its purest and most tangible form knowledge is observable in the educational system" (p. 19). For instance, individuals who have no experience of post-secondary education believe, as R. did, that expertise involves knowing more detailed facts:

...it is not uncommon for people to imagine that university students are working on immensely difficult calculations, that they are subtracting or multiplying enormously large numbers or unbelievably small fractions. Students of history or professional historians are likewise described as people who know "a hell of a lot of history", that is, they know not only the year of an important historical event, but also the precise date...As well as appearing ingenuous, these answers tell us something about the way experience of schooling influences our way of apprehending knowledge. [pp. 19-20]

This conception of knowledge, based on school experiences, also represents an outsider's commonsense understanding of college and university level work.

But, as Roger Säljö (1984) points out,

...a static and factual conception of knowledge is not an invention of schools ...[but is] part of commonsense thinking...[where] the dominance of a factual view of knowledge among teachers and learners can be seen as a

consequence of its domination of the larger cultural context of Western everyday thinking, where there is a strong tradition of construing knowledge in absolutistic terms. [p. 88]

Trivialized learning occurs, then, in a broader socio-cultural context in which a factual conception of knowledge holds sway; R.'s focus on "remembering everything", as well as individuals' concerns about their ability to recall details from texts they have read, can be connected to such a quantified conception of knowledge.

The preoccupation with *how much* someone learns, in its extreme version, is associated with the memorization of details. R.'s experience in the psychology course epitomizes the reproductive character of quantified learning, where students read the textbook (and used rote learning) to prepare for multiple-choice exams. By contrast, a preoccupation with *what* someone learns is associated with understanding ideas and qualitative or meaningful learning.

A premise on which the qualitative research perspective associated with the Gothenburg studies rests is that, save for a very small fraction of human knowledge, most things we can learn about are potentially meaningful. Consequently, research carried out within this qualitative perspective often examines students' experiences of learning and educational institutions' teaching and learning practices with an eye to promoting 'meaningful' rather than 'quantitative', 'reproductive' learning.

Research on 'what is learned' from a student's perspective

In the Gothenburg studies and other related research, a critical distinction is made between investigating a student's perspective on what is learned compared to an instructor's perspective. In respect to my own classroom research, for instance, R. reads a text and I note that two things are particularly striking about what she appears to know/not know how to do as a reader: no differentiation seems to be made between her opinion and the writer's intended message and, in fact, she substitutes her views for those of the writer; nor does R. give any evidence of having adopted a critical "reader's stance" in relation to the article she is reading (Rosenblatt, 1989). But, my perspective on *what is learned* is not R.'s experience; she was looking for something from the text other than the writer's viewpoint. What she says she is looking for would become a focus for research within a qualitative research perspective on meaningful learning.

Unless I explore her experience directly, R.'s experience of learning from reading--a student's--is relegated to an aspect of someone else's reality-- mine, the teacher's. The authoritative framework remains in the hands of the instructor (Smith, 1990a) and, reflective thinking, where "the learner is in total control" (Boud, Keough, & Walker, 1985), is discouraged. By adopting a student's perspective, researchers working within the qualitative research perspective try to give students a distinctive, autonomous voice. Meaningful learning is something students do or do not experience in content-specific ways. The student, no longer

an object whose silence is taken for granted, can become an empowered subject or maker of meaning in the fullest sense.

By analyzing *what is learned from a student perspective*, attention is focussed on understood or misunderstood content (Champagne, Klopfer, & Gunstone, 1982) rather than supposed student inadequacies--limited intelligence, disinterest, no motivation--typically the reasons many instructors cite to explain learning difficulties (Entwistle, 1984, p.13). In ABE programs, instructors might add 'learning disabilities' to this list of individual traits.

Researchers involved in the original Gothenburg studies, though, wanted access to students' 'experience of learning' just as I wanted access, through the use of classroom assessment techniques, to what students' know about reading and learning from reading. Ference Marton (1981) explains the significance for research when the focus is on what is learned from a student's perspective by differentiating between content of a written text and "apprehended content" or content as experienced and conceptualized (p. 184). Since principles of learning are not separated from content, general theories of learning cannot be constructed.

Learning does not involve:

...the transfer of ready-made concepts or principles into empty spaces in the students' heads...In the teaching process, students have various conceptions which we try to change, modify or successively replace. The conceptions held by the students--as a rule--differ from those which the author of the textbook or the teacher is trying to make the students acquire (or construct)...What these conceptions are, however, does not follow either from any general properties of the learning process, or from the subject matter as defined by the teacher or by the textbook. Consequently if we accept the thesis that it is of interest to know about the possible alternative conceptions students may have of the phenomena or the aspects present in,

related to or underlying the subject matter of their study, it is these questions specifically which we must investigate. [pp.182-183]

And this, interestingly enough, is the conclusion I reached as a consequence of working with R. and other DVST reading students. Moreover, once individuals' conceptions of reading became known, contradictory views were commonplace and most students' ideas about reading conflicted with my own.

The research methodology developed to describe, understand, and analyze "what is in the students' minds", to use Marton's expression (p.183), is called phenomenography (p. 180). Although influenced by phenomenology, from which perspective learning is the learning of something, the introspective method associated with phenomenology is actually antithetical to phenomenography (Marton, 1984, p.55). Indeed, its aim is to describe people's conceptions or experiences of reality--not one's own experience nor reality itself. This is why Marton refers to phenomenography as a "second-order perspective" (1981, p. 178). For instance, asking 'what do you think this writer is saying?' implies a different research stance (and classroom practice) than investigating the question from a first-order perspective, 'what does this writer say?'. By asking what a writer says, the tendency is for students to 'reproduce' someone else's ideas. By asking students what they think a writer is saying, the emphasis is on the transactional process readers need to engage in to reconceptualize a writer's intended meaning through the harnessing of what Rosenblatt (1989) has called each individual's own 'linguistic experiential reservoir'.

'What is learned' and approaches to learning from reading

According to the Gothenburg researchers, different learning outcomes reflect different learning processes (Marton and Säljö, 1984, p.37) depending upon whether students adopt either a *deep* or *surface* approach to learning (Marton, Hounsell, & Entwistle, 1984). Other studies have duplicated these findings which link depth of processing to quality of learning outcomes (Biggs, 1979; Schmeck & Phillips, 1983; Watkins, 1983).

The majority of economics students, for instance, who explain price without reference to the market system or the law of supply and demand, do not change preconceptions concerning economic phenomena by reading the textbook or by listening to lectures. Instead, students use newly-acquired economics terminology to relabel commonsense thinking (Dahlgren, 1984).

Studies carried out in all subject areas indicate that these economics students are not exceptional. Despite a background in physics, mechanical engineering students, when asked what forces act on a car travelling along a road in a straight line at a high constant speed, rely on an Aristotelian conception of force for their explanation and not Newton's Laws of Motion (Johansson, 1983). In study after study, researchers noted that individuals demonstrate a facility for the more arbitrary aspects of a discipline (terminology used for labelling), but subject-specific vocabulary has little or no meaning in a problem-solving context. In fact, 'what is learned' through formal courses and the reading of school texts appears to be disconnected from everyday phenomena. In their efforts to

understand why this might be the case researchers conducted a series of reading experiments and, as a consequence, discovered that the way people read an article (and why they choose either a 'surface' approach over a 'deep' approach) affects what they learn.

An account of one text-based experiment, initiated by Marton (see Dahlgren, 1984, pp. 25-26; also Marton & Säljö, 1984), suggests that what someone knows how to do as reader is inextricably tied to what is learned from reading. In this particular study education students, without imposed time limits, were asked to read a newspaper article as they would ordinarily and they were told to expect questions afterwards. The article, written by a Swedish professor of education named Dahllöf in the midst of a public debate on university reform, addresses the contentious issue of pass rates. In his article, Dahllöf criticizes a well-known report which argues that social sciences and liberal arts should be restructured to resemble the vocationally-oriented areas of medicine and civil engineering where pass rates are higher. Dahllöf, however, re-interprets the data from the original report and shows that the situation is unsatisfactory for some students in the social sciences and liberal arts but not for all students. On this basis, he argues that selective measures, not general ones, should be taken to increase the pass rate.

The education students' summaries of Dahllöf's argument show that a range of interpretations exist in one class. Many students in 'translating' Dahllöf's argument into their own words clearly misunderstood his intended meaning.

Researchers, using protocols associated with phenomenography (Marton, 1981; 1984), identified four qualitatively distinct understandings of Dahllöf's viewpoint:

- A. Selective measures should be taken.
- B. Differential measures should be taken.
- C. Measures should be taken.
- D. There are differences between different groups of students.

[see Marton & Säljö, 1984, p. 36]

The majority of students (mis)understood what they had read. Indeed, the range in understanding among these education students in a Swedish post-secondary institution represented what I typically found when students in the DVST introductory academic reading course are asked to summarize a writer's viewpoint after reading a selected article.

Like other text-related analysis done by Gothenborg researchers, differences in learning outcomes are content-based and structural. The structural qualities reflect how ideas are presented in the article--either "conclusion-oriented, descriptive, or mentioning" (Dahlgren, 1984, pp. 26-27). While category A is the more accurate reflection of Dahllöf's argument, both B and A represent content-specific conclusions. For students who do not 'read' the content as a dissenting position within the context of a larger debate, conclusions and their relative significance--including their degree of specificity--will be overlooked. Likewise when the main idea is not grasped, understanding will be fragmentary since there is no referent for determining relationships among ideas. Categories D and C represent description, but they also indicate that the article's purpose and main idea have been missed entirely.

When Marton asked students involved in the reading experiment to comment on how they went about reading Dallöf's article, two distinct approaches emerge. Some students try to remember scattered details and examples from page to page; the focus of their attention is the text. Marton & Säljö (1984) note that this group of readers "did not try to understand the text, they tried to memorize it...their awareness skated along the surface" (p. 40), and hence Marton's characterization of a 'surface approach to learning'. Other students look for the main idea, author's purpose, and any conclusions reached; the text is a means to understand what they are reading about. This is referred to as a 'deep approach to learning' and without "trying to memorize the text ... they remembered it very well" (p. 41).

Yet it is the relationship between what is learned and the approach students take that is striking. The outcome for all students who adopt a deep approach is category A or B, and for those using a surface approach, category C or D (p. 42). Students who miss what the article is about apparently do not look for this when reading:

...all our efforts, all our readings and rereadings, our iterations and reiterations, our comparisons and groupings finally turned into an astonishingly simple picture. We had been looking for an answer to the question of why the students had arrived at qualitatively different ways of understanding the text as a whole. What we found was that **the students who did not get "the point" failed to do so simply because they were not looking for it.** [p. 39]

Marton & Säljö note that students who focus on the pages of the text "see themselves as empty vessels, more or less, to be filled with the words on the

pages" (ibid.). These students view reading as a one-way information exchange, a conception held by ten out of twenty-one students from one of my reading classes.

By contrast, readers who went beyond the pages in the Dahllöf text,

tried to understand the message by looking for relations within the text or by looking for relations between the text and phenomena of the real world, or by looking for relations between the text and its underlying structure. These learners seemed to have seen themselves as creators of knowledge who have to use their capabilities to make critical judgements, logical conclusions and come up with their own ideas.

[p. 40]

Based on this appreciation of skillful reading, researchers became interested in investigating the efficacy of various instructional interventions designed to foster a deep approach to reading text.

Teaching reading and 'surface' approaches to learning

If Marton's observation that students who miss the main point when reading text *do not know to look for it* is compared with attempts by researchers to change this, the outcome is unsettling, especially for instructors in ABE programs who teach adults 'reading skills'.

In a particularly interesting reading experiment, Marton and Säljö (1984) tried to "induce a deep approach" by having one of two groups of students from an integrated political science, economics, and sociology course imitate successful self-questioning techniques (p. 46). Questions interspersed throughout the text drew attention to sections and sub-sections, summaries of each, and relations between various parts and the whole. However, the students helped in this way

simply displayed "an extreme form of surface learning" while students left alone "performed significantly better" on immediate and delayed retention measures (p. 47). Why did this happen? The explanation offered seems reasonable; another version of a surface approach occurred with the 'text' replaced by 'questions' which then became the learning objective, the pursuit of answers interfering with a deeper, more reflective approach. According to the researchers "the very predictability of the 'demand structure'...played the central role in generating the paradoxical outcome" (p. 48).

This kind of predictability is what many DVST reading students seek when they are introduced to various acronym-based, sequential reading and studying strategies such as OARWET (overview; ask; read; write; evaluate; test). But, compared to more proficient readers, the metacognitive abilities of the students who are the least flexible in their application of OARWET are underdeveloped. And, even among more proficient undergraduate readers, as findings from a study by Ruth Garner and Patricia Alexander (1982) indicate, the strategic processing of text depends on a reader's ability to actively formulate and reformulate anticipated questions. Although OARWET is not a self-directed question formulation strategy, an informed shifting from one step to another is based, with the aid of cues (headings, subheadings, etc.), on individuals' assessment of their understanding of the text. Even so, as Garner and Alexander and other researchers (Brown, Smiley, & Lawton, 1978) point out, the ability to anticipate text-learning tasks develops after extended exposure to these kind of tasks.

Despite explicit content-specific modelling, practice in OARWET's use did not lead to generalized, skillful application of this strategy on the part of all individuals in my reading classes. For some students, the sequential nature of the steps still turned out to be too 'predictable'. Like Marton's and Säljö's questions for 'inducing a deep approach', applying a generic reading strategy became yet another means for reinforcing a surface approach to learning.

ABE reading instructors might wonder whether the explicit teaching of reading skills contributes to an individual's reading effectiveness or merely turns students into skilled surface learners. The latter conclusion, I think, would be premature. On the one hand, it is clear that evaluation--including ongoing means to assess student learning or what Marton and Säljö refer to as the 'demand structure'--does influence approaches to learning and learning outcomes. Moreover, this finding suggests that great care needs to be taken when evaluating learning from reading, an extremely important issue that I will address later in this chapter. On the other hand, yet related to this first point, is the fact that researchers established whether students did adopt either a surface or deep approach using "quantitative measures of knowledge" (Marton & Saljo, 1984, p.47), an odd choice given their views on 'meaningful learning'.

Even more problematic from an instructional perspective is the researchers' assumption that instructions applied once might change how students would read and therefore understand text. This assumes all students in higher education are accomplished readers, which is hardly the case. Persistent reading problems,

especially underdeveloped metacognitive skills and strategy-use, cannot be overcome by a set of questions even if they have been designed to help students break with a shallow interpretation of ideas. Complexity of the text alone limits some individuals to a surface approach and less-skilled versions at that. An individual's approach to learning, rather than being seen as a personal characteristic, is a disposition which varies according to prior knowledge, learning means (for instance, text readability), demand structure, and other factors.

Efforts to induce meaningful learning in the Marton and Säljö experiment fell into the trap of 'technification' (Marton & Säljö, 1984, p. 50). Ironically, the lesson for these researchers is that mastering techniques is not a substitute for experiencing meaningful learning. In brief, reading skills are more than isolated technical skills. As Lennart Svensson (1984) points out, study skills (and reading skills too, I would argue) are techniques which have a functional relationship with students' approach to learning. Svensson reaches this conclusion based on a study in which the distinct approaches students favour when reading during an experiment--characterized by Svensson as either 'holistic'/deep or 'atomistic'/surface--continue to be used by them in everyday circumstances in twenty-three out of thirty cases over a year-long period (cited in Gibbs, 1981, p. 79). In fact, reading techniques such as skimming/scanning or paraphrasing support either a surface approach or a deep approach to learning from reading, as my classroom research indicates.

My own findings also suggest that DVST reading students favour reading techniques which are manifestations of their conceptions and expectations about reading. For instance, students who view reading as a mechanical, decoding activity seem to be too "glued to print" (Chall, 1983) to monitor their understanding of the text; indeed, the six individuals from the DVST reading class of twenty-one students, who conceptualized reading in this way, dutifully applied the overview 'O' step of OARWET without seeing the significance of such an approach other than that the instructor had recommended it. Some students who viewed reading as a way to gather information would be glued not to print but to the entire text, R.'s favourite skimming and scanning techniques in full use. The key objective would be to complete the six steps of OARWET; no attention was paid to developing a holistic or deep understanding of "phenomena of the real world" through reading or "relations within the text" or "relations between the text and its underlying structure" (Marton & Säljö, 1984, p.40).

Conceptions of learning and DVST classroom research

The failure to effect deep learning through the 'teaching' of self-questioning techniques concerned researchers to such an extent that they decided to review all the research protocols associated with this particular reading experiment. Säljö, struck by the variety in approaches to learning and learning outcomes within the surface-oriented group, thought students' past educational experiences might account for the research findings. He organized follow-up

interviews with the original participants and, in the course of this study, discovered that individuals' *conceptions of learning* included a range of understandings in which learning was seen variously as:

- 1...a quantitative increase in knowledge
 - 2...memorizing
 - 3...the acquisition of facts, methods, etc. which can be retained and used when necessary
 - 4...the abstraction of meaning
 - 5...an interpretative process aimed at understanding reality
- [Marton & Säljö, 1984, p. 52]

But the link between conceptions of learning and approaches to learning remained mostly speculative until the van Rossum and Schenk (1984) study in which students answered a questionnaire about their conceptions of learning; students then did a reading experiment modelled after the original Dähllof study (ibid.). Correlations were high between surface approaches and conceptions 1 and 2 of learning above, between deep approaches and conceptions 4 and 5, with conception 3 almost evenly divided between these two distinct "what-how relations"--the *what* of a quantitative increase in knowledge realized by the *how* of memorizing; and, similarly, the *what* of an interpretative process aimed at understanding reality realized by the *how* of abstraction (p. 53).

Prior to learning about the Gothenburg studies and the qualitative research paradigm, I had only investigated the relationship between DVST students' conceptions of reading and their reading skill development. When a few students added comments to their original accounts of 'what reading involves', I realized that the opportunity to revise conceptions in writing was a good way to emphasize

changes in students' thinking. At the beginning of the next semester, I collected students' completed reading questionnaires at the end of the first reading class and returned these to them after the first four classes. During this period, the focus of our work in class was a critical exploration of conceptions of reading (Chapter 2 describes the instructional strategy I use). I invited students to add to their accounts if, indeed, their views on reading had changed.

Of the nineteen students present, ten were satisfied with what they originally wrote. Although these accounts include many contradictory views, the majority represent the robustness or staying power of quantified conceptions of reading and the emphasis on *how much* is learned:

Its something you do to get more knowledge. In some cases information, like for a job, an assignment, etc. Its also permanent, and puts you in place with the writer.

Reading will involve knowledge of vocabulary and the ability of getting the main idea with the supporting ideas that is in one article.

Reading involves you in read[ing] a book or textbook to find information that is needed for assignments and/or research. Reading plays a big part in anything.

Reading can help you to absorb and prove your knowledge [so] that you know what happens in this world.

Reading is thinking, the comprehension of a wide variety of words and subjects. Being able to pick the main idea of that certain choice of reading material. Being able to sum up your choice of reading material in a good descriptive manner. Knowing what material you're reading is going to be about by just skimming through it briefly.

Two other accounts refer to "understanding", although the notion of what this entails appears to be restrictive and bounded by the text itself:

A way to communicate, to give ideas, opinions and feelings. To understand one another's ideas or opinions.

Understand what you read.

Nine students added to their accounts (identified in bold). The first five break with a passive, "glued to print" relation to reading and these adult readers seem to be open to a more personally-involving and meaningful experience of learning from reading. The reference to emotions in several accounts suggests how important it is to select written materials that occasionally will lure adult readers into a reading experience which is mainly 'aesthetic' (Rosenblatt, 1989) even if this would not be their stated preference:

Reading is putting the letters on a page together to make words and expand personal knowledge. Placing the spoken word on paper using various symbols.

Reading evokes passion and emotion.

Reading is the understanding of what the words on the page are. It is the description of the words we look at. Reading is a way to communicate with others.

Reading is understanding the words and their meaning. Being able to say the word properly and using the sentences to get the meaning.

Reading is a way of communicating and understanding someone else's thoughts or ideas. It can help you expand your knowledge and skills in speaking and also reading and writing.

Reading is a discipline which involves concentration, focus, control of the eyes.

Reading involves listening, understanding whether emotional, interesting or not.

Being able to understand what another person writes down. Making the sound you see.

Historical. Organizes our statements and ideas. Brings out emotions.

Some students' initial comments about reading include references to learning new things while others add this aspect of learning from reading to their accounts later on (identified in bold). These students' experience of reading would also be compatible with qualitative conceptions of learning:

Reading is understanding, it involves hours of thinking, and listening to the authors and to give our minds more of a creative flow, to imagine exactly what we are reading, as a visual of emotions like smiling, laughing, crying, getting mad.

Reading involves patience and silence. Reading is opening a book and learning new ideas and new areas. Updating yourself to the new age and the old age.

A way to communicate one's ideas and beliefs.

Reading can be emotional and bring in personal feelings. Reading can describe new ideas and beliefs.

I think reading is like exercise for your imagination because it allows you to explore different ideas, and other opinions, etc.

I feel reading should be a part of everyone's life because it allows you to learn, feel, explore, and experience a unique knowledge that builds each mind into something great. It not only involves learning and comprehension but also creates a quality no one can take away.

Reading how does someone explain something that one loves so much that is such a big part of them.

Reading involves love, understanding. Reading insight into a bigger picture of learning: e.g. the more one learns the more there is to learn.

I typed these accounts, circulated them a few weeks later, and asked students to highlight what they liked best in each one; their opinions were discussed in small groups and individuals wrote, on index cards, current impressions or concerns about their experiences of reading. At this time, most students thought of reading as written communication where a reader needs to understand what a writer is saying. This conception of reading represented a 'new' understanding for many students. Although I expected their views on reading to develop over the course of the semester, this version of reading did represent *their* thinking and not a reproduced version of my own. In this respect, my instructional strategy--as expressed through the curriculum I developed for the course, the class plans I devised and adapted on an ongoing basis, and the integrated individual and group assignments I continually refined--had the expected results.

But, if conceptions of knowledge ultimately influence whether a student adopts a *deep* or *surface* approach to learning, as findings from studies associated with the qualitative research paradigm reveal, then students' ideas about learning also need to be addressed. A conception of reading as information-gathering, for instance, reveals a notion of learning and knowledge that is essentially quantitative,

just as R.'s predilection for memorizing facts represents the 'how' part of a quantitative what-how relationship (Säljö, 1984).

Since reading is a means to learn from texts, students' conceptions of reading as well as their conceptions of learning will influence reading practices.

This understanding led me to add a component to the instructional approach I had been working on as part of my classroom research. In brief, I decided to address students' conceptions of learning before any formal work was done on 'what reading involves'. What I think of as an extension of the Gothenburg studies does not involve elaborate preparation; I simply ask students '*what is learning?*', and at the same time, I indicate that there is no need to restrict thinking about learning to what happens within educational institutions. As part of this assignment, I ask individuals to comment on how they learn best, why this is the case, and how they might describe learning based on a positive learning experience of their choosing (see Gibbs, 1981).

In account after account, students use words that convey agency; they are subjects in the learning experiences they describe. Spirited class discussion follows the exchange of individual stories; the collective account of learning that emerges is emotional, contextualized, and complex. Learning is both process and product, social and individual, difficult and easy, an adventure, everyday life, and so on. Most often learning is equated with change. Yet, save for the odd person, almost all students select experiences **outside** formal education settings to describe a personally-meaningful learning experience. Regrettably, individuals' negative

learning experiences, vividly-recalled, nearly all happen to them as children in school; these incidents--crystallized in memory--describe occasions where individual learning efforts became occasions for public humiliation. Many accounts are tied to the evaluative practices of schools. Meaningful learning, according to these students' recollections, rarely occurs in school, if at all. The rupture between formal as compared to informal educational contexts is most evident.

Research associated with the Gothenburg studies, though, mainly focuses on learning in school. In fact, a reproductive conception of knowledge is presumed to be dominant not only in schools but in the society whose dominant values schools reflect. A similar limitation is evident in my own classroom research. Students' experiences of reading--and their conceptions of reading--are schooled versions. While I have asked adult readers about their reading preferences and reading habits in everyday life, I have not systematically investigated what they *know how to do as readers outside school* where the expression "reading for pleasure" underscores the non-evaluative aspects of this reading activity.

School learning and evaluating experiences of reading

While individuals' ideas about learning influence what they think they are supposed to learn and, as a result what they actually learn, instructor evaluation of learning sends a powerful message to students regarding the kind of learning that is truly valued. Some messages are confusing. Examples of contradictory 'cues' where instructors expect one thing but teach and test for another are legion

(Entwistle, 1984). Clearly, the effect of evaluation on approaches to learning and learning outcomes has been underestimated.

Assessments and assignments for evaluating reading ability or exams and assignments where reading is a means for acquiring subject-specific knowledge, all indicate reading that is 'valued' and hence, emulated. Rosenblatt (1989) provides us with an example which illustrates how poorly thought-out evaluative practices can affect reading development. In a discussion in which she argues that adopting a reader's stance is "essential to any reading" Rosenblatt notes that in schools where efferent reading dominates, evaluative practices often leave students confused:

Unfortunately, much current practice is counterproductive, either failing to encourage a definite stance or implicitly requiring an inappropriate one. A favourite illustration is the third-grade workbook that prefaced its first poem with the question, "What facts does this poem teach you?" Small wonder that graduates of our schools (and even colleges) often read poems and novels efferently, and political statements and advertisements with an aesthetic stance. [p.174]

For similar reasons, Mollie Sager (1989), rejects a "study guide" approach to reading novels since activities in the guide "disengage students from active interaction with the text" (p.41). In her efforts to change from "monitor to mentor", Sager designed a story writing activity so teenagers in her remedial class could "construct and reconstruct both the literal meaning, emotional content, and setting of the text" themselves (see pp. 41-43).

Although the Gothenburg studies on text-related learning practices do not offer prescriptions for teaching or teaching reading, Marton and Säljö's (1984)

study documents how "a demand structure" or evaluative practices affect approaches to learning or what students think they are supposed to learn. I believe that the implications for designing instruction which promotes meaningful learning are clear: first, focus on the key conceptions and not the details in a field of study; second, give students time to reflect on what they are learning; and, third, evaluate students in a way that encourages a 'deep' or interpretative understanding of material.

As researchers associated with the qualitative research paradigm on meaningful learning point out, insofar as reproductive learning is dominant in the education system the dominant focus will be on *how much is learned* instead of *what is learned* and student learning will be evaluated using quantitative means more than qualitative ones. DVST students' quantitative conceptions of learning and reading, in other words, have emerged from and been reinforced by the dominant ways the K-12 public school system evaluates learning from reading, especially in relation to 'at risk' students.

Of course, some evaluative practices contradict other evaluative practices. A number of students are ill-prepared for the reading assignments associated with technical, college, or university studies; they do not know how to 'read critically'. In many respects, adult readers in the DVST reading classes are among the worst prepared of all, since they have spent years learning how to become accomplished 'surface learners' so they could improve their scores on standardized reading competency tests. For instance, they know how to 'skim and scan' for answers

and they can answer a majority of multiple-choice questions correctly without being able to paraphrase key points in a passage or, in some cases, without even reading the passage--a decided advantage when testing is timed. Even copy-matchers (Cole & Griffin, 1986), who mimic the form of a surface approach without any of the content, can succeed at redundant, short-answer, written exams.

In fact, what DVST students know how to do as readers--and feel confident doing--seldom fits 'college-level standards'. Even though language competencies are poorly-defined and not well understood throughout the institution and within discipline areas, many college instructors expect and assume that students are proficient readers. As Säljö (1984) notes, the complexities involved in reading are underestimated. Reading is:

...a strategy for taking part in ways of conceptualizing the world that are frequently abstract and unrelated to everyday experiences in any obvious way. This poses a central problem for contemporary education. Many of the insights and statements encountered in text-books, even those encapsulated in a brief passage or two, may be the product of centuries of discussion and reflection. [p. 73]

Indeed, at an advanced educational level, the ability to read (and write) decontextualized material (Olson, 1977) is presupposed. This type of reading represents a distinct kind of literacy. As Säljö (1984) further notes,

this demand for learning through reading...imposes criteria and restrictions which are different from those that apply to other kinds of reading that we do. The pedagogical context often--although by no means always--contains rather severe restrictions on the kind of interpretation of a particular piece of writing that is relevant or 'correct' **in that particular situation of teaching and learning**. In 'private' reading the demands for a 'common' interpretation of a text may be less meaningful... [p. 73]

The way Säljö conceptualizes the experience of learning from reading on the one hand, and the way adults lacking experience in higher education do on the other--"where experts read a lot and know a lot of details"--implies extraordinary differences in expectations. Not only are students assumed to be skilled readers of any and all text by the time they reach college but, in circumstances where meaningful learning is the objective, the expectation is that they will be able to explain everyday phenomena ('cost', 'motion') by using key conceptions ('price', 'force') from a specialized field of study. These conceptions, in turn, are embedded in the historical development of discipline-based knowledge. How can adult readers I work with meet the increasingly sophisticated expectations associated with qualitative learning where reader agency is assumed?

To begin with, the activity of reading needs to be left "intact" when teaching reading (Cole & Griffin, 1986). Individuals also need to be in-charge when they read. Gary Steinley's (1985) distinction between *life reading* and *school reading* draws attention to reading practices *with* and *without* agency. Adults who are avid readers read from many meaningful contexts, cognitive frameworks, and structures of knowledge. This 'life reading', is where, from "what we know with",

readers elaborate upon ideas, ignore them, analyze them, evaluate some, and forget others, depending upon the context and purpose for which they are reading. It would be difficult to assign an orderly pattern to this processing. At one time, a reader may struggle to comprehend a complex piece, then dismiss it as having little to offer. The same reader may later evaluate an idea in one paragraph, compare it to another from a previous reading, re-evaluate both, and synthesize them into a new idea... [p. 319]

By contrast, the contexts students usually draw on for 'school reading' are related to evaluation--finishing assignments, preparing for class discussions, passing exams:

Students are stripped of processing choices. Teachers not only determine what is read, when it is read, and why it is read, they also determine, through their learning activities, how that information should be processed...Even when it is possible to focus attention on the right context, the knowledge and processes of a discipline, it is the teacher's context, not the students'. It has been processed through the teacher's beliefs and values, not theirs. And that is where it will remain unless students hear about it, use it, think about it, and think with it. Only with that kind of activity can, for example, a knowledge of historical patterns become the powerful context from which we read in life. [p. 320]

Steinley argues that if schools broke with sequential, logical, part-to-whole approaches to reading and instead imitated the reading practices of avid adult readers, fewer young people would lose interest in reading (see Rasinski, 1989, for a similar view).

Within an academic context, Steinley ties the loss of reader agency to overt evaluative practices; other researchers hold similar views (e.g. Ramsden, 1984, p. 149). But, as Steinley (1985) notes, instructors' beliefs and values also provide a subtle, yet highly persuasive evaluative context for "how... information should be processed" (p.320) by students. To cite one example: the language of skill development, if couched in reading readiness terminology and practices, becomes the language of evaluation. Some students are 'ready' to read while others are not; some are still 'learning to read' while others are finally 'reading to learn'.

Steinley's description of 'life reading' reminds us that school reading is not the only--or necessarily the first--reading we do. To use Vygotsky's words, "any

learning a child encounters in school always has a previous history" (1978, p.84). As sociolinguistic literacy research demonstrates, individual reading practices are shaped by many diverse cultural and linguistic values and assumptions about language use and learning that predate school attendance. Highlights from this research will be discussed in the following chapter in relation to teaching reading in general, and findings from my classroom research, in particular.

Chapter five

LANGUAGE LEARNING, READING PRACTICES, AND SCHOOLING: A SOCIOLINGUISTIC LITERACY PERSPECTIVE

Sociolinguistic literacy research makes a critical distinction between literacy and schooling (Scribner & Cole, 1981; Heath, 1983) and, in doing so, questions the premise that formal, school-based language instruction is an exclusive or even essential means for turning individuals into readers (and writers). Rather, from a sociolinguistic perspective, school is simply one of many domains where language learning occurs. In fact, students of all ages go to school knowing about reading and reading practices as part of a language socialization process *valued* by their community. This learning is then *evaluated* at school and often found wanting.

Most ABE instructors remain unaware of how language learning influences individuals' ideas about reading, especially before attending school; or, for that matter, how diverse values and assumptions about learning from reading can lead to school-defined problems. The experience of L., the DVST student who pretended someone else was reading, is not uncommon. Indeed, the majority of ABE/literacy students' early years at school might have been less oppressive than what they report, if their way of using and learning language fit school assumptions. Perhaps 'poor readers' or 'slow learners' are really cultural and

linguistic strangers to the dominant language practices of educational institutions (cf. McDermott, 1974; Ogbu, 1980).

Language experiences outside and inside school--and their possible influence on reading practices--are examined in this chapter through the use of selected sociolinguistic literacy studies. After reviewing key findings from this research, Heath's (1983) seminal study of three English-speaking communities and their distinctive "ways with words" is looked at in some detail. This study provides a framework for understanding the implications for effective teaching when everyone's ways with language may not match the school ways. Finally, I reassess my own approach to teaching adults reading in relation to DVST students' diverse language experiences.

Key research findings

By documenting language use in everyday life, sociolinguistic ethnographers offer persuasive evidence that school-based reading practises are one set among many culturally-patterned, often multilingual reading practices and skills. This is the first significant finding from the research.

Sylvia Scribner and Michael Cole (1981), for instance, studied literacy among the Vai, an African Muslim society in Liberia which includes literate and non-literate adults as well as readers and writers of one or more distinct written languages: Vai, Qu'ranic Arabic, and school-based English. They found that "literacies are highly differentiated" (p. 136), any literacy,

...a set of socially organized practices which make use of a symbol system and a technology for producing and disseminating it. Literacy is not simply knowing how to read or write a particular script but applying this knowledge for specific purposes in specific contexts of use. [p. 236]

Becoming literate is tied to *uses* of literacy. The historian Harvey Graff (1979) cautions against isolating literacy or regarding it only in "terms of self-advancement or skills"; he argues that "literacy's importance...lies in its relation to the transmission of morals, discipline and social values" (p.258). Acquiring literacy, Scribner and Cole realize, is also tied to becoming knowledgeable and skilled in activities where literacy is used. Thus literacy does not lead to the "same knowledge and skills whenever people read or write" (1981, p.132).

Two related views have been undermined by this finding: first, the belief that literacy is a set of generalized reading and writing skills which transcends a multitude of linguistic and cultural particularities; and, second, the belief that literacy is tied to cognitive development (Goody, 1977; Olson, 1977). Specifically, it has been argued that the advent of written language offers individuals the means to categorize, think abstractly, and reason analytically. As Scribner and Cole (1981) point out, however, many cognitive transformations associated with literacy acquisition are actually consequences of the schooling experience.

Both these two notions--literacy as skill, and literacy as cognitive transformation--are prevalent in the ABE/literacy field. Equating the ability to read and write with imagining and thinking is how many practitioners conceptualize literacy (see comments on 'what is literacy?' in Bossart, Monnastes, & Malnarich, 1991, pp. 3-34). Similarly, skill-based, decontextualized instruction

treats reading as a progressively more complex intellectual endeavour which explains why the metacognitive aspects of reading appear in the final stage in a reading readiness model. It is also by viewing reading acquisition in isolation from cultural and linguistic practices that much standardized curriculum comes to be written and used. In these and other like cases, literacy is seen through 'schooled' teachers' eyes.

But, Vai literacy is learned and used outside a school context. This finding separates literacy from schooling and lays the groundwork for breaking with a one-sided preoccupation with school-based writing (or reading) which

can lead to a serious underestimation of the cognitive skills involved in non-schooled, non-essay writing, and reciprocally to an overestimation of the intellectual skills that the essayist text "necessarily" entails. [Scribner & Cole, 1981, p. 75]

Steinley's (1985) account of the metacognitive processes involved in 'life reading' suggests that reading outside school can be at least as cognitively-demanding as reading inside. In fact, Rosenblatt's (1989) focus on reading as a linguistic activity which combines both public and private components and requires the adoption of either an efferent or aesthetic stance illustrates an approach which avoids caricatures of reading, whether in a schooled or non-schooled context.

That language learning does not only occur at school and that literacy is really a multiplicity of literacies are propositions related to a second significant finding from the research: everyday uses of reading and writing can differ dramatically in neighbouring communities, even if the same language is spoken. Heath's (1983) study of how children use oral and written language in a town and

two small communities in the foothills of the Appalachian mountains is the basis for this finding. Spoken and written language in all three communities reflects specific cultural practices; each community has its own complex language socialization process.

The ways children learn to use language in the white working class community of Roadville and the black working-class community of Trackton, depends

...on the ways in which each community structured their families, defined the roles that community members could assume, and played out their concepts of childhood that guided child socialization. In addition, for each group, the place of religious activities was inextricably linked to the valuation of language in determining an individual's access to goods, services, and estimations of position and power in the community. In communities throughout the world, these and other features of the cultural milieu affect the ways in which children learn to use language. [p. 11]

For blacks and whites from working class communities who "come together in institutions of work, commerce, politics, and schooling...each has met a third set of ways of using language to get things done" (p. 10). This third set of ways is most familiar to middle class blacks and whites who live in town and work at white-collar jobs and know "the communicative habits and preferences of these public institutions" (ibid.). How well children do in one of these institutions, school, depends on the extent to which their community's oral and written language use is compatible with the school's language practices.

By the time children attend grade one, they have already been exposed to a distinctive language socialization process--including reading habits and

practices--which will influence school success or failure. Single factor explanations, for instance whether preschoolers have stories read to them or parents value education, in Heath's view are misleading. Instead, critical indicators of success can be found in the "patterns of interactions between oral and written use of language" (p. 344) associated with children's socialization as talkers, readers, and writers.

In Heath's study, the school complemented communicative practices of mainstream middle class black and white townspeople. Their children, treated as literates before they could read, would do well with few exceptions. Roadville children, taught reading readiness behaviours and skills prior to grade one, would be average if unimaginative students until grade four or five when they would be characterized as slow learners. Trackton children, readers of environmental print before attending school, would be labelled poor readers by the end of grade one and would experience failure in the school's early grades.

Language socialization and the experience of reading

Children's experience of reading or, to recall Smith's words (1990b, p.5), *what they know how to do as readers*, predates attendance at school. A comparison of reading practices in the three communities Heath studied--specifically preschoolers' experience of talking and of reading, adults' participation in this experience, and the community's treatment of texts--reveals

why some children adapt easily (and therefore quickly) to schooling and its dominant literacy practices while others do not.

As Annie May tells Heath, learning to talk in Trackton is about "learning to know" in situations where meanings of words constantly change. Preschoolers, teased into predicaments by older children and adults and then asked, "now what you gonna do?",

must think before they respond, and as Annie May realized, must feel the motivations and intentions of other individuals. They are powerless to counter physically; they must outwit, outtalk, or outact their aggressors. Across sets of situations and actors, children learn the domains of applications of a particular word, phrase, or set of actions, and the meanings conveyed across these are often neither literal nor predictable. [Heath, 1983, p. 84]

Parents use analogy questions more than any other form to help children "know when meanings are not literal but conveyed" (p. 105). Unlike parents from Roadville and the town,

children are not seen as information-givers or question-answerers. This is especially true of questions for which adults already have an answer. Since adults do not consider children appropriate conversational partners to the exclusion of other people who are around, they do not construct questions especially for children, nor do they use questions to give the young an opportunity to show off their knowledge about the world. [p. 103]

By contrast, children from the white working class community of Roadville, as Annie May comments, are asked "what's this, what's that". They are expected to be accurate in naming things and in reciting knowledge learned during the day; mistakes are corrected and information is repeated until it is "right" (p. 141).

In both communities the way language is used in worship, including how religious knowledge is transmitted and texts are treated, greatly influences language

socialization. Worship in Trackton is a celebratory affair where feelings hold sway and the construction of meaning is a collective activity, prompted by "a few stories, wafts of songs, or Biblical quotations to remind them of church teachings" (p. 147). This is antithetical to people's experience in Roadville where the Bible is absolute; the word is given and followed, not interpreted.

Texts in Roadville are not tampered with either. Words have exact meanings and uses: "behind the written word is an authority"; "...analysis does not extend too far beyond the text" (p. 235). Factual questions are posed to make sure that even bedtime stories have been understood properly. When Roadville parents focus on the "rightness of the word" (p. 127) and ritualized question-answer exchanges "where verbatim performance (is) a way of showing off knowledge" (p. 144), they are imitating church practices. Even in play, children are expected to

report exactly how something is said, maintain a single consistent label for items and events, and render stories in absolute chronological order with direct discourse. [p. 165]

But, in Trackton, on the rare occasions when older children read stories to preschoolers, the text is "almost never read...as it appears in the book" (p. 103).

The only time this happens is when the children are **playing school**. Like a Biblical quotation, parts of the text serve as catalysts for interpretative story-telling:

...the written word is for negotiation and manipulation-- both serious and playful. Changing and changeable, words are the tools performers use to create images of themselves and the world they see. [p. 235]

For the parents and children of Roadville, the ability to reproduce knowledge precisely proves learning. "Sticking to the truth" (p. 158) is expected; stories are factual retellings of what happened. Heath describes the gulf between the inventive storytellers of Trackton, who create highly fictionalized accounts of events, and the storytellers of Roadville this way: "for Roadville, Trackton's stories would be lies; for Trackton, Roadville's stories would not even count as stories" (p. 189).

Trackton adults' treatment of text follows the pattern established by religious practices as well. Sections from newspaper articles are read out loud and this leads to lively discussion. Reading is social and interactive; people who read on their own are considered odd unless they are old and religious. In Trackton,

authority in the written word does not rest in the words themselves, but in the meanings which are negotiated through the experiences of the group. [p. 196]

By contrast, Roadville adults have more reading materials in their homes than Trackton parents, yet they seldom read. If they do, it is an individual activity.

From Heath's accounts it is evident that Trackton preschoolers are steeped in highly-social, literate traditions. Youngsters want to belong to the community and their participation is welcomed. They do not have special educational toys or books nor are school-related behaviours modelled for them. But, as Heath notes, children find their own reading and writing tasks in everyday life (p. 190). They teach themselves using visual imagery; "children remember and reassociate the

contexts of print" (p. 192). Before going to school, Trackton children use print independently and they can read.

When Roadville children go to school they cannot read, although they are familiar with the practices involved in reading independently and checking whether what has been written has been understood. They are used to answering specific questions with specific answers. Reproductive learning or a quantitative conception of knowledge fits their experience of language socialization. When, in later grades, they are asked to evaluate or analyze or interpret what they have read, youngsters from Roadville do not do well at school. They have not had any experience at home (or at school for that matter) with treating text other than in a reified form. Reading is not an interactive process.

The irony is that Trackton children, who manipulate and interpret text for their own purposes as preschoolers, will likely fail at school. Their ingenious, visual, and highly-contextualized way of teaching themselves to read--which matches the highly-contextualized use made of reading in their community--will be supplanted by an auditorily-based, sound-letter correspondence way of reading. Their interpretative approach to learning from text will be out of sync with a prior 'stage' of reading where literal comprehension is stressed. If they find a Mrs. Gardner (see chapter three) who bridges one set of ways of knowing with another set, their success at school will exceed the institution's expectations and those of its teachers.

Despite very different language socialization processes, both Roadville and Trackton youngsters have something in common. When Heath compares the types of uses of reading in their homes, neither will have been exposed to a 'critical/educational' use whose purpose is "to increase one's abilities to consider and/or discuss political, social, aesthetic, or religious knowledge" (p. 258). This kind of reading, though, surrounds youngsters from the mainstream middleclass.

These children, unlike those of Trackton and Roadville, are viewed as potential conversationalists and potential literates before they are even born (pp. 245-247). Parents not only value education as do the adults of the two working class communities, but they are school-oriented:

Both at home and at work, there is an almost continuous use of written material as a topic or backdrop for talk.
[p. 255]

As a result, these children know books are written and writing is read; that reading aloud is different than conversation; that reading can be factual or fantasy and play; that reading is a dyadic interaction with prescribed roles. Their experience answering 'what' questions means they know about classification and labelling procedures and they can compare and contrast new learning to what is already known. These children also can demonstrate learning from reading when asked to do so--and they already know different ways this might be done (p. 393). These children from the town, like their parents (some of whom are among the majority of the school's teachers)

are producers and consumers of literacy in a consistent, highly redundant and repetitive pattern of using oral language, and especially dialogue, as a way of learning both from and about written materials. [p. 256]

In contrast to children from Trackton and Roadville, the townspeople's youngsters have two additional advantages which anticipate the ways language is taught at school. First, they have had extensive practice answering 'why' and 'how' questions compared to their working class counterparts (p. 378). But more than this, they can differentiate "contextualized first hand experiences" from "decontextualized representations of experience"; as Heath concludes, "they come to act like literates before they can read" (p. 256). The notion that conceptions of language or reading which predate school include a knowledge of behaviours individuals cannot accomplish on their own is related to Vygotsky's two developmental levels, the 'actual' and the 'potential' (1978, pp.90-91). Without being able to read, the townspeople's children understand the gist of *doing reading* in a school setting.

Heath's study supports an *emergent literacy perspective* on language learning which is contrary to a reading readiness approach. The term, first used by Marie Clay in the late sixties (cited in Strickland & Cullinan, 1991, p.426), refers to the process of language acquisition which emerges from a child's nascent but rapidly developing 'linguistic-experiential reservoir' (Rosenblatt, 1989) before formal, schooled reading instruction begins. The difference between 'reading readiness' and 'emergent literacy' represents more than a quibble over words. The

consequences, Strickland and Cullinan (1991) argue, are visible in the learning environments provided for children:

The readiness approach leads one to believe that direct instruction in phonics is necessary for a child to become literate. In readiness programs, adults serve primarily as bearers and dispensers of information. What the child is to learn is predetermined by the adult and dispensed in discrete bits in a manner both prescribed and preordered. The emergent literacy perspective leads us to acknowledge that while much of the same information is critical, the responsibility for its access and use is shared between adult and child. Adults serve as facilitators and planners who take great care to structure the environment so that certain literacy experiences are apt to occur. They surround children with print and encourage them to use it for their own purposes. [p.430]

The emergent literacy developmental approach implies that language learning, as it emerges "naturally", needs to be monitored by adults:

They are responsive to the child's efforts; they offer praise and affirmation of increasingly skilled attempts. They are also proactive, offering new ideas and new strategies that are developmentally appropriate for the child or group of children. We believe the different interpretation of the role of adults is an extremely important distinction. [Strickland & Cullinan, 1991, p. 431]

Indeed, one interpretation values *learner agency*, beginning with its unique expression in the developing reader's personal history prior to formal reading instruction. Here, the experience of language learning 'outside' school would not have the potential to become the basis for exclusion when 'inside'.

The instructional approach Strickland and Cullinan advocate (see pp.428-430), although they do not state this explicitly, starts with an appreciation and analysis of what someone knows about reading before they go to school. In these circumstances, the work of Heath and other educational ethnographers (see Schieffelin & Gilmore, 1986) alerts instructors to the specific conceptions and

practices behind diverse "ways with words" so teaching can be more effective.

This willingness to recognize divergent language practices as a starting-point for instruction does not occur in what Heath and other educational ethnographers refer to as 'mainstream schools'.

To summarize: Before school, what a potential student knows about *doing reading* is based on language socialization. Oral and literate traditions represent specific cultural and linguistic practices that are valued by a community.

Language use and learning, even in one tongue, is not uniform. Preschoolers, socialized in distinctive and complex ways with words, will arrive at school with contrary experiences and expectations. At school, language learning **valued** at home will be **evaluated**. Heath shows how school criteria for evaluating language competencies give preference to one set of ways of knowing about words; instruction is predicated on middle-class language socialization values and practices. To further illustrate this point, Heath uses her own experience as an instructor: many of the teachers from the area who are in her graduate course share the townspeople's cultural and linguistic assumptions about language when Heath first meets them.

Language values and school evaluation

The schools that children from Heath's study went to valued a *technocratic* version of literacy. Suzanne de Castell and Allan Luke (1986) use this term to describe an approach to literacy where "concern with managerial efficiency and the

quantification of educational output" (p. 87) leads to the standardization of textbooks, instruction, and testing. Existing idiomatic approaches to language instruction are systematically displaced by the teaching of decontextualized skills and competencies in reading; writing is taught separately. This version of literacy was also dominant in schools DVST students attended in their youth.

A technocratic approach to literacy continues to shape many teachers' approaches to language learning in North American public school systems. This version of literacy is also endorsed by some adult basic education programmes. However, the philosophical, pragmatic, and pedagogical underpinnings of a holistic, *progressive* paradigm have not been entirely eclipsed. Likewise, traces from an earlier *classical* version of literacy, including rote learning, are still present in public schools and religious private schools (see de Castell & Luke, 1986, pp.90-91 for a detailed comparison of these three paradigms).

The technocratic approach to literacy de Castell and Luke identify and analyze, complemented an emerging managerial ethos and its ascendancy in post World War II industrial and corporate organization. Quantified conceptions of knowledge and reading became dominant; reproductive conceptions already were in place as a legacy of classical traditions. When researchers associated with the original Gothenburg studies observe that 'how much is learned' is valued more than 'what is learned', they are documenting the successful transformation from a progressive to a technocratic paradigm in educational institutions worldwide. Notions central to the progressive paradigm about interactive, social, and

experiential learning or self-expression still have a place in the technocratic version of schooling but it is a decidedly subordinate one as research from this 'qualitative research paradigm on meaningful learning' shows (Marton, Hounsell, & Entwistle, 1984; Ramsden, 1988).

As described in my classroom research and the Gothenburg studies, conceptions of reading and learning held by students have been influenced by conceptions and practices related to these three different paradigms and their versions of literacy and knowledge, even if a quantified, reproductive conception of learning is held by the majority. The dominance of this view reflects de Castell and Luke's account of a dominant technocratic notion of literacy. Students who conceptualize reading as a one-way exchange in which they are passive recipients of information, internalize schools' streamed or 'lower level' conceptualization of quantified knowledge. This conception matches the language learning experience of Roadville youngsters and the relations between an educated clergy and their working class congregations.

This conception of knowledge as quantifiable brings R.'s preoccupation with "remembering everything" to mind; she read the Bible and spoke of her involvement in church activities but I failed to investigate how this affected her conception of reading and her consequent treatment of 'words' as authoritative. In retrospect I realize that a number of students in the DVST reading classes are frequent, if not daily readers of the Bible or similar texts such as materials from Alcoholics Anonymous or Narcotics Anonymous.

In a paper titled "For the Bible tells Me So: Teaching Children in a Fundamentalist Church", Caroline Zinsser (1986) describes literacy socialization at Sunday school and vacation Bible school for preschoolers, four and five years old. The Bible is the centrepiece for these 'literacy events' or occasions, where following Heath's (1982) definition, "a piece of writing is integral to the nature of participants' interactions and their interpretative processes". Zinsser (1986) soon realizes that,

In fundamentalist Sunday schools children are taught specific skills for Bible literacy, they are taught by a systematic form of classroom discourse, and the sacred text differs markedly from secular text in its significance for the reader, its establishment of authority, and in the sequencing of presentation. [p.56]

Curriculum workbooks and worksheets support the interpretation of the Bible as text, where children are taught that "the Bible is the direct word of God" (p.59). The lesson from the Bible story, with the help of the curriculum guide, includes an "application story". But, as Zinsser notes, "memorization of Bible verses played an important part in Bible school curriculum" (p.60); at each meeting a star would go on a child's chart for accurate recitation of the last verse 'learned'. Insofar as the word of God is impervious to questioning, so too were children "not encouraged to think speculatively about the stories, to supply additional details out of their own imaginings, or to suggest alternative endings" (p.63). Children's single-word answers to questions did not deviate from the text; children looked to the teacher for cues. Zinsser comments on an incident where she asked the children, "Do you think we have a photograph of Jesus?" She writes:

I was trying to elicit an answer which had to do with Jesus living before cameras. My question was met with what appeared to be complete blankness. The children assumed my question was a ritualistic opening to a didactic story and were waiting for cues as to what form their response should take. They were waiting for me to cue the correct answer--I was waiting for them to think about my question. We were at an impasse of unfamiliarity. [p.66]

R., as an adult reader and student, and I, as an adult reader and instructor, experienced a similar 'impasse of unfamiliarity'. Zinsser's work suggests that R.'s treatment of text may not only be derivative of school experiences (as I had thought) but also of church literacy events, where canonical patterns of pedagogical discourse (p.68) are learned. Many Roadville parents, themselves fundamentalists, use this same pattern of discourse when reading stories to their children at home and, as Heath (1983) indicates, school teachers will later criticize Roadville youngsters for responding to questions with unimaginative, minimalist answers and for 'laconic behaviour', especially when they are asked to analyze, evaluate or interpret texts they have read.

By contrast, the townspeople's and their children's conception of reading is clearly an interactive one. Even if the conception of knowledge remains accumulative, the learner or reader is an assertive information-gatherer. Exposure to the critical/evaluative aspects of reading at home prepares learners for the eventual introduction of this reading skill in the 'graduated' reading curriculum at school.

de Castell and Luke (1986) point out that in the technocratic paradigm the "touchstone of educational excellence...[is] evaluation" (p.89). How students come

to hold certain conceptions of language or conceptions of reading is related to implicit and explicit values held by their families and communities in the first instance, and instantiated in school evaluation practices, in the second. For Trackton youngsters, to take one example, reading print using visual decoding practices happens to the extent it does because children's efforts to read are integrated into the community's everyday life; they deliver neighbour's mail, read labels on cans when shopping for their parents, and so on. These contextualized activities are valued. Yet unless Trackton children learn auditory decoding practices, they will not be able to decode words 'out of context' and they will do poorly at school.

In fact, the school's evaluative practices which determine success or failure are intrusive and paradoxical. Hervé Varenne and R.P. McDermott (1986), for instance, document how the school's evaluative discourse is replicated at home through assigned homework. As one of three kinds of literacy within the family, "homework" is outside the family's usual practice of literacy since it is "controlled by The School" (p.201); "family members involved in the homework hold each other accountable for maintaining the School frame" (ibid.). In their study of two children who live in the same neighbourhood--one "a reader" and the other "a non reader"--Varenne and McDermott track how the idea of grade levels and associated evaluative practices, then of 'success' and 'failure', are imported home through the doing of homework which

has the property of focussing...failure on the individual actions, the child first, and the supervising parent, second. If something is going wrong, it is

the child that is to be "blamed". If this does not seem reasonable, the parent will be blamed. One might then blame the teacher and, perhaps, the particular school the child attends. What must be noticed is the way all these assignments of blame shift the focus away from the institution of scholastic evaluation back onto some individual unit. Thus, the Kinney's experience of homework as a painful event does not lead to a critique of homework as such. It leads to a critique of *their own* way of doing homework. [p.209]

While 'failure' is attributed to the individual, 'agency' (for 'success')--denied to "the reader"--is claimed by The School.

Brian Street (1984) argues that the evaluation of language use and learning introduces an ideological dimension of literacy where certain kinds of knowing are valued over other kinds. Not only are "particular practices and concepts of reading and writing" context-dependent but they "are already embedded in an ideology and cannot be isolated or treated as 'neutral' or merely 'technical'" (p. 1). Schools eventually accommodate all children through streams of knowing, yet the academic is valued more than the technical/vocational and the technical/vocational more than the remedial. In turn, this public evaluation of a person's ability to learn and to read--or any evaluation--is a key way conceptions of learning are reinforced (Perry, 1970; Marton, Hounsell, & Entwistle, 1984). Self-concepts about our own abilities are also formed in this process of learning how others see/evaluate us.

DVST students whose preschool language experiences failed to prepare them adequately for the school's version of literacy are students 'at risk' from the onset. What happened to them follows a familiar pattern which Roadville and Trackton children also experienced. The language practices of an educational institution, including its biases and inequities, transform individuals' preschool

knowledge of texts into deficits. McDermott (1991) reminds us that in the deficit theory, "context refers to an empty slot, a container, into which other things are placed" (p. 11). Some learners are harder to fill than others:

the deficit theory assumes that language and culture are storehouses from which children acquire their competence. Some children get more and some children get less. [p. 12]

Once the evaluation of institutionalized learning is based on what is missing, reading conceptualized as a series of hierarchically-organized skills and subskills becomes a benchmark for measuring achievements and evaluating progress; 'success' is merely an absence of failure. Since a model such as the reading readiness one establishes what stage of language learning should be in place by what grade, children's 'deficits' (and adult readers' too) can be pinpointed using so-called objective, standardized measures. Mastered competencies codify progress, but if progress does not fit the institution's schedule, the time-frame freezes. What someone is working on turns into a problem or difficulty, then a deficit. Schools' evaluative practices, transmitted through *teachers' talk*, become the language students use to think about reading as well as the language 'heard' in relation to their own--now decontextualized, hence pervasive--*reading problems*.

'Doing reading' and working at cross-purposes

Adult students in DVST reading classes want to improve their reading and, like R., some students are quite specific about the reading difficulties they wish to

'overcome' and how this can be accomplished. Since my instructional objective has been to reinstate reading as a contextualized, complex activity where generic reading problems have no place and learner agency can develop, the potential for some of us to be working at cross-purposes within the DVST reading class is certainly present. As Kidd (1973) points out, conflict between an instructor and adult students over the content of teaching is not unusual in Adult Education.

Surprisingly, contradictions of this kind are scarcely mentioned in the relevant ABE literature; but, when they are, differences are mainly attributed to competing "concepts of reading". William Fagan (1988) and others (Gambrell, Heathington, & Boser, 1981; Johnson, 1985; Keefe & Meyer, 1980; Norman & Malicky, 1987) comment on 'low-literate' adults' restricted views of reading. Typically, students focus on decoding when instructors want them to focus on 'reading for meaning'; for instance, Malicky & Norman (1989) identify a contradiction between adult learners' "reasons for wanting to learn to read (which) were broad and encompassing" (ibid., p. 200) on the one hand, and print-based concepts about reading, on the other. Only Fagan (1988) seems to appreciate that a focus on decoding may reflect learners' previous experiences, including the experience of being evaluated:

the perception of the adults about how they were taught to read and write seemed to influence their perceptions of how they could improve their reading and writing at present. [p. 55-56]

Conceptions of reading development which equate 'learning to read' with formal reading instruction, paper-over distinctive language practices from domains

other than school. Sometimes these practices are evident, though, even in classroom situations where language learning is taught as a series of decontextualized skills and subskills. For instance, in an article curiously titled "The reading concepts and strategies of adult nonreaders", Malicky and Norman (1988) miss the opportunity to investigate emergent literacy practices of a group of adult readers and, hence, the instructional implications of such findings. Students are described as having "made no or minimal progress in learning to read and write" (p. 198); they think "print rather than meaning is paramount in reading" (ibid.). Yet, at another juncture in their research report, they note that "most adults in this study spontaneously relied on their knowledge as they approached environmental print tasks and all types of passages" (p. 201). What is it that these adults know how to do as readers? In which nonschool contexts? At school? Can any connections between domain-specific literate, or textual language practices be made?

Incidental comments throughout this report indicate that English is not the first language of some of the students. What does a "focus on print" mean in these circumstances? Are these adults literate in their Mother Tongue?

Conflicting conceptions of reading can mask deeper contradictions. Pat Rigg (1991), a literacy specialist and university professor, describes a conversation she had with Petra, a Spanish-speaking worker who has never been to school and cannot write her own name. She and Petra are able to speak to one another because a translator is present. Rigg asks Petra how she might help someone who

is having difficulty reading. This question is selected from the Burke Interview, a series of questions "designed to elicit a person's unarticulated and unconscious theory of reading" (p.198). After persistent questioning, Petra answers:

If I were like you who know how to read, I would be very nice to that person who doesn't know how to read. You know there are a lot of people like that, right? Someone who already knows how to read is all the time saying, 'why do you want to learn that?' and they don't care. They are all the time judging one because one doesn't know how to read, but one knows how to think in one's head. [Ibid.]

Petra then asks Rigg why she is asking her questions: "Are you trying to help those who can't read, or are you asking them to help yourselves?" (ibid.)

The question Rigg asks Petra assumes that she knows about reading as a set of specific practices; Petra's answer underscores the cultural value placed on literacy and schooling in a print-oriented society. Later on, Rigg will comment on the fact that Petra who wants to learn how to sign her name does not share Rigg's psycholinguistic view of reading: "she wanted to get the letters right" (p. 12) and checks whether something is a T or W. Rigg will conclude that one result of her study was to discover the irrelevancy of the Burke questionnaire when interviewing 'illiterates'.

Indeed, an 'impasse of unfamiliarity', to use Zinsser's (1986) gentle and blameless words, is an opportunity to investigate conceptions and practices related to oral and literate language learning valued in domains other than school. And, as Petra indicates, these are also opportunities to question assumptions that sociolinguistic literacy studies have tried to dispel, namely the idea that literacy is tied to thinking. Adult learners speak more bluntly: "new learners are not new

thinkers" (Bossart, Monnastes, & Malnarich, 1991, p.175); "if people could realize that education and being intelligent are two different things, then we would be a much better society" (Hunter, 1990, p.43).

The DVST classroom revisited: A research postscript

In the Piedmont Carolinas in the late sixties and early seventies when Heath did her fieldwork, complex language socialization in three distinctive communities--black working-class Trackton, white working-class Roadville, and the racially-mixed, predominantly middle-class town--occurs in one language only. Within British Columbia, by contrast, very few communities are or have been unilingual for some time.

L.'s story reminded me of the obvious: students in DVST reading classes might know more than one language even if school instruction has been almost exclusively in English at Canadian schools. I did not investigate bilingual or multilingual language learning and use as part of my classroom research, since students spoke English with ease. When I did follow-up work a year later, the extraordinary cultural and linguistic wealth represented by the class of twenty-one students astonished me.

At the beginning of the semester, some students had just arrived in the Lower Mainland from isolated northern communities where the language of everyday life is Gitskan in one village and Dene in the other. Some students represent the first generation of their families to be born in Canada; some came to

Canada as infants or young children; some are part of established ethnic minorities where their families' ancestral tongue is still the dominant language in their community; some only speak English and, in this grouping, one student is trying to reclaim his aboriginal status. Eleven of the twenty-one adults understand a language other than English when it is spoken; nine can speak one of these languages; five can read and write a language other than English. Only two people's family background could be described as middle-class and one spent her early years in a kibbutz in Israel. All have oral fluency in English and none have assessed language needs that would be better met by ESL instruction. In brief, within this class most individuals' language socialization is multilingual and multicultural. I have no reason to believe that this class is entirely different from any other in ABE and literacy programmes throughout the country and province.

What might this imply? Conceptions of reading could be linked to cultural attitudes toward reading (Field & Aebersold, 1990) where verbal memory or rote acquisition may be the way reading is taught (p. 408); a whole language approach may clash with traditional language learning where oral/sight/memory techniques prevail (Barnaby & Millard, 1991). What appear to be cultural values may be only what individuals expect "real teaching to be" (p. 125). Of course, the interplay of different factors may be more complex than this. For instance, a report on the project to establish an adult Chipewyan literacy class at Snowdrift, on the eastern end of Great Slave Lake, (where oral Chipewyan is spoken by everyone but

English is used for 'important' transactions), suggests that the fit between what is valued and by whom is not so easy to decipher:

Research on native learning styles consistently suggests that native learners prefer to display a skill publicly only after practising the skill privately until they feel competent in it. This is in direct contrast to our expectation displayed in our teaching styles that we should learn from our mistakes and attempt trial practices until we get it right. The language experience technique calls for direct transcription of oral language to written, mistakes and all. The hesitation to use the technique both by students and instructors may have come from resistance to using the informal register in the case of Snowdrift because it is 'wrong' and they run the risk of ridicule by putting it in written form. [pp. 125-126]

When Carmen Rodriguez and Don Sawyer (1990) ask native people "why do you think you didn't learn to read and write better when you were younger?", the reasons given were complex and spoke of dysfunctional homes and families, poverty and the struggle to survive, and the experience of residential school (pp. 32-39). But what the authors refer to as the "inappropriateness, insensitivity and boredom of the schools" ranks high (p. 33). They comment on the "mismatch between the culture of the home and community and the culture of the school" (p. 34). But over and over again, the people they interview talk about their bitterness at being labelled a slow learner. Moreover, the way they were taught did not fit ways they learned: "They didn't teach reading; you could memorize stuff and others told you the answers" (p. 38). By contrast, when asked "how do you learn best?", fifty-three out of fifty-six respondents replied *watch then do*; nine named *listen*; six named *practise*; three *on my own*; two *discuss*; and, one *memorize* (p. 42).

This study reinforces what I came to realize when working with R. and other students in my DST reading classes. No single instructional approach, of one instructor's making, will support each student's efforts to become a skillful reader. Discussion, a central tenet of my instructional strategy, would alienate some First Nations students. In fact, a mature student, P. , brought this to my attention by simply saying that he hated "group work". He would listen attentively to all views but would rarely speak in class; immediately afterwards, though, he would engage me in a discussion of the issues raised.

Bridging diverse expectations and experiences

Mrs. Gardner's year with Trackton first graders was not repeated. In an interview with Heath (1983) a decade after the fieldwork was completed, she commented on how the ability to bridge differences was possible then because her class shared a set of ways of knowing.

How can contrary expectations and experiences of reading be effectively bridged in a class which has a complex language mix like the DVST one described? One approach, suggested by Heath herself, might be for students and instructors to become ethnographers of their own language learning and use. Diverse conceptions of language, learning, and reading could then be related to an academic context as required. If adults are going to be "free to learn" (Rogers, 1969)--if ABE students are going to develop learner agency--then perhaps we might usefully become ethnographers of our own language use and learning. In

other words, just as theories on reading acquisition and development belong in the classroom (see chapter two), so too do findings from sociolinguistic literacy studies.

For ABE students the opportunity to become ethnographers of their own language learning is the basis for developing a radical critique of what happened to their "ways with words" once they arrived at school. In turn, such a critique may provide adult students with the means for becoming independent language learners who, as *makers of meaning*, make connections between diverse ways with words by themselves, for themselves.

CONCLUSION

Of all the various accounts of what reading and literacy involves from decoding to metacognition, the phrase "reading the word and the world" (Freire & Macedo, 1987) captured R.'s imagination and helped her conceptualize another, less restrictive view of *doing reading*.

From chapter one, "Beginning with R.: A Background To An Inquiry About Adults and Reading"

In these concluding comments, I extend the 'reflective exchange' (Schön, 1983) on instructional matters presented in the preceding pages to a consideration of future research initiatives. I am interested in furthering the articulation between classroom research and field-related research which, although less circumscribed, nevertheless ought to be grounded in current teaching and learning practices within the ABE and literacy field. Accordingly, what follows has been organized in relation to two aspects of a related process: to begin with, I reframe my classroom research experience in respect to more general reflections regarding literacy and ABE; afterwards, I identify specific research directions based on my teaching experience.

On some general reflections

No simple answer or single theoretical model can account for the complexities of learning about reading and learning from reading. This conclusion is evident given findings from my classroom research, the Gothenburg studies, and

sociolinguistic ethnographies of literacy. Graff (1986) summarizes this reality, albeit in its broadest terms: "The history of literacy clearly shows that there is no one route to universal literacy, that there is no one path destined to succeed in the achievement of mass literacy" (p.77). In this respect, my thesis documents a very brief moment in individuals' developing literacy histories, namely their participation in a 'reading class'.

Several points need to be acknowledged. The idea of a reading class, whatever its course title, suggests that students assessed for placement in such a course are still *readers-in-waiting*, even if this is not the intention. In fact, many students in DVST reading classes think of themselves as non-readers. James Paul Gee (1991) in a discussion of 'what is literacy?' points out that the very idea of a reading class represents a narrow conceptualization of literacy as the ability to read and write (p.7). Indeed, once we track what someone knows how to do as a reader, the experience of reading is not so easily disengaged from other language competencies.

Generic notions of language learning and use offer the least productive ways of thinking about what individuals are expected to do in an unfamiliar context and what they know how to do as readers, listeners, writers, and speakers in specific, familiar contexts. Sociolinguistic ethnographies of literacy also show that to understand the complexities of literacy we need to separate literacy from schooling. Language competencies are highly contextualized and are best understood as distinctive conceptions and practices related to language learning and

use not only prior to schooling, but also throughout one's lifetime in many domains other than schooling. Still, the job of freeing our own instructional practices from conceptual and organizational notions which equate learning to read (or write) with schooling requires the collective scrutiny of practitioners throughout the ABE and literacy field.

The issues are not merely theoretical; indeed, conceptions of language learning, including ways to teach reading, are influenced by our own sociocultural language experiences. These personal literacy histories include our histories as instructors in a field where certain instructional practices are taken for granted. By making these visible, we begin the process of making our own assumptions about language learning and use visible.

Developing this kind of critical sociocultural self-awareness is linked to an important finding from my classroom research, namely that successive teachers' talk has been internalized by students. The talk, of course, is riddled with values and assumptions about language learning and use. Moreover, just as economics students become adept with the vocabulary of economics but not the key concepts of this discipline so too do students in remedial classes become adept with the language of remedial instruction but not the independent *activity of reading* in specific contexts. Indeed, the construction of many 'remedial' classes is founded on and perpetuates loss of agency. To paraphrase an expression used by some of my students, the 'talk' is there (someone else's) with little evidence of the 'walk'.

Many individuals in ABE and literacy classes are graduates from classrooms in which language acquisition (including the activity of reading) has been reduced to a series of decontextualized, disconnected linguistic 'skills'; the author's intended meaning is lost amongst the disconnected pieces of text only to be put together again by external expertise (the teacher's). Given these circumstance, it is especially critical that issues related to **learner agency** dominate the developing discourse on *good practice* within the ABE and literacy field. Learner agency ought to be the subtext of all that we do--'what we do' being understood from this standpoint as a continuum of complex practices which can either stifle or support agency in the many contexts of human communicative practice.

In the particular course described in this thesis, the context is an academic one. As an instructor, I try to bridge students' current ways of knowing with an explicit examination of the new ways of knowing that are required in an academic context. Although I do not think of myself as a teacher of a remedial reading class for "reading-failure adult students" (Miller, 1993), I and the people in my class inherit the pedagogy of the past including the conceptual and organizational practices associated with a 'reading-readiness' approach to reading acquisition and development, itself a product of thinking and practices related to language acquisition and development.

However, the women and men in this class *are* readers, even if their self-image, reinforced by our (teachers') ways with words, continually suggests that

they are merely on the verge of proficient reading. And, if we actually examine an individual's experience of reading or "what someone knows how to do as a reader", there is much to discover. The intensive tutorial relationship I developed with R. transformed my understanding of how to teach adults reading. Together, we developed a method for ways to meta-talk *doing reading*: first, R. read the text and talked about what she thought the writer of the text meant; and, second, as she talked about the writer's intended meaning, she worked at explaining 'how she knew'. I chose this approach because R. had difficulty paraphrasing paragraphs and even sentences and I needed to know how to support her efforts to understand written language in very specific ways. As a consequence of this intense work with R., the critical significance of conceptions of reading (what is reading, what does reading involve) as a means for organizing someone's reading practices surfaced.

The question posed by my initial work with R. was this: how is the acquisition of reading skills linked to conceptions of reading and explicit and implicit conceptions of language? This question is really a question about learning 'something' through the means of language competencies; we need to specify what kind of learning we have in mind. Within the domain of schooling, conceptions of knowledge have a particular effect on the kind of learning that is valued. In circumstances in which knowledge is quantified ('how much' more important than 'what' is learned), the kind of learning valued is 'reproductive' and without agency. As the Gothenburg studies on text-related learning indicate,

what students think they are supposed to learn, how they approach learning, and what they actually learn is influenced by their conceptions of knowledge. Findings from my classroom research parallel these findings from the Gothenburg studies and related research on deep learning and surface learning.

My classroom research findings also show that conceptions of reading influence how readers approach the reading of text and, as a consequence, what they actually know or learn about 'something' through the means of reading. This insight led me to revise my instructional strategy. A crucial first step in developing learner-focussed instruction is to understand students' responses to the question 'what is reading?' or 'what does reading involve?'.

The DVST Introductory Academic Reading course, as I teach it, is a place where a group of adults--I include myself in the group--explore contextualized language learning and use. Before this exploration can begin, students' experiences of reading without agency need to be arrested. This "breaching", a word used by Harold Garfinkel (1967) to describe the disruption of ordinary activity, is most successfully accomplished through the careful selection of texts which elicit a dramatic emotional response from adult readers in my class. For reading in an academic context requires the ability to develop both an efferent and an aesthetic reader's stance (Rosenblatt, 1989). The 'academic' context I introduce students to, in my mind's eye at least, is one in which meaningful learning is valued. Of course, I am aware that quantified conceptions of learning are reinforced by evaluative practices in post-secondary educational institutions as well

as in the K-12 system. Thankfully, the reverse is also true; exemplary instructional practices that promote learner agency exist in many educational institutions, although to an ABE instructor these practices may certainly not seem to be dominant ones.

On future research directions

Unless theoretical issues related to teaching and learning are addressed, the development of *good practice* within literacy and ABE classes will be founded less on vibrant, participatory field-based research and more on individual and institutional assumptions about adult learners, 'basic education', and 'literacy'. As a relatively new field, we in ABE run the risk of equating a quantitative increase in programming with qualitative improvement in our ability to provide diverse, meaningful and useful learning opportunities for adults. Keeping a central focus on the conception of learning implicit in and operationalized through our diagnostic, instructional, and evaluative practices may help keep us attentive to that risk.

One drawing card of classroom research (Cross & Angelo, 1993) and most professional development activities associated with 'reflective practice' is the opportunity to become a more effective instructor. Notwithstanding the initially personal context of the present study, I believe that findings from my classroom research may have instructional implications for practitioners within the ABE and

literacy field other than myself. As well, my classroom research identifies a number of fronts on which field-based research initiatives seem long overdue.

First of all, a critique of conceptual and organizational practices derived from a reading readiness approach, as found in the literacy and ABE field, might productively be undertaken from a sociology of knowledge perspective. My own limited research suggests that the reading readiness model's pivotal distinction between 'learning to read' and 'reading to learn' (and its associated instructional practices) is far more influential than many of us realize. Based as it is on a deficit model of learning, this approach to reading acquisition and development may seriously undermine adult learners' ability to develop learner agency. It is important also to be aware that a reading readiness approach supplants a developmental, contextualized understanding of language acquisition. A sociolinguistic approach, by contrast, does not identify deficits. Rather, it offers a standpoint from which 'student success' in different domains can be measured in relation to practices associated with learner agency.

The process of designing alternatives to current and widely-accepted assessment protocols, diagnostic procedures, course materials selection, and evaluation of learning methods could surely be better supported by field-based research. Findings from my classroom research suggest that the following initiatives might be useful starting-points:

1) *On assessment practices:* In-house assessments of all four language competencies tied to students' educational plans and communicative purposes

could replace standardized tests which decontextualize language learning and usually assess two of four language competencies (reading and writing). The use of a portfolio or prior learning assessment component, supported by a portfolio development course, appears to have significant potential for developing learner agency.

2) *On diagnostic procedures:* What someone actually does between the reading of a text and displaying an understanding of this text could be usefully documented and analyzed. This actual "doing" of reading would be described by readers in their own words. Case studies documenting adult readers' reading and understanding of specific texts would provide a basis for further contextualizing students' experiences of reading and what these experiences represent in relation to their own language learning and use. Unless this kind of analytical work is done the diagnosis of reading difficulties will likely remain steeped in various forms of teachers' talk, itself a legacy of remedial and deficit notions pertaining to language acquisition and development.

3) *On classroom materials selection:* Experienced and exemplary instructors might usefully articulate the 'what' and 'why' behind the particular classroom materials they select in the context of learner-focussed instruction. While some classroom materials can be adapted to particular circumstances, the shelf-life of these materials is often limited as is their usefulness to different groups of students. Adult learners can be far more actively involved in proposing classroom topics and themes, as well as in the selection of related materials found in the

course of everyday living or at the library. A knowledge of how the library works and how to find any written material 'imaginable' seems an obvious and essential aspect of developing reader agency.

4) *On evaluation of learning methods:* Since ways of evaluating learning send a powerful message to students regarding what learning is valued, we need to develop ways to promote meaningful learning and critical thinking in relation to contextualized language learning and use. Paraphrasing, summarizing an author's argument, comparing the ideas of several writers, synthesizing and evaluating these ideas in relation to a particular issue or problem are language proficiencies that should be emphasized through evaluation. To this end, ways to do this that are peer-based, collaborative, and rigorous need to be investigated and analyzed possibly through a series of classroom-based research projects.

A second front for field-based research is related to sociolinguistic ethnographies of literacy. As adult students document their language learning and use, this material can be systematized and reproduced so their implications can be discussed more widely throughout the field. Such documentation appears as important to ABE/literacy instructors in the broader field as to ABE learners in their particular classrooms. For without this knowledge of crosscultural and sociocultural language socialization practices, the bridging we attempt to do as instructors between knowledge in one domain and knowledge in a new domain will be hit and miss, suffering as it does currently from the unchallenged sociocultural biases each instructor brings to the language-learning classroom.

A third front for research involves a deeper understanding of the cognitive and affective dimensions of learner agency and mediated action. Many adults in ABE and literacy learning situations have been emotionally damaged by experiences inside and outside schooling. For instance, the way that an emotional reaction to the written words of someone else sparks the development of reader agency through 'touching' the reader's own linguistic-experiential reservoir requires investigation.

The objective of classroom research and field-based research must surely be to support the efforts of adults like R. to become able readers of any and all texts. In both educational arenas, I am motivated by the conviction that to the extent that adult readers are able to reconceptualize reading in ways which capture their imagination and allow them to "...whiz into the future" with all the other M.'s, then to that extent they will be able to develop "learner agency" as readers.

Finally, the relationship between teaching and learning is characterized by reciprocity. I thank the many women and men, from classes I have 'taught', for teaching me more about teaching adults reading. Through the writing of this thesis the idea of learner agency has been present as a persistent theme. I realize that it has been the under-the-surface, subliminal issue all along: how can I as an instructor create the best conditions for individuals to act as subjects and meaning makers? Agency is taken, not given.

APPENDIX 1

Variation in DVST students' grade level placements based on results from three standardized reading tests administered during a two week period

<i>Student</i>	Stanford Brown Level	Nelson Denny Form C	Canadian Test Basic Skills
1	11.4	12.8	8.6
2	10.0	12.2	8.5
3	11.4	9.3	8.6
4	12.0+	13.8	8.7
5	10.0	7.5	6.6
6	9.1	—	7.6
7	12.0+	11.5	9.4
8	11.3	7.0	7.7
9	12.0+	13.2	8.2
10	10.0	12.2	—
11	11.4	11.5	8.4
12	11.4	7.0	7.6
13	6.8	8.1	7.1
14	11.4	13.2	7.9
15	11.4	10.8	8.4
16	9.1	11.5	7.5
17	7.6	9.3	7.2
18	—	13.2	9.4

APPENDIX 2

Students' self-reported reading difficulties (in italics) in relation to the MAETT articulation guide for Adult Basic Education

Note: Some students in the class of twenty-one adults report more than one problem

READING COMPREHENSION

of students

LITERAL (recalling information)

<i>uninteresting reading material</i>	9
<i>concentrating when reading</i>	7
<i>remembering what was just read</i>	5
<i>identifying important information</i>	3

INTERPRETATIVE (retelling information)

<i>understanding author's ideas</i>	5
<i>lack of specialized vocabulary</i>	4

INFERENCE (combining information)

<i>lack of background knowledge</i>	1
-----------------------------------------------	---

CRITICAL (commenting on information)

<i>developing own understanding</i>	1
-----------------------------------------------	---

WORD ANALYSIS/DECODING

<i>understanding meanings of words</i>	5
<i>pronouncing words</i>	5
<i>reading too slowly</i>	1

APPENDIX 3

Students' conceptions of reading and self-reported reading difficulties

CONCEPTIONS OF READING

	INTERACTIVE PROCESS	WAY TO GATHER INFORMATION	MECHANICAL ACTIVITY
<i>Total students</i>	5	10	6

SELF-REPORTED DIFFICULTIES

COMPREHENSION

Literal

<i>no interest</i>	*	*****	***
<i>concentrating</i>	**	*****	
<i>remembering</i>	*	***	*
<i>main ideas</i>		**	*

Interpretative

<i>author's ideas</i>		***	**
<i>special vocab.</i>	*	**	

Inferential

<i>no background</i>			*
----------------------	--	--	---

Critical

<i>developing ideas</i>		*	
-------------------------	--	---	--

DECODING

<i>Word meanings</i>		*	****
<i>Pronunciation</i>		**	***
<i>Reading slowly</i>	*		

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