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I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Connie L. White entitled "It Ain't All About the Books: Building Community-Based Literacy Education Programs." I have examined the final copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in Education.

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We have read this dissertation and recommend its acceptance:

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Dean of The Graduate School

It Ain't All About the Books:
BUILDING COMMUNITY-BASED LITERACY EDUCATION PROGRAMS

A Dissertation
Presented for the
Doctor of Philosophy Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Connie L. White
December 1996

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DEDICATION

for my father
Larry White

These apple trees on the mountainside
He planted the seeds before he died.
I guess he knew that he'd never see
The red fruit hanging from the tree.
But he planted the seeds for his children and me.

High on the ridge above the farm
I think of my people who have gone on.
Like a tree that grows in the mountain ground
The storms of life have cut them down.
But the new wood springs from the roots underground.
Gone, gonna rise again.

Words and music by Si Kahn, Joe Hill Music
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Abstract

What is community-based literacy education, and how is it practiced? How are the students, the teachers, the community-based organization and the community as a whole impacted by this approach to literacy education? What factors are important in creating and sustaining community-based literacy education?

To answer those research questions, this study examines a community-based literacy education program in Eastern Kentucky. The data collection involved participant observation as well as work with a participatory research group within the organization in order to identify examples of community-based literacy work, and the students, staff and volunteers most active in those efforts. Sources of data included interviews with 20 of those active participants; field notes, and journal entries kept over a five-year period; participatory research group meeting notes; and various other artifacts from the organization.

The study found these characteristics present in the community-based literacy education program, providing an on-the-ground definition of community-based literacy and its practice in this place: recognition of community context; students learning and growing in a supportive web of relationships with teachers and other students; opportunities for student leadership development systematically being identified and nurtured; teachers and students being close in class and culture; curriculum being drawn from community issues and issues in students' lives; community-based literacy education meeting community as well as individual needs.

Students, teachers, organizations and communities are impacted in various ways by community-based approaches to literacy. Students gain opportunities to connect issues they care about to their education; they are invited to learn in many ways, including ways that are not classroom- or book-bound. Teachers find that students stay longer because of the approach which includes field trips, learner-centered curriculum, community-problem solving, and working in groups. The organization is enriched by the presence of adult basic education students who participate with others to carry forward the work of the organization. The community builds denser webs of support for civic participation through the many relationships that adult basic education participants form as they do their community work.

Factors which influence and support community-based literacy education include respect for the will and the self-determination of the students; the provision of many opportunities to work together to solve problems in the community; and recognition that there are many ways to learn, to contribute and to grow in community-based literacy education programs...*it ain't all about the books.*

Preface

When I was growing up on my family's farm in Roane County, Tennessee, I believed my father and my grandmother to be among the smartest people I ever knew, and I still do. My father could identify every tree in our woods. He knew which ones would furnish logs that could hold the fire all night, and which ones would force him to rouse from his sleep to stoke the flame and add more fuel. He knew how to judge which way the trees would fall when he cut them. He knew how to judge when the cows would be thirsty enough to climb the hill to the frozen pond, so that by the time we finished chopping the ice, they would arrive at the pond to drink before it froze back over.

My grandmother could identify every bird just by hearing its song. And she turned dark, mottled, late summer apples into clear, sweet jelly, and into dried fruit for Christmas stack cakes. She knew how to dry shellie beans so they tasted just right. She could can and freeze all the corn and the tomatoes her bountiful garden grew and swap those for my mother's potatoes and blackberries and muscadines. She could do the wash in a big kettle beside the creek if her wringer washer was torn up. She knew how to sing by shape notes and loved to turn out big Sunday dinners after church.

But as I grew up, I saw that those forms of knowledge so important to my family's surviving and flourishing in our farm community were devalued by people in positions of authority in other contexts. Ideas about what people ought to know and

ought to be able to do changed according to who was doing the judging. The school I attended didn't consider those things we learned and did on the farm important enough to teach or even talk about much.

As I became a young adult and added college to my list of experiences, I saw many things in the world that needed changing. As a member of Save Our Cumberland Mountains (SOCM), a democratic, grassroots citizens group, I have spent many years of talking with others, taking action as a group, and talking some more to evaluate what we have accomplished. Over the years, we have had some wonderful successes and some spectacular failures. We learned how to trust each other and the process of making decisions together. We learned the skills of listening, speaking, writing, lobbying, building a group, sustaining energy and motivation, strategic planning, issue campaign design, evaluation and more (White, 1994). I added to my learning about citizenship and participation in public life through the people I met and the things I heard and saw at Highlander Center, Southern Empowerment Project, and Tennessee Industrial Renewal Network. For twenty years those experiences have changed and enriched my life and they continue to do so today.

As a special education teacher for seven years, I observed the inadequacy of our educational system's and procedures and structures in determining, teaching, and assessing, what are seen as useful and important knowledge, skills, and behaviors. Many of my students had a happy and fulfilling life outside of school. They did this despite our efforts which tended to label, dismiss as failures, and generally

discourage them because their academic learning was slower or different in some way. I never figured out how to both accept my students as they were, with their own interests and abilities, while at the same time encouraging them to learn the things we taught in school, some of which might even have been helpful in their lives! Although school curriculum and methodology taught teachers to believe that educational skills were universal and isolated from the rest of students' lives, I was never satisfied that I even knew what my students needed to learn in their own particular contexts and set of circumstances.

Dissatisfaction with my ability to reach conclusions or feel good about my ability to meet students' needs readied me to change direction. Sporadically throughout the years I had been a volunteer literacy tutor and a helper in a GED class in the my community. I was also an active member of several grassroots, democratic citizens' groups seeking change in environmental, economic and social issues confronting us. But I never connected the two areas of interest.

While at a weekend workshop at Highlander, I met and talked briefly with the person who was later to become my major professor at the University of Tennessee. He encouraged me to take an adult education class and later, to enter the University of Tennessee doctoral program.

My decision was sealed when I got the most extraordinary job ever offered to me: a graduate research assistant position at the University of Tennessee Center for Literacy Studies. It was here that I finally made the connection. It was here that I realized the things I had learned as a member of a citizen's group - how to participate

effectively in community decisions, reflect on my own experiences to learn what I needed to know and be able to do, analyze and challenge injustices, trust and depend on the collective knowledge and wisdom of others in the group, take action with others and learn by doing - could also result from participating in community-based adult education.

Those life experiences, interests and questions led me to work with the staff and students of Mountain Communities United, as a part of my job at the Center for Literacy Studies. I am very thankful for that opportunity.

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CHAPTER ONE

COMMUNITY-BASED LITERACY EDUCATION

A group of adult basic education students stand in groups on the steps of the state capital in Frankfort, Kentucky. Some carry signs, others sit quietly. They listen to speeches. They ask hard questions. They observe the political process. They speak about their own needs and their community's needs.

Sharon, who rode in a van with other adult basic education students from Mountain Communities United, a community group in Fairmont County in Eastern Kentucky, remembers the day:

> *I never been to Frankfort before. We made signs and we packed them. I made one, Feed the World. And we made another sign to not cut the lunches for schools...not cut funds like coal vouchers and food vouchers. Because a lot of people in the world ain't got nothing to eat, can't keep warm...they need a helping hand. When [you're there] something gets in you. You want to be heard and you want to speak out. And you want to go for the right...you all join together.*

Community-Based Literacy Education

Mainstream literacy work assumes that the purpose of literacy education is limited to improvement of reading, writing and numeracy skills of individual

students. This assumption is related to an orientation to individual students as seen in education programs in the United States. For most of these programs, the purpose of education for adults is "help individuals fit into mainstream society and to succeed in employment, schooling, parenting and other arenas in ways that are defined by the mainstream society" (Fingeret, 1992, p. 13).

However, many of the assumptions which underlie the individual orientation of traditional adult basic education programs have been called into question, including that adults' lack of literacy skills is at the base of many economic and social problems. The relationship between education levels of adults and the ability of communities to attract industry is an example. The widely-accepted notion that industry locates in areas where adults are well-educated is refuted by the U. S. Department of Agriculture's 1991 report *Education and Rural Economic Development: Strategies for the 1990s* and other sources, which suggest there is no correlation between education levels in rural areas and economic growth. The assumptions behind many family literacy programs have also been questioned. Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines (1988), Heath (1983) and other respected scholars have been critical of family literacy programs that present a monolithic image of poor families as illiterate, uncommitted to their children and in need of training in parenting skills.

Other practitioners and scholars describe a broader purpose for literacy education. They opt for a community orientation that has to do with community building, with increasing participation in the life of a community by all of its citizens, as well as with the attainment of individual skills in literacy as in other endeavors.

The focus of "community-based literacy" is to build and strengthen communities, to encourage involvement of students in the life of the community and in solving its problems (Curtis, 1990; Fingeret, 1984; Gaber-Katz & Watson, 1990; Merrifield, White & Bingman, 1991). This approach to education is oriented to community development and social action. It encourages the integration of the issues and concerns of students, families an communities into the literacy curriculum.

My colleague and I (Bingman and White, 1994) wrote that community-based literacy approaches the entire community and its development as a social process rather than approaching literacy as acquired by individuals without reference to learner aims within the context of the community. Examining the historical roots of educational offerings in Appalachia, we found that traditional approaches to education include "development which forgets the community and doesn't include the people most in need, education that is top down and passive, solutions that emphasize only needs and not strengths" (p. 1). Too often, education in Appalachia has been seen as a way to isolate, educate, and then remove certain members from the communities in which they were raised, and which need them the most. We propose another way of looking at the uses of education--as "not a ticket out but a ticket in" (p.1) to the community: education as a way to develop the community and its leaders who will remain inside the community and work to solve its problems.

> Education for these kinds of ends means joining with others to work on something you care about, to have opportunities to learn, to find your own voice and begin using it, to act on a new idea of informed citizenship and participation in government....As members of community organizations and staff and volunteers of literacy programs, we need a chance to develop a

> shared vision. We need opportunities to come together and support each other and learn from each other ways to create educational programs that serve our communities well. We need encouragement and opportunities to take on new challenges and new roles of leadership. We need support to challenge power structures. (p.1)

Characteristics of Community-Based Literacy

Gaber-Katz and Watson (1990) say that the "theory of community-based literacy is developing in tandem with, and emerging from, the practice"(p. 2) The Participatory Research Group of which Gaber-Katz and Watson are a part write that their purpose was to provide a more detailed description of the practice of community-based literacy. To do this, Gaber-Katz spent time with three community-based programs in Toronto and later brought the groups together to talk about their understanding of the approach. Through analysis of the transcripts of interviews and discussions, Gaber-Katz and Watson identified three fundamental elements of community-based literacy: learner-centeredness, literacy from a critical perspective, and community building. The authors' summary of the characteristics of each element appears below.

Within community-based literacy programs, *learner-centeredness* means that programs:

- listen to literacy learners and elicit stories about their lives;
- believe that everyone can learn;
- emphasize equality among learners, volunteers, and staff;
- encourage learners to become involved, both in the program and in the community;
- ensure that learning will be relevant;

- provide a range of programming options;
- assist learners in setting their own learning goals and measuring their own progress; and ensure that learners' interests and needs determine the curriculum.

In community-based literacy programs, literacy from a *critical perspective* means that programs assist learners to:

- improve their basic skills in reading, writing, numeracy, communication, life skills, abstract thinking, and general knowledge;
- increase their critical abilities;
- build self-confidence;
- increase their understanding of self;
- participate more fully in society;
- create language and culture;
- enhance the quality of their own lives; and
- work toward empowerment and social change.

In community-based literacy, community-building means that programs:

- are located in the community at convenient locations, are open at convenient times, are responsive to community needs, and co-operate closely with other neighborhood services;
- foster the development of common interest and goals;
- encourage literacy to be understood and practiced as a social process;
- create a sense of belonging;
- draw upon members of the community to share responsibility for the education of other adults within the community;
- help learners to acquire an understanding of self in relation to society; and
- work to build supportive communities. (pp. 172 - 174)

Harold Alden, a member of the Gaber-Katz and Watson's Participatory Research Group, offers another tool to help understand various literacy approaches. In contrasting liberal, conservative and critical perspectives, Alden points out the

political and economic assumptions that underlie theory and practice. Gaber-Katz and Watson rework Alden's typology to show how each perspective might be reflected in a literacy program.

> From the **liberal** perspective, literacy education is perceived as neutral. Literacy learners are viewed as adult learners who...are taking advantage of opportunities for lifelong learning. The liberal understanding denies that there is a distinct profile of adult literacy learners that needs to be reflected in the curriculum and the methodology. The resulting program model is likely to be one in which the teaching methods reflect a knowledge of the principles of adult learning and the whole language approach. The curriculum is likely to include life skills and functional materials--all with the intention of better integrating adult literacy learners into society.
>
> From the **conservative** perspective, adult literacy learners are perceived as being ashamed of their inability to read and write, living in fear of being found out. Illiteracy is described as a disease. It is understood that learners are seeking anonymity so that their friends and relatives will not discover that they have never learned to read. As a result, one-to-one volunteer programs are regarded as ideal since they respect the privacy of the learners. The belief central to the conservative perspective is that once adult students learn to read, they can go on to do anything. If they try hard enough they will "make it." The program model that grows out of the conservative perspective is one that is centered on skill-building...learning language by becoming aware of its structure and applying its rules. It is understood that learners will gain self-esteem by learning to read and write.
>
> From the **critical** perspective, it is understood that adult literacy learners have the right to participate in a democratic society, and that it is the community's responsibility to ensure that all its members can be active citizens. The critical analysis suggests that literacy learners have little economic privilege as individuals and, as a group, are disempowered by their poverty. Illiteracy is seen as a reflection of a particular social, economic, and political system that does not equally benefit all groups within society. The process of becoming literate includes coming to understand oneself better within a social context and coming to understand the importance of actively participating in society. Literacy broadens the range of possibilities for developing one's identity (pp. 30 - 31).

Community-based literacy education programs generally strive to reflect the critical perspective. Throughout their book, Gaber-Katz and Watson describe curriculum, materials, and teaching approaches common across community-based literacy programs. Many of these reflect and connect to the social and political analysis of the critical perspective. Community-based programs often use learner-produced materials in addition to commercial materials, reflecting the value they place on the learner's own life and experience. Whole-language reading and writing approaches are preferred for the same reason, with their emphasis on reading for meaning instead of decoding. Journal-writing, in dialogue with other students, staff or as a personal reflective activity, is encouraged. One-on-one tutoring is supplemented by the use of small groups, formed around themes or interests. Curriculum may be built around themes in learner's lives and issues in the community.

One example of such a program is Bronx Educational Services (BES). In this program, teachers listen for themes in student's lives. They listen to informal conversations in the break room, and they listen to class discussions. Teachers pay attention to what students care about, the things they choose to write about, how they look at their own lives and what they say about their hopes and dreams. Teachers may even facilitate activities to surface "generative themes." For example, one such generative theme for recent BES classes was housing. The students and teachers built curriculum around this theme. They had many discussions that resulted in "mind maps"-diagrams of students' thoughts about housing. They did research on housing in

their community. They documented housing problems and solutions in the community by taking photographs and writing. The class did critical-thinking activities such as determining who made decisions about housing, and thought through problems of inequity in housing. They used key words like "landlord," "tenant" and others to teach decoding skills. Some students interviewed their neighbors about their experiences in public housing. Some wrote letters to authorities about their housing needs. Some wrote articles about housing problems in the BES newsletter. For the culmination activity, students put together an exhibit of their photographs and invited the public.

Just as in other literacy programs, community-based literacy programs are concerned with student motivation and retention and student outcomes. Beder's study (1991) reveals that deterrents to adults entering and staying in adult basic education long enough to meet their goals include negative associations with schooling (but not education), "boring" curriculum that does not engage them or seem relevant to their lives, and an emphasis on "thinking" rather than "doing." It is deterrents such as these that community-based educators believe their approach avoids. It seeks to build curriculum around the issues in students' lives and in their communities; it integrates doing with thinking, just as in the Horton and Freireian approaches (Horton & Freire, 1990); and it places less emphasis on the traditional schooling model that stresses standardized curriculum in commercial textbooks and workbooks.

Community-Based Literacy and Civic Participation

Scholars and practitioners alike see the promise of community-based literacy education in developing civic participation in communities. Civic participation in which a broad range of people participate in civic life and are a part of decision making, and the way that civic participation connects people across barriers of race and economics is key to building "social capital." Social capital theorists such as Robert Putnam (1993, 1995, 1996) and others have written about ways that communities are strengthened when residents build networks and connections among themselves. Activities that encourage these relationships to form among community members may be as diverse as a bowling league, a community chorus, a Girl Scout troop, or--as community-based literacy practitioners would add--activities which involve literacy class members in the community. The connections that Putnam talks about are important not only to the social fabric of the community, but also to political and civic decision-making. Putnam's research has shown that more community involvement from a wide range of people results in more efficient and effective government.

Statement of Problem

Increasingly, literacy is seen as more than a series of isolated, unconnected skills. Lytle and Wolfe (1989) describe four broad definitions of literacy: literacy as

skills, literacy as tasks, literacy as practices, and literacy as critical reflection and action. *Literacy as skills* connects literacy attainment to reading instruction in K - 12, and relies heavily on standardized tests to assess grade level gains inside a universal set of decontextualized skills. This conceptualization regards literacy skills as generic and stable across settings. *Literacy as tasks* acknowledges that the meaning of literacy is understood in its uses. Functional literacy--the ability to fill in forms and do other tasks associated with day-to-day survival--is emphasized. *Literacy as practices* addresses the "social, political and economic nature of literacy practices" (Lytle and Wolfe, p. 10). In this conceptualization, literacy is seen as situated in a particular context, and not immediately transferrable to different contexts without knowledge of background information and social support. This conceptualization is particularly sensitive to diversity of purposes and roles of literacy in differing cultures, classes and social settings. *Literacy as critical reflection and action* is linked with Freire's notion of "reading the word" and "reading the world" (Freire & Macedo, 1987). Reading, writing and the ability to critically reflect are important tools in understanding the world and how to act on it. These four social constructions of literacy each implies a set of assumptions and each suggests different approaches to adult basic education.

Historically, adult education has been concerned with engagement in community. Community-based literacy programs that encourage learners to reflect and act collectively on the social, political, cultural and economic conditions that impact their lives and their community have long existed (Elias and Merriam, 1980;

Jarvis, 1987). Highlander's Citizenship Schools, Paulo Freire's work in Brazil, and the Nicaraguan literacy crusades are notable historical examples of literacy as critical reflection and action. Current work and writing includes Curtis' (1990) description of the elements necessary for literacy programs oriented to social change. Gaber-Katz and Watson (1991) describe efforts at three Canadian programs that integrate literacy and social change.

The understanding of literacy as social and cultural practices has emerged from the study of the uses of literacy in different cultural contexts. Heath (1983) describes the tensions that result from the expectations of middle-class teachers for their students from working-class families, where there are differences between the structure of families, definition of roles, and place of religion and culture in families. Gillespie (1990) and Auerbach (1990) describe ways in which the cultural practices of students can be respected and built upon in adult literacy programs.

The social constructions of literacy as social and cultural practices and literacy as critical reflection and action are increasingly seen to have merit by literacy scholars and practitioners. But it has been difficult to create literacy programs which value students' lives and experiences and to create curricula that draw from the students' own lives and culture. And even fewer programs have worked to help students participate in the community: to be a part of the decisions that affect them, to work collectively on issues that they care about, and to help bring about social change.

We need to know much more about how to create effective community-based programs. What happens when an organization tries out community-based literacy?

What are the benefits and the risks? How can teachers and students who have been involved in community-based literacy sort through what they have learned about the approach, and use those understandings to do their community-based work in even more effective ways?

The last question becomes central for program and staff developers who are very aware that little recognition or support for community-based literacy exists in the field, especially among state funding agencies. One of the most promising ways that literacy program participants can examine their own work is through participatory evaluation, in which participants analyze their own practice through critical reflection and determine changes they want to make. Although often used in Third World countries (see particularly Hope and Timmel, 1986), participatory evaluation has had only limited use in structured learning programs in the U.S. until recently.

Organizations have not been able to create programs that are built on a community-based literacy approach in part because there is so little written of it. Few studies have been produced that help form a clear picture of community-based literacy education. We know little about the factors that make a difference in an organization's ability to create and sustain such an approach to its literacy education work. We are at the very early stages of understanding how this approach impacts teachers, students, organizations and communities. My research questions emerged in response to that need.

Research Questions

What is community-based adult education, and how is it practiced? How are students, teachers, organizations and the community impacted? What factors contribute to the development of programs that integrate literacy and community development and organizing?

Method

I looked for answers to the research questions by engaging in a participatory research process with a group of staff, students and volunteers who have been part of community-based literacy education at Mountain Communities United (MCU), a community organization in Eastern Kentucky and the site for this study.

Limiting this research to one study site allowed me to pursue in depth the practices of that site. I functioned as a participant observer, as described in Whyte (1943) and other research efforts carried out or chronicled by Whyte (1984). The role allowed me to be at MCU, participate in the work of the organization in various ways, while also documenting much of what I saw. To some readers of research, that may also be a limitation: I formed definite opinions while in the midst of the fray. I "controlled" for this somewhat by talking over my MCU experiences throughout the years with my colleagues at The Center for Literacy Studies. They often asked questions that caused me to reconsider or look at situations from a different perspective.

Though this research is in the form of a case study that attempts to answer questions about community-based adult education, I do not mean to present MCU as a model. Rather, my description of this organization and its literacy education efforts is intended to reveal the richness and diversity of community-based literacy, which will differ according to community context.

Significance of the Study

As a nation, we are now grappling with broad social policy questions concerning connections among education, poverty, jobs and the economy. Scholars are being called upon to help understand these relationships and contribute to the development of policy, legislation, and education and training programs. As adult educators, our field debates professionalization and teacher credentialing. We examine curriculum and the place of skills-based individualized instruction in it. We ask hard questions about diversity and culture.

All of these tensions and dilemmas that we are experiencing as a nation and as a field are present in this study. Although this research has not uncovered solutions built on community-based methods that are applicable across communities and contexts, it provides a starting point, an example that others can examine and make judgements about its applicability to their own situation. This study can help us understand some of the strengths and challenges of community-based approaches in literacy education. I believe that because we have thoroughly investigated the efforts

of one organization, we have provided useful information to other programs and to the field of adult education. While we can not generalize from one case, we can now suggest some additional ways in which community-based adult education may contribute to strengthening communities while building the skills of individuals.

Organization of the Report

This report contains nine chapters. This chapter introduces my study. Chapter Two reviews the literature relevant to this study and includes the theoretical underpinnings which frame my understanding and help tie research to practice. In Chapter Three, I describe the method used in the study. Chapters Four and Five describe Mountain Communities United and the various ways that community-based literacy is practiced there. Students and teachers are also introduced. Chapter Six describes, through stories and interviews, how students are impacted by community-based literacy. In a similar process, Chapter Seven describes how teachers are impacted by community-based literacy. Chapter Eight focuses on organizational and community impacts of community-based literacy. Chapter Nine summarizes my findings and reports my conclusions, and an epilogue contains my reflections on doing the study.

CHAPTER TWO

RELATED THEORY, RESEARCH AND PRACTICE

This literature review situates my research questions in the field of adult education and provides both a historical and current context for community-based efforts. Also explored is the idea of literacy as a social construction, potentially affected and changed by political, economic, and social values and perspectives of those in power. The review also seeks to illuminate relationships that exist between community-based adult education efforts and current thinking regarding building social capital and civic participation.

Historical and Current Context for Community-Based Adult Education

Historically, how have scholars and practitioners seen the relationship between adult education and community? Does the field of adult education have roots in community-based work? What were the goals and values espoused in the field? What was the role of the adult educator in early community-based efforts? What do contemporary theorists have to say about community-based work? Are there examples to examine?

Roots of Current Community-Based Literacy Education

In the early 1900's-- during the same period that quantitative science, with its emphasis on standardization and categorization--was beginning to be applied to education, a very different path was also taken. This approach to education was connected to local community concerns and social action. In many ways this approach is the mother of current community-based literacy education work.

The roots of contemporary community-based education can be traced to scholars and practitioners from Europe and North and South America in the early part of this century. According to Cross-Durant (1987), adult educators such as Yeaxlee, Tawney, Lindeman, Coady, Horton and Freire saw education and social action as a way to address injustices. Many practices used by current community-based educators, such as connecting education to issues of concern in the community, facilitation and small group methods rather than lecturing or "banking education," and valuing democratic process were also embraced by these educators.

In the second decade of this century, Basil Yeaxlee thought about lifelong education and had already pointed out the inadequacy of the traditional years of schooling in producing adults who are able to fully participate in the democratic process. Yeaxlee theorized that if the goal was to produce a democratic, benevolent society, then education ought to be practical and related to the students' experiences and interests, as well as intellectually challenging. Education would help adults to think in the complex ways that functioning in a pluralistic democracy demands.

According to Elsey (1987), R. H. Tawney, born into England's privileged class in 1880, could have contented himself with a traditional, non-political brand of social work in London's East End. Instead, he came to believe that education was more valuable than charity, and that education could be used for political ends. In 1903 Tawney founded the Worker's Educational Association (WEA), which was the embodiment of his vision that working class power would be gained through political education. Bringing together unions and universities, tutorial classes were offered to workers in the spirit of "comradeship in study."

Tawney felt that adult education is an arm of democracy, and through it political and intellectual emancipation could be achieved. He passionately believed that education can and should be used to make a fairer society. Tawney was confident that ordinary people were quite capable of political and economic analysis, and that sharing knowledge and ideas through reasoned argument would help build a better democracy. Tawney continued his association with the WEA as a teacher and administrator for almost 50 years.

According to Brookfield (1987) Eduard Lindeman, born in 1885 to immigrant parents, described adult learning groups as a crucial training ground for democratic participation. Lindeman theorized that a vision of a just world and a philosophy of self-determination would best be served by what he variously termed "adult education groups" or "neighborhood/grassroots discussion groups" who aggressively engage the world in reflection and action.

Lindeman believed that all successful adult education groups sooner or later become social action groups. Lindeman's vision was of active, empowered adults, who through exchange involved themselves in energetic discussion of alternatives to capitalistic economies, exploration of ways to combat racial discrimination, and who examined the role of the U.S. in international affairs. Lindeman further believed that adult education participants should accept as their task reshaping the future.

As written by Brookfield in Jarvis (1987), Myles Horton was born in 1905 into a family who valued the meaning that religion gave to their lives. Horton's was a working-class family who stressed the importance of education. Even as a teenager, Horton demonstrated a great sensitivity to the rights of working people. His highly-developed sense of moral justice made it especially painful to see the poverty, unemployment and racial and class inequity around him. Horton's sense of being overwhelmed and ineffective against these problems using the traditional outreach of church and community led him to search for other means of combating oppression.

Horton emphasized education as a call to action. His vision of adult education is in many ways similar to Lindeman's. However, Horton is even clearer that there is no such thing as neutrality, and the notion of objectivity in education is a false one. It should not be assumed that the Horton/Highlander method (or as Horton preferred, "idea") is one of propagandization of certain viewpoints. At Highlander workshops, from the famed Citizenship Schools of earlier days to the current Economy Schools, ways of learning emphasize the posing of questions and the examination of the collective experience of ordinary people.

Tawney, Lindeman, and Horton agree that all genuine education keeps doing and thinking together. Similar goals--the desire for a critically reflective, politically aware people in charge of their own lives--were approached very differently by the three. But in the work of all three, the notion of group plays a central role in community-based education. In the workers' or neighborhood group, citizens practice the very skills, knowledge and attitudes that they seek to bring to the world. As members seek a voice in the group, they find it also in the community; as they practice new skills in the group, they find them also applicable to the world outside the group; as they become more involved and active in their group's decision-making, so do they in the larger community's.

Horton and Lindeman prefer non-authoritarian, informal learning, where groups use their own experiences, not texts, to gain insight. The use of interpersonal exchange and discussion is valued highly. Both Horton and Lindeman see adult education as a critical process, where participants come to see the constructed nature of their environment. Horton further emphasizes that the content of education must come from the learners themselves. Participants reflect on past action, analyze, and take new action. The use of drama, song and other creative forms is encouraged.

For both Horton and Lindeman, the role of the adult educator is that of guide, not of law-giver. The facilitator, whose job it is to get people talking, should avoid any appearance of authority. Tawney's methods were very different, especially regarding the role of the facilitator. He was a charismatic speaker, a lecturer with considerable ability to move and inspire audiences. He believed that reading, essay

writing and discussion in response to lectures was the preferred method for learning. His approach clearly contrasts with the unobtrusive style of facilitation favored by Horton and Lindeman. Tawney's tutorial classes were far more structured than the workshops and discussion groups advocated by Horton and Lindeman. His emphasis on high scholarship standards and adherence to a curriculum that contained not only political and economic theory, but literature and history as well, is another point of difference among these three. Tawney's passionate conviction that his students could understand and make use of this information is a testimony of his dedication to the ideal of shared inquiry among people of disparate backgrounds and experience.

Tawney, Lindeman and Horton shared the goal of individual empowerment through the development of critical thinking skills and increased confidence. Tawney felt that this growth would help working people obtain class power. Horton recognized the great potential for leadership development present in the adult education process. Lindeman points out that adult learning groups are a crucial training ground for democratic participation. All see education as a life-changing and expanding process. For thinkers and activists such as Tawney, Lindeman and Horton, education and life are inextricably bound up together.

While Lindeman and Horton were active in the United States, to the north at St. Francis Xavier in the small Canadian town of Antigonish, Nova Scotia, Moses Coady was also at work (Crane, 1987). A Roman Catholic priest and head of the University Extension Department, Coady help build in the third, fourth and fifth

decade of this century a movement that blended "adult education, Christian ethics and a program of social justice, directed through a university extension department" (p. 217).

As Coady worked in the Extension Department and in parish projects, he became deeply aware of the poverty, malnutrition, and despair among the people of the area. Coady's goal and life work became the aggressive pursuit of "a full and abundant life for everyone in the community" (Crane, p. 230). Abandoning the traditional University goals of scholarship, Coady instead undertook the organizing of fishermen over the eight thousand mile stretch of coastline of the Maritime and the Magdalen Islands. He believed that education must begin with the economic and be accomplished by group means. Coady's methods included mass meetings and discussion circles. "This did not involve teachers," he writes. "The people would come together by themselves and discuss their problems. The first logical step in this process was for someone to round up the people, so to speak. This involved the mass meeting" (p. 231).

In the groups, participants discussed real, everyday problems. Once a month or so, they came together with other discussion groups into one large community group to hear speakers or share recreational or cultural activities. The University Agricultural Extension Department was a resource to the groups and provided them materials and information. Within three decades, the Antigonish movement, by all accounts, helped the people of the region make significant progress in marketing,

credit, housing and many other areas of economic self-help. Less well-realized were goals of participation in decision-making by ordinary people.

Like other thinkers at the root of community-oriented adult education, Coady advocated broad goals of human development and social change that were far ahead of his time. Decades before the information explosion, he urged sharing of all technological advances. "It is the right of all people of this earth to have access to this knowledge," Coady wrote in 1952 (Crane, 1987, p. 235). He called for unity among all the worlds' people and an end to religious divisions. Coady warned about "poisoning our earth and our waters" and told audiences that "we cannot sin against nature and hope to win" (Crane, 1987, pp. 234-235). Coady's position was that adult education should be in service to these broader goals, and its ultimate success or failure should be judged by the economic empowerment and social justice efforts of people in communities.

Emancipatory Pedagogy, Critical Theorists and Community-Based Literacy Education

Like Horton, Paulo Freire was inspired to address economic and social inequities by his religious background. His emancipatory pedagogy shares much with that of Horton. Both men work "on the ground," and their action is much more visible than their theory. Both regard political work and adult education as integral parts of the same effort. Jarvis (1987) writes that, working among the poor of Brazil, Freire was a part of the rise of radicalism in the Roman Catholic church and the

sweep of Marxist ideas across Latin America. Freire writes, "This, then, is the great humanistic and historical task of the oppressed: to liberate themselves and their oppressors as well" (p. 270).

For Freire the teaching and learning transaction is a dialogue between all those who are participants in the process. His emancipatory pedagogy rejects the "banking" notion of education, in which a teacher deposits a collection of isolated facts and information into a student's head (Freire, 1970). Instead, he sees education as creating a critical awareness among people (Elias and Merriam, 1980; Peters and Jarvis, 1991). This *conscientization* is a central theme in Freire's work, in which humans "achieve a deepening awareness both of the socio-cultural reality which shapes their lives and of their capacity to transform that reality" (Jarvis, p. 270).

In teaching literacy skills to adults, Freire uses generative themes and problem posing. He wants not only to teach people to read and write, but also "to understand and relate their learning to the reality of their everyday life...to encourage learners to create knowledge and meaning as a result of a constant problematizing of their existential situations" (Jarvis, 1987, p. 274). For Freire, education is imminently practical, and with this combination of reflection and action, "praxis", learners are able to transform their own lives and the world.

Horton and Freire share much with critical theorists who also describe social action as being among the purposes of literacy. Giroux (1988) writes that people need to be able to read in order to challenge beliefs and myths that may prevent them from acting in their own best interest. Lytle and Wolfe (1989) credit Brookfield as

helping us understand that "an awareness of beliefs, values and behaviors as culturally constructed leads to the possibility of individual change and collective action" (p. 11).

Perhaps more than any others, Horton and Freire moved beyond rhetoric and turned their commitment into sacrifice that pushed all of us forward in our thinking about social change and adult education. Horton was beaten for his beliefs. Freire was imprisoned and exiled for his. Of his work in Nicaragua (Horton and Freire, 1990), Horton says:

> I met three or four popular educators. Two days before, they had found this popular educator who lived nearby with his throat cut, which was what the contras did to popular educators to let people know that they knew they were popular educators...as I looked at that man's grave, that simple grave where his neighbors had buried him with a little wooden cross on top, I was filled with tears and anger, knowing that our government was really responsible for that man's death. But the fact that there were people even within sight of that house who were continuing to do popular education meant that they had moved way beyond...they had committed their lives to it....Can we move in this country? Can the people in Appalachia who are so impressed with popular education and what's going on in Nicaragua, can we move another stage beyond just thinking it's a wonderful idea and be willing to make sacrifices? (p. 224)

Horton's challenge to adult educators, and that of Freire, Lindeman and others is to keep finding work to do in the community that matters and to develop education that supports it. This kind of education addresses goals of economic and social justice and has value beyond our place and time.

Current Examples of Community-Based Literacy Work

Current examples of community-based literacy work are in some sense the legacy of adult educators such as Coady, Lindeman, Horton, and Freire. There are several recent local and regional efforts which encourage a community-based approach to literacy, such as the Community in the Classroom program, developed at the Center for Literacy Studies. This project brought together 10 community groups that either had or wanted to have literacy work integrated with the community issues that were of concern to participants (Bingman and White, 1994; Bingman and White, 1992). This work was based on a sharing of "how-to" knowledge and group reflection on the values (involvement, democracy, participation in decision-making) held by organizations and members which shaped their educational approach.

The Northeast U.S. has emerged as an area with much interest and experience in community-based approaches to adult education. The New England Literacy Resource Center at World Education in Boston publishes *The Change Agent*, a respected and widely-read newsletter with an emphasis on students making positive changes in their communities. Dorcas Place Parent Literacy Center in Providence, Rhode Island uses a community-based approach to its literacy instruction, advocacy and public awareness work. The Literacy Project in Greenfield, Massachusetts centers on both the development of communities and individuals. It has developed a student-run Legal Advocate program, a student-made video on domestic violence, and a student-generated community group dealing with teen violence. The Germantown

Women's Educational Project in Philadelphia seeks to strengthen the community through their literacy work, including exploring ways to integrate literacy with development of learners' capacities in civic participation. The Dover Adult Learning Center in Dover, New Hampshire also has a particular interest in civic participation and has routinely registered students to vote and supported students as they speak about adult education at public hearings and write letters to civic leaders on issues important in their lives.

Bronx Educational Services has demonstrated educational methods, such as writing from themes in students' lives and communities, that integrate literacy learning and reflection on issues of gender, class, race, and power. Literacy South, in Durham, North Carolina, has created many useful publications that fit well with community-based approaches. The series *Not By Myself: Creating Communities of New Writers in the South* is a collection of students' writings, often accompanied by a photograph of the author. The writings are life histories, poems, and stories by literacy learners. Literacy South also produced a very helpful resource manual, *It Brought A Richness to Me* (1993), describing a participatory literacy approach.

The Appalachian Civic Leadership Project produced literacy materials and a process of group meetings based partly on a model by the National Issues Forums, a project of the W.K. Kellogg Foundation. Like the National Issues Forums, the materials and meetings raise questions for discussion and reflection around a theme. *The Appalachian Environment: Protecting Our Air, Land and Water* (Warren, et

al., 1993) is an example of combining reading, thinking, discussion and possible action on politicized issues into a literacy program.

With it's call to action and political edge, there appears to be few state funding agencies willing to underwrite research and staff development work on community-based literacy. An exception is the state of Virginia, which in 1995, funded Beth Bingman to write training modules and carry out training activities with teachers on community-based approaches.

There is national interest as well. In 1995 the National Institute for Literacy funded Brenda Bell at the Center for Literacy Studies and Silja Killenbach at the New England Literacy Resource Center to carry out the Southern Appalachian and New England Civic Participation project. The purpose of this work was to investigate the skills, knowledge, behaviors, attitudes and resources that are needed by actively involved citizens/community members; and, how ABE and ESOL programs can promote the development of these.

National organizations like the Association for Community-Based Education have sponsored workshops, developed programs, and published materials to help program developers and teachers learn and improve their practice of community-based adult education. (See especially ACBE publications *Literacy for Empowerment: A Resource Handbook for Community Based Educators, 1988*; and *ACBE Evaluations of Community-Based Programs, 1988-89*).

There are many more national and international examples of community-based literacy efforts and institutionalized promotion of community-based approaches than

those in the United States. UNESCO work is a particularly visible contribution. The 1993 UNESCO meeting in Salamanca, Spain culminated in the publication of *Alpha 94: Literacy and Cultural Development Strategies in Rural Areas* (Hautecoeur, 1994). Hautecoeur describes its purpose in part as examining "the function that local communities assign to educational activities and cultural research in their efforts to recreate vital, attractive and locally-controlled environments" (p. 1). The twenty-one articles, two of them by Center for Literacy Studies staff, (Bingman and White, 1994; Merrifield, White and Bingman, 1994) describe community-based literacy efforts from nearly all parts of the world.

Literacy as a Social Construction

Many scholars and practitioners view literacy as an set of universal, isolated skills that lead to better reading, writing and numeracy. Most literacy programs, with their dependence on uniform curriculum, mass-produced commercial materials and standardized testing are built on that same assumption. This narrow understanding of literacy is very individualist and separate. It separates literacy learning from the rest of an adult's life. It leads away from using issues in people's lives and in the community as a basis for reflection or action. Because many literacy programs treat literacy as an isolated set of skills, not imbedded in culture and context, and not integrated with action, there is little room for community work inside such literacy programs.

However, if practitioners and scholars choose to understand literacy as a social construction, we can see that there are "many literacies" (Gillespie, 1990). We are free to consider the world as the classroom, and an individual's quest for literacy becomes not only an effort to master skills and tasks, but also a way to examine his or her own experiences, to interact meaningfully with others, to contribute to the community, and to take action separately or together on issues of concern.

Why have we generally chosen, as adult educators and as policy makers, to treat literacy as an isolated set of skills, separate from the rest of our lives? Why have so many of us embraced the *literacy as skills* understanding of our work?

As educational theorists and practitioners, we have a body of shared history, experiences, and traditions. Kuhn (1970) described how we are prepared to think, see and practice in a particular field: we cite shared law, theory, application and concrete models. Kuhn points out that "apparent consensus" (p. 11) is produced for those whose research and practice are based on shared paradigms and for those who committed to the same rules and standards for scientific practice, a consensus in which disagreement over fundamentals is unlikely.

Part of the shared history we have inherited as educators is habits of categorization. Bogdan and Bilken (1977) write that "civilizations have always created such categories as "handicapped" and "race" (and we could add, "illiterate") and fostered prejudices, stereotypes and discrimination" (p. 18). Others have suggested that the categories serve purposes such as placing blame, focusing fears,

and permitting self-serving congratulatory feelings of approval, inclusion and relief that we do not belong to the deviant categories.

The force of "apparent consensus" and habits of categorization in the field of adult education may lead us toward the *literacy as skills* model. The next section offers a fuller description of how the "literacy as skills" model may have been constructed.

Building a Social Construct of Literacy

In the past two decades, an increasing number of theorists have been critical of the tendency for social scientists to formulate theory on the basis of common sense notions that match preconceived ideas rather than well-thought out research. Bogdan and Bilken (1977), writing about the fields of special education and rehabilitation, might well have been speaking of adult basic education: "Social science has done much to reify categories and therefore to entrench prejudice, stereotypes and discrimination....Professionals and disability-related fields have followed a research tradition which has hindered the questioning of basic concepts in disability research....Assumptions have been taken as givens, as starting points for research" (p. 19). Because this limited theoretical base leaves us open to acceptance of unquestioned assumptions, it has been easier to build socially-constructed notions of literacy that don't hold up to scrutiny. Bogdan and Kuglemass (in Skrtic, 1986), Kazemak (1988), Smith (1989) and Rogoff & Lave (1984) variously show how social

value judgement, tests and the culture of social service systems are among the social constructors of notions of literacy.

Adult education has been criticized for lack of strong theory, a clear framework of beliefs or unique philosophical basis (Knowles, 1980; Lawson, 1991). Many scholars believe that without these, the field of adult education becomes fertile ground in which unexamined prejudice and common sense assumptions can multiply. This may be especially true in the area of adult basic education, where some common assumptions among professionals and the public include, for example, that illiterate people have low self-esteem, few problem-solving skills, and are socially isolated.

Prevailing Notions of Literacy are Based in the Positivist Paradigm of Knowledge

Education's early twentieth century fascination with the notion of standardized testing gave rise to habits of classification and categorization across the field. Bogdan and Kuglemass (in Skrtic, 1986) summarized the assumptions behind prevailing notions of normality-disability, based in the positivist paradigm:

> (1) Disability is a condition that individuals have; (2) disabled/typical is a useful and objective distinction; (3) special education is a rationally conceived and coordinated system of services that help children labelled disabled; (4) progress in the field is made by improving diagnosis, intervention and technology.

Like special education, much thinking about literacy and illiteracy in the field of adult education is based in the positivist paradigm of knowledge. The similarities are so striking that with the words "illiteracy" and "adult education" substituted in the Bogdan and Kuglemass quote above, the authors could have been writing about claims regarding functional literacy. The Bogdan - Kuglemass description of assumptions behind prevailing notions of normality and disability in the positivist paradigm bear much resemblance to the conservative perspective on literacy, described on page 6 of this report.

Kazemak (1988) writes that in this view, illiteracy is viewed as a condition that individuals have, making them "inherently different" from literate people (p. 466). Although functionalists are able to see illiteracy/literacy on a continuum, still it sets an arbitrary point as a cutoff and "assumes that all those who test below that level are deficient in skills, while those above it have the basics needed to survive" (p. 466).

In *Life at the Margins: Everyday Literacy Among Diverse Adults*, an ethnographic study of adults with low literacy skills, Merrifield, et al. (1996) point out that this narrow concept pays no attention to an individual's history, social context, or broad range of experience, knowledge and ability. Like the social constructivists in the field of special education, these scholars suggest that our notions of literacy and illiteracy are based not so much on objective reality but are instead socially constructed. The operative process is not "seeing is believing" but rather "believing is seeing."

Social Value Judgements as Constructors of Notions about Literacy

Many of us fall victim to unexamined, prejudicial assumptions and stereotyping of adults with low literacy skills. We might call this "literatism", as Smith (1989) suggests. Former First Lady Barbara Bush, quoted in the same article, illustrates these assumptions as she implies that people with limited reading skills are responsible for much of the crime and social ills in this country.

> I truly believe that not being able to read is one of the root causes of so many of our other social problems--drug abuse, teenage pregnancy, unemployment, and even AIDS. Our prisons and welfare rolls are filled with people who cannot read nor write....It's frustrated teenagers who can't read well enough to do their homework who become the dropouts on the street corner selling crack" (p. 10).

Continuing to subscribe to the belief that people with low literacy skills are "inherently different," given to crime, and socially undesirable is convenient; it means that we can keep on believing that the fault is with the individual. We don't have to examine our economic system or our educational system. Smith (1989) challenges Ms. Bush's assumptions about the literacy-immorality-crime connection:

> Literacy doesn't make anyone a better person. Some of the greatest tyrants in the world have been voracious readers and compelling writers. A number of people believe that making all young people literate would prevent crime, but I don't think that inability to read and write makes anyone a criminal -- something else is responsible. And I haven't seen any evidence that learning to read makes criminals abandon their nefarious careers. If anything, it could make them more efficient criminals. Literacy doesn't generate finer feeling or

> higher values. It doesn't even make anyone smarter. Illiterate people navigated the oceans by reading the stars, which for millennia served many cultures as a clock, calendar, atlas, almanac, and historical record. Today, most literate people don't even notice the stars (p. 354).

Tests as Social Constructors of Notions about Literacy

The inadequacy of methods and tools of assessment in education has been broadly documented. The most interesting additions to this literature are questions about contextual factors in understanding the skills of adults, as Rogoff and Lave (1984) describe.

> Micronesian navigators who show phenomenal skills in memory, inference, and calculation when traveling from island to island perform abominably on standard tests of intellectual functioning. Subjects who perform poorly on logic or communication problems in a test situation often reason precisely and communicate persuasively in more familiar contexts (p. 2).

Rogoff and others have questioned the assumption that it is possible to examine a cognitive process without reference to context. "Evidence shows that our ability to control and orchestrate cognitive skills is not an abstract context-free competence which may be easily transferred across widely diverse domains but consists rather of cognitive activity tied specifically to context. Both the arithmetic skills learned in school and learned in tailoring show a limited generality to a different type of arithmetic problems" (p. 3). Rogoff and Lave call the everyday cognition of adults

"opportunistic" and "practical," and write that it is very difficult to assess an adult's skills or competencies outside of a particular context.

This body of research would suggest that conventional ways of testing the skills and abilities of adults are inadequate and can serve to undergird a system built on unconscious and untested assumptions.

Service Systems as a Constructor of Notions about Literacy

The seemingly endless repetition of examinations, being herded from one waiting room to another, the replacement of human identity by test scores--all these experiences are well known to adults seeking basic education services. The experience of dehumanization reinforces and helps construct notions of literacy and illiteracy.

Adults who attend teacher-controlled programs, who are instructed with methods and materials reminiscent of elementary school, and whose very presence at school is sometimes mandated by law, just like children, will likely be viewed as child-like, without adult competencies.

"Spread" and Devaluation as Constructors of Literacy

The inferior social status inferred upon persons who do not conform to images of literate adults implies that the part of the person that is different is diminished, and

also that the whole person is diminished by lack of literacy skills. It is difficult for the person to escape "spread", or the societal "tendency to respond to...[loss or absence of a]...function by lessening the value of the whole person" (Bartel and Guskin, p. 36). This force operates both socially in interactions with others and their expectations, and on an individual level, depending on how much the person has internalized those social judgements into his or her own self-concept. Fingeret (1992) notes that "students often feel strong in many areas of their lives, but they know that the larger society is contemptuous of their inability to read and write well," (p. 7) and so acknowledges the difficulties of having many strengths but being judged only for the things that a person does not yet do well.

Trying to "Pass" in a Literate World

Several scholars have discussed the social consequences of being labeled as different. These social consequences are real, whether or not the labels represent any relationship to "objective" reality. Considering the high stakes of these social consequences, Goldstein (1986) questions the assumption that an individual's denial of her disability is a neurotic behavior. Instead, he suggests that the individual thereby preserves an identity that allowed her to be a real, human person, did not force her to accept a label that implied (whether true or not) a loss of wholeness, of damage (in Shontz, 1986, p. 10).

Like people who reject a label of "disabled," most participants in the Longitudinal Study of Adult Literacy Participants in Tennessee (all of whom are enrolled in literacy classes) report in an interview substantial interaction with print materials everyday (Merrifield, Smith, Rea & Shriver, 1993) . Maybe these students describe their experiences as they see them. Maybe they overestimated their interaction with print in order to look more skillful to the interviewer. Or maybe, like those who reject the disabled label in order to lay claim a whole, undamaged concept and representation of their inner person, they refuse the label regardless of skills. Because in our culture it is so hard to simultaneously hold "illiterate" and "competent, worthwhile person" as representations of our selves; thus we have to make that choice. The value judgements and social consequences set into action by the label "illiterate" are often too great to bear.

Prevailing Social Constructions of Literacy

If literacy is a social construction, what are the predominant understandings of literacy? How do these understandings affect our ability as a field to conceive of and integrate community-based efforts into literacy programs?

The recognition that "literacy is connected to the social, historical, political, cultural, and personal situations in which people use their skills" (Fingeret, 1992, p. 3) has enabled scholars to critically examine concepts of literacy as a social construct. Lytle and Wolfe (1989) write about four broad categories of literacy definitions.

These could also be thought of as the current prevailing social constructions of literacy. Lytle and Wolfe's categories of literacy definitions include literacy as skills, literacy as tasks, literacy as practices and literacy as critical reflection and action.

Literacy as skills. The idea that literacy is a set of universal skills that are "stable across texts and contexts" (Lytle and Wolfe, p. 7) is probably the most pervasive definition in literacy programs today. This model is "defined in relation to the traditions of instruction in K - 12 schools and attainment of grade levels" (p. 7) and has its roots in the same historical choices made in the fields of education and psychology as described earlier in this chapter. Throughout this century, education has taken much of its disciplinary base from biology and psychology, which "yields an approach to diagnosis, intervention and technology grounded in diagnostic-prescriptive teaching and behavioristic theory" (Skrtic, 1986, p. 13). Instructional programs are designed on the basis of performance on tests. Behavioristic theory is applied to specific skills instruction. Learning goals are broken into sub-skills and taught sequentially. In this model, the teacher is thought of a "technician applying a technology of teaching" referred to as "systematic instruction" (Skrtic, 1986, p. 13).

Efforts to develop objective measures of academic achievement and group standardization methodology in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century gave rise to a paradigm that suggests that there is an objective and neutral set of skills that are universal and not context-specific. In this model, "effective literacy instruction involves breaking reading and writing down into their component parts and teaching them sequentially. Much time and attention are often given to the processes of

decoding and encoding." (Lytle and Wolfe, p. 8). Despite much criticism of this "school model," the model persists in many literacy programs. Testing to determine "grade level," learner and program assessment based on standardized tests, and generic curriculum materials are but a few of numerous examples of the *literacy-as-skills* paradigm.

Literacy as tasks. Embedded in *literacy-as-tasks* definitions is the recognition that literacy can be understood as a tool to use in order to do a meaningful task such as read a bus schedule or fill out an employment application. The concept of functional literacy-- the ability to do needed tasks of everyday life in the real world-- is closely related.

Lytle and Wolfe note differing understandings of functional literacy: performance on daily tasks; the idea that functional literacy skills comprise a set of skills less than full literacy but more than the most basic "survival" literacy skills; a more relativistic understanding that recognize functional literacy standards change from culture to culture (Levine 1982); and Hunter and Harman's (1979) writings that emphasize the role of an individual and group in setting their own standards for functional literacy.

Both Lytle and Wolfe (1989) and Fingeret (1992) point to the Adult Performance Level Project as reinforcing the understanding that *literacy-as-skills* definitions are inadequate to help discern how adults use literacy in their lives. Later the National Assessment of Education Progress used a complex research design to measure prose literacy, document literacy and quantitative literacy. But both of these

large projects, as well as most other efforts to understand literacy as tasks, fall victim to a basic contradiction. Lytle and Wolfe point out that they first propose that "competence is context-specific and then posit the same tasks for all persons" (p. 9). Fingeret adds that literacy-as-task approaches do not consider the context in which a person does the task. She points out that we assume that filling in an application form in literacy class is the same task as filling in that form in the personnel office, when in reality, it isn't.

Literacy as practices. This understanding of literacy acknowledges that "we engage in literacy in a social setting, and we cannot separate the setting from our literacy behaviors" (Fingeret, 1992, p. 6). While the *literacy-as-tasks* understanding would support the need to learn to write checks, that understanding might not include acknowledgement of the difference between learning to spell the numbers and note the check in the checkbook register, and writing a check in a busy supermarket line with a clerk and several impatient people looking over the writer's shoulder. The literacy-as-practices perspective does include this understanding, and sees social context as a key element.

Lytle and Wolfe describe the work of Heath (1983) who wrote about the uses of language and literacy practices of working class families and Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines' (1988) ethnography of inner-city families. These scholars provide a "strong contrast to deficit models that emphasize the limited background some children (and adults) bring to learning...although the uses of reading and writing are tied to the

particular economic and cultural patterns of a community, families use literacy for a wide variety of purposes and audiences and in diverse situations" (Lytle and Wolfe, p. 10).

Fingeret (1992) notes that there are few programs based on the understanding of literacy as social and cultural practices, and difficult challenges remain in learning how to create programs that support adult students in trying out new skills and tasks in their everyday social and cultural contexts.

Literacy as critical reflection and action. One of Freire's important contributions is his understanding of literacy as not only "reading the word" but also "reading the world"--to use "reading, writing and discussion to reflect on the conditions of one's existence and ultimately to change them" (Lytle and Wolfe, 1989, p. 11). This critical literacy perspective sees literacy as a "means for adults to challenge the traditional distribution of knowledge and power in their communities and in the larger society. It is a philosophy in which action and reflection are intertwined as adults work together for a more just society" (Fingeret, 1992, p. 7). For practitioners who subscribe to literacy as critical reflection, literacy classes are built around struggles and themes in learners' own lives. Often reading, writing and discussion may be centered around issues of power and race and gender and social class. It is hoped that this will lead to the possibility of change in the learner's own life and of the possibility of collective action.

These last two understandings of literacy, as practices within a social context and as a way to change power relationships through personal and collective action,

support the possibility of building communities while working toward greater literacy for individuals. It is this theme I explore in the rest of this chapter.

Social Capital and Civic Participation Through Community-Based Literacy

Within the past few years, more and more interest has been expressed in the ideas described by social capital theorists, sociologists, community developers, community organizers and others. These thinkers talk about building a *civil society* and increasing *civic participation.*

Among such thinkers are Coleman (1988, 1990), who is generally credited with developing the social capital theoretical framework, Putnam (1993, 1995, 1996) who is perhaps the most-read of the social capital theorists, as well as Lappe & DuBois (1991) and Boyte (1995).

Putnam (1993) writes that social capital refers to "features of social organization, such as networks, norms, and trust, that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit. Social capital enhances the benefits of investment in physical and human capital" (p. 36). Basing much of his earlier work on investigations of regional government in Italy, Putnam observed that although the 20 new governing structures began in 1970 were very much alike, their success rates varied enormously from extremely successful (programs worked, life was better, citizens were satisfied) to dismal failures (marked by inefficiency and corruption). In attempts to explain these differences, Putnam noted that political affiliation or

ideology seemed not to matter. Neither did affluence or social stability, political harmony or population movements. Instead it was "strong traditions of civic engagement - voter turnout, newspaper readership, membership in choral societies and literacy circles, Lions Clubs, and soccer clubs [that were] the hallmarks of a successful region" (p. 36). Putnam further describes civic life in the successful regions of Italy, such as Tuscany, and Emilia-Romagna:

> [They] have many active community organizations. Citizens in these regions are engaged by public issues, not by patronage. They trust one another to act fairly and obey the law. Leaders in these communities are relatively honest and committed to equality. Social and political networks are organized horizontally, not hierarchically. These "civic communities" value solidarity, civic participation, and integrity. And here democracy works (p. 36).

In contrast, Putnam describes regions such as Calabria and Sicily:

> The very concept of citizenship is stunted there. Engagement in social and cultural associations is meager. From the point of view of the inhabitants, public affairs is somebody else's business - *i notabili,* "the bosses", "the politicians" but not theirs. Laws, almost everyone agrees, are made to be broken, but fearing other' lawlessness, everyone demands sterner discipline. Trapped in these interlocking vicious circles, nearly everyone feels powerless, exploited, and unhappy. It is hardly surprising that representative government here is less effective than in more civic communities (p. 36).

In other words, connectedness counts. Putnam believes that social capital undergirds economic progress as well as good government. He calls social capital a "precondition" of favorable economics and efficient government. Putnam agrees that government and economics flourish in environments with strong networks of civic

participation because they help create "norms of reciprocity." Since "trust lubricates social life," the networks are vital. Those social networks also "facilitate coordination and communication and amplify information about trustworthiness of other individuals", primarily because of repeated instances of working together means that strong relationships are formed, and "dense social ties facilitate gossip and other valuable ways of cultivating reputation - an essential foundation for trust in a complex society" (p.37). There are fewer cases of corruption and opportunism, since information spreads quickly, reputations are known, and mutual interdependence discourages corruption and opportunism. And finally, because these social networks have within them past experiences and successes with collaboration, they form a template for networks to use in addressing new challenges.

Putnam describes some characteristics of social capital that bear noting. First, it tends to be cumulative. The trust built in one collective endeavor, say, a group of farmers who share equipment and pool their labor to get all the hay in the community up, will serve them well in their next effort together, whether it is related or unrelated to their farming needs. Second, just as with physical capital, groups who have social capital tend to get more of it, while those without it often do not. Third, social capital increases through use and decreases through disuse. But unlike physical capital, the proceeds are not put to private use. Social capital often benefits the entire community, in direct and indirect ways.

Social capital is the result of practical things we do together, or interests we hold and pursue in common. Social capital is an additional product, often not the

direct reason that we go about our political, economic and recreational activities. As Putnam says, "members of the Florentine choral societies participate because they like to sing, not because their participation strengthens the Tuscan social fabric. But it does" (p. 38).

Putnam's ideas for building community through encouraging the accumulation of social capital seem full of potential for adult educators hoping to integrate community work into literacy learning. Speaking of formulating new strategies for development, strengthening economies and encouraging democracy, Putnam suggests that we

> ...patiently [reconstruct] those shards of indigenous civic associations...design programs that creatively combine individual choice with collective engagement...[apply resources] in ways that strengthen community organization, not weaken it (p. 39).

Putnam continues:

> ...social policy is designed to enhance the opportunities of individuals, but if social capital is important, this emphasis is partially misplaced. Instead we must focus on community development...[realize the] indirect benefits that could flow from the creation of social networks that cross class and racial lines. In any comprehensive strategy for improving the plight of America's communities, rebuilding social capital is as important as investing in human and physical capital (p. 42).

In *Bowling Alone*, Putnam (1993) summarizes the findings of educational, sociological, economic and health research that shows the importance of social

connections and networks. Putnam writes that civic participation and the presence of community networks and norms--the marks of social capital, developed through personal interaction and collective action over time--are the single most influential factor in positive outcomes.

> Research on the general population has found that people with comparatively few social and community ties face substantially greater risks of physical and mental illness and mortality, controlling for socioeconomic status and for physiological risk factors. One study, for example found that controlling for sex, age, race, socioeconomic status, physical health status and personal hygiene, social connectedness lowered mortality risk by more than half. Joining, in short, is good for your health (p. 5).

However, Putnam notes that trends in civic participation are heading downward within the United States: he notes the downward trends of political participation; secondary associations such as churches and other religious groups, mainline civic organizations such as scouting, Red Cross, PTAs, and unions; and social trust. He finds participation in these activities and associations to be down significantly in recent decades in every case. For example,

- Voter turnout declined by almost a quarter between 1960 and 1990.
- Since 1973 the number of Americans who report that in the past year they have attended a public meeting on town or school affairs decreased more than a third.
- Similar downward trends were noted survey research where Americans were asked if in the past year they had:
    - written to their congressman or senator;
    - attended a political rally or speech;
    - served on a committee of some local organization; or
    - worked for a political party (p. 8).

There was a similar decline in measures of social trust and neighborliness:

> The proportion of Americans who socialize with their neighbors more than once a year has slowly, but steadily declined over the last two decades, from 72% in 1974 to 61% in 1993 (p. 20).

Putnam examines some possible reasons for the downturn in civic participation, including the movement of large numbers of women into the labor force, population mobility, and technological trends. While Putnam (1996) accepts that each of these may be a factor, he eventually identifies one major prime suspect: television.

> The links between civic engagement and television viewing can be instructively compared with the links between civic engagement and newspaper reading. The basic contrast is straightforward: newspaper reading is associated with high social capital, TV viewing with low social capita. Controlling for education, income, age, race, place of residence, work status, and gender, TV viewing is strongly and negatively related to social trust and group membership, whereas the same correlations with newspaper reading are positive. Within every educational category, heavy readers are avid joiners, whereas heavy viewers are more likely to be loners. In fact, more detailed analysis suggests that heavy TV watching is one important reason why less educated people are less engaged in the life of their communities. Controlling for differential TV exposure significantly reduces the correlation between education and engagement (p. 46-47).

There are drawbacks to the tightly-woven networks that civic participation and involvement encourage. Putnam (1993) cautions against discounting the costs of community engagement. He warns us not to "romanticize small-town, middle-class,

civic life in the America of the 1950s" (p. 27). Echoing a theme in his earlier work, Putnam says that the "substantial decline in intolerance and probably also in overt discrimination...may be related in complex ways to the erosion of traditional social capital" (1993, p. 27).

In "The Prosperous Community", Putnam explains how inequalities may be perpetuated by the norms and networks that are in place.

> Social inequalities may be embedded in social capital. Norms and networks that serve some groups may obstruct others, particularly if the norms are discriminatory or the networks socially segregated. Recognizing the importance of social capital in sustaining community life does not exempt us from the need to worry about how that community is defined - who is inside and thus benefits from social capital, and who is outside and does not (1993, p. 42).

Connecting Civic Participation Learning to Adult Education

The current interest in social capital, creating the "civil society" and enlarging civic participation to strengthen communities has produced a call for a strong role for education at all levels in this transformation. What do current thinkers believe is an appropriate role for schools? What does this suggest for adult education? And how does it fit with community-based literacy programs?

Packer (1996) presents several intriguing ideas. Packer suggests that public-funded education should be "purpose-based" and should have standards for each of three purposes: employment, citizenship and personal development. He praises the

work of the SCANS commission (the Labor Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills) in bringing "customers" (employers) into the system for determining "What Work Requires of Schools", the title of their first publication. Similarly, Packer suggests, we should also establish a "Citizenship Commission to determine what U.S. Democracy Requires of Schools" (p. 47).

Packer describes a process in which the commission would not produce standards for history, math or any other particular academic discipline. Instead, they would determine the "big ideas" that students would study. In history, these might be:

> ...concepts such as democracy, exploitation, pluralism, etc. The commission might ask that high school graduates be able to read, understand, and discuss articles that appear on the front page of the nation's major newspapers. It might also ask that students be equipped to participate in civic or political organizations in their communities. It should do enough survey research to ensure that the findings represent the broad public view (p. 47).

Packer notes that civic organizations are also customers of the schools, and they need adults who are equipped to participate in the group, understand how meetings are run, and develop their own leadership capabilities.

Packer further proposes that, like SCANS, a specific curriculum would not be prescribed, but the standards would guide local educators in putting together the content so that students would have the experiences they need in order to get to the goals and behaviors the standards suggest. Packer calls for an integrated curriculum that would serve the standards of both employment and citizenship, for instance:

> ...a focus on the requirements for democracy will imply important things about curricula. Take mathematics, for example. If the math curriculum is to better serve the purposes of either work or citizenship, then statistics is likely to increase in importance and trigonometry to diminish. Psychology or sociology may be able to break into the triad of biology, chemistry, and physics in a science curriculum serving these ends. And in the social sciences, economics may become an important part of the study of history or geography (p. 56).

The National Institute for Literacy is already fostering this kind of effort in the field of literacy and adult basic education. The Civic Participation Standards Project began Phase 1 work in Appalachia and New England. The Center for Literacy Studies, and the New England Literacy Resource Center designed and carried out research on these key questions:

- What skills, knowledge, behaviors, attitudes and resources are needed by actively involved citizens/community members?
- How can ABE and ESOL programs promote the development of those skills?

The groups developed a participatory process that included focus groups with "customers" or "stakeholders" in adult basic education - teachers, administrators and policy makers. There were also a series of inquiry projects with adult learners and their teachers. These classroom-based efforts integrated civic participation into the curriculum.

During their first year of working together, the groups collected data from focus groups, documentation from inquiry projects, and reflections from two Working Groups (consisting of representatives of focus groups and inquiry projects) who

guided the projects in both New England and Appalachia. The groups also analyzed student writings, teacher's journals, transcripts of recordings from focus groups, individual interviews and inquiry group logs.

The Working Groups found that to participants, citizenship meant "making a difference - a better life, a better community, a better world" (p. 15). Four broad areas with subthemes emerged as key characteristics of civic participation. These characteristics may suggest goals, curriculum and activities for adult basic education programs:

- Developing and Using Voice
  - developing a sense of self
  - speaking out in ways that you can be heard
- Getting and Understanding Information
  - knowing where and how to get information
  - analyzing the information
- Working Together
  - getting involved with others
  - participating in groups
  - supporting each other
- Taking Action
  - individuals helping individuals
  - organizing community service
  - educating others about an issue
  - influencing decision-making
  - becoming decision-makers

Instructional strategies also emerged from the data and include:

- Use the community as a classroom.
  - Take students into the community: field trips, community service and volunteer activities, visit elected officials, attend legislative hearings.
  - Learn more about an issue.
  - Get ready to take action.
  - Reflect and plan for next steps.

- Create community in the classroom.
  - Identify and build on students' knowledge, interests, and experiences.
  - Surface, support and challenge students' biases, assumptions and core beliefs.
  - Create support groups.
  - Validate student ideas: use small and large groups, use students' own words and ideas for written material, students make decisions that affect them.

- Support students as change agents and leaders (leadership development).
  - Run a democratic center: students make decisions about program and curriculum; students have a student government.
  - Read stories about peers who have made a difference.

- Teach to different ways of learning (multiple intelligences).
  - Use role playing, visual (photographs, pie charts), videos, simulations, discussions; draw pictures; talk about feelings; read and write essays, creative writing; hands-on; gardening, fixing up center (p. 14).

Themes also emerged from the program quality data:

- Model principles of democracy at the classroom, program, and state decision-maker level.
- Make civic participation a legitimate part of instruction and system reform at all levels.

- Support teachers by developing and providing professional development opportunities, teaching resources, adequate planning time as well as providing for the basic needs of adequate space, materials, and salaries.
- Use local resources and develop collaborations with other organizations and groups.
- Vary the mode of instruction by balancing individual work with group work and collective action (pp 76 - 78).

The fifth theme is particularly intriguing. It emerged from many conversations in which teachers and others spoke about "the necessity of moving away from an excessive focus on individualized approaches and balancing them with group work that could lead to collective action...(which) is such an important facet of civic participation...(and) merits more attention than most adult educators are used to giving it" (p. 76).

Finding these kinds of suggestions in a report of publicly-funded research in the field of adult basic education is unusual. Breaking away from one-on-one individual approaches is a big step for most programs; to suggest that groups of students within classrooms might also legitimately decide to become informed, take positions, and pursue collective action on community issues of concern to them surely exceeds the comfort zone of many administrators and other program staff.

These ideas are exciting, refreshing and perhaps reflect Jeffersonian ideals of education for democracy. They also remind of us our heritage as adult educators and the tradition of community involvement modeled by many practitioners before us. Though only the first year of a multi-year effort, already this research has greatly contributed to the field of adult basic education by suggesting a conceptualization of

citizenship and civic participation, by outlining key areas of skills to be developed, and by suggesting instructional strategies and program quality guidelines.

Lappe and DuBois (1991) also contribute to the conversation about the role of education in developing strong communities characterized by broad civic participation. They suggest that we need to educate for effective citizenship and a democratic public life by reforming or creating schools that teach and embody democratic values while maintaining a vision of a rich, vibrant, participatory involvement in public life.

> Today's public problems are so big, so complex, so interrelated, so pervasive that they simply can't be solved by top-down authority. They cannot be solved without the engagement of more and more of us - without more and more ordinary citizens gaining the capacities to be effective problem solvers.
>
> Solutions must be equal to the magnitude of our problems...only as more people engage in problem solving can there be full public commitment to the solutions we devise...thus nothing is more important than education citizens, those who possess the concepts, tools, and experience to be effective public problem solvers (p 2).

Reconceptualizing "Public Life"

In their work at the Center for Living Democracy, Lappe and DuBois, and others are reconceptualizing "public life." Instead of a narrowly-defined understanding that includes only formal (or at least structured) civic and political activity, their conception embraces everything outside of our intimate, private circles - such as our roles as employees, consumers, students, owners, investors, users of transportation and communications networks, financial institutions, education systems,

arts and recreation resources, the marketplace, in short, our whole communities. The decisions we make in these roles "may well have more effect...on the direction of the community, environment, the national well being than the decisions we make at the ballot box" (p. 4). Lappe and DuBois further suggest that we re-think the demonization of "self-interest". "The challenge of creating a healthy public life is creating opportunities for citizens to understand, evolve and act on their interests" (p. 6).

The difference is that we rarely have opportunities to define our self interests in terms of our values and interests in relation to others' perspective. If education gives us the chance to do this, we are more likely to see how decisions and policy need to be supportive of the whole, connected web of life. It begins to be in our "self interest" for example, to support good funding for public education since our children's quality of life depends in large measure on their whole generation's ability - not just their own individual ability - to sustain economic and social gains.

Lappe and DuBois outline why schools need to be reformed, and what schools need to teach and practice in order for children and adults to have the capacity to create a living democracy in their own communities.

> Democratic public life is not something we're born knowing. Like music, reading, or basketball, we learn the ways of democratic public life through experience. And, like all arts and sport, we enjoy them only as we learn to do them well. If we feel awkward and foolish for too long, we'll just stop. if, however, we begin to learn the particular challenges and rewards of an art, we'll persevere even when our "performance" is far from perfect.

> We include such arts as dialogue, active listening, analyzing and participating in power through collaborative problem solving, negotiation and planning. We pay special attention to the creative use of conflict - that is, using conflict for learning. We also stress the arts of reflection and evaluation as essential to developing group and collective memory, essential to healthy public life (p. 8).

Lappe and DuBois describe how dialogue, including listening and probing, can be a part of the life of classrooms and schools. "Public talk" can be demonstrated and practiced in ways that show how value differences are not abstractions or cliches, but result in different public choices. Dialogue and negotiation can help students recognize their own value systems, and enlarge the way they think about issues and choices. Participants also can begin to see that power can be enabling and constructive, not corrupt and self-serving.

Lappe is critical of the "community service" approach that some schools use to encourage students to have a broader vision and knowledge of the world.

> We at the Center for Living Democracy suggest replacing a community service framework with an "arts of public life" framework. In the former, students are often perceived as the more privileged who are helping (or serving) the less privileged. In the latter, all are expected to participate in order to learn the skills of effective public problem solving - essential to applying virtually all the other lessons the curriculum offers. In a democratic public life framework, students participate in community problem solving in order to learn to analyze and wield power, to perceive one's own and other's interest, to negotiate, to mediate, to make decisions collaboratively. Last fall I met Sarah Lawrence students who were working with a group in Yonkers developing a self-managed housing complex and small business for and with homeless people . The young women told us they were learning a great deal working along side the key players, not simply serving in menial ways or arrogantly guiding the less fortunate (p. 12).

Lappe and DuBois emphasize that within their own walls, schools can give opportunities to practice skills of living democracy. Schools can create opportunities for students to have a genuine role in determining shape and direction of every course and in the evaluation of teachers. Schools can encourage and support students as they take community decision-making roles in the setting of school policy. They can "foster the emergence of citizens - citizens who have thought through the consequences of their value loyalties, who can engage with others holding differing views and who can work constructively to realize their values in the public world" (p. 10).

The Role of Community Service

Lappe and DuBois' belief that traditional community service programs fail to promote true civic participation is echoed, in fact, by many involved in National Service programs such as Americorps and VISTA. Peters, writing in *Social Policy* (1993) cautions against assuming that community service or volunteerism, without the engagement of "people in the civic ideas and concepts that can inspire significant shifts in the way people see their own power and role in relating to social problems" (p. 49). The traditional community service "charity" approach does not affect lasting change in either the giver, the receiver, or the community.

> The promise of the service movement is that it can be one among several source of democratic renewal. Service experiences can inspire young

> people to develop a life-long commitment to participation in public life, rooted in a deep, full sense of citizenship. Participation, the central value of the service movement, can be taught as the practice of citizenship, understood as a serious, public-spirited contribution to the work of public problem-solving.
>
> Many service projects describe work such as cleaning up a neighborhood or renovations of a community center as "rebuilding community." It can be, if fixing the physical aspect of the space helps mobilize people to solve problems. It does not if people from outside the community (or for that matter, from within it) come in, fix up a space, and leave. Attention must be paid to developing the problem-solving capacities of *people*. A refurbished community center alone is of no use in solving people's problems.
>
> The fact that "participation" is often seen in service movement as volunteerism rather than citizenship reflects a hollowing of our public life...the framework for service must be political in nature in order for participants to learn to deal strategically and effectively with issues of power, diversity and self-interest. If service projects are designed to help participants see their work as connected to a broad and deep concept of citizenship - not outside of politics, but, in fact, at its heart - they may go a long way toward enfranchising citizens and reinvigorating public life (p. 46-48).

It is important that we listen to these criticisms. In much of the national service movement, efforts to link citizenship and community participation to literacy face the dangers of de-politicizing and sentimentalism. Similarly, efforts in developing community-based adult education programs may similarly impacted.

Helping meet the direct needs of the people of the community is an important contribution, often one that brings great pleasure to the volunteer, and may be appropriate activities for adult education classes. But volunteerism is not the same as educating for democracy, or even civic participation, when civic participation is understood as action to become involved in working out solutions to public problems, say Boyte, Lappe and DuBois. If adult literacy students have only volunteerism

opportunities, and not the opportunity of critical reflection and learning skills essential to democracy, they have missed the point of civic participation.

Power, Community Organizing and Literacy Education

Just as depoliticizing and sentimentalism are challenges, to community service efforts, so too are attempts to link literacy learning to community issues, while simultaneously assuming that listening, speaking, negotiating, and compromising will guarantee a "seat at the table." Access to being a part of the decision-making will usually not be granted without at least a show of power, a demonstration that an organization is a "player" in decision-making. Even theorists who have contributed much to current thinking about strengthening communities through the encouragement of civic participation of a broad range of people seem to overlook this critical fact.

Equating learning about decision-making with guaranteeing a "seat at the table" can be a trap easily sprung. Even Lappe and DuBois fall victim to thinking that access to decision-making will be granted without a fight. When conflict is mentioned, it is generally in the context of a controlled situation, like a classroom, and is used to teach skills of active listening, dialogue and negotiation. Though the classroom activities are important and needed and will help us build the kind of world many of us work toward, a group must first be recognized as a player to even be given access to negotiation. Groups often do "power analysis" as a tool to help

participants see patterns of power and ways that power is used to determine who gets to the negotiating table.

Community organizations such as the Neighborhood Builders School (McLeod, 1996) of the Partnership for Neighborhood Improvement VISTA program teach their members this understanding of the four stages of power:

> Stage 1: A community group cares about an issue, and makes noise about it. Even though they are not a part of decision-making, they have the power to be noticed.
>
> Stage 2: Public pressure builds to hear all sides of the issue, and the group is invited to the table. Now the group has the power to negotiate and be a part of the decision making on the issue.
>
> Stage 3: Time passes and agreements made with the community group are not honored. The group calls attention to this and persists long enough to get the original agreement honored. Now the group has the power to make negotiations stick.
>
> Stage 4: The power to make long-term lasting change comes when the group is able to move to institutional levels. For instance, an organization may become good at stopping strip mine permits in communities, and later is powerful enough to change the strip-mining law for the whole state.

Lappe and DuBois fail to acknowledge that caring about an issue and having The skills to participate does not guarantee that a group will have access to power, or guarantee it will get the opportunity to exercise it. There is almost always the need for creative and energetic, sometimes confrontational ways to get from pre-Stage 1 to Stage 2 on the scale of power. Lappe and DuBois use examples from the world of community and labor organizing, but they often do not mention the struggle it takes

for the organizations just to get to the table and be in a position to use those skills of dialogue and negotiation.

For example, Lappe and DuBois cite the mediation that takes place during the United Mine Workers of America strike against Pittston Coal Company in southwest Virginia is 1989-90. Lappe and DuBois (1994) praise the skills of the mediator as he helps both sides break through animosity and total mistrust by getting them to talk directly to each other, how to get along with one another. Pointedly, the mediator does not focus the two on contract proposals, but on skills of listening and of each group establishing the humanity of the other (p. 264-265).

The mediator may have chosen well. Though he may well have been key to the end of the strike, UMWA miners would never have gotten so far, had they not already mounted a very confrontational and public campaign to build local and national support for their cause. The UMWA had established itself as a player that had to be reckoned with. (See accounts of the strike from the perspective of union members and community members in Fisher's *Fighting Back: Resistance in Appalachia* and in Bingman's *Appalachian Women Working in Community*).

Similarly, Lappe and DuBois praise the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF)-affiliated organization COPS (Communities Organized for Public Service) for a calm and reflective response, rather than a confrontational one, to a community concern, without considering how the organization got to the point of being able to negotiate.

> COPS members were upset because the city's biggest employers were bringing in outsiders to fill local jobs. COPS might have simply staged an angry

> protest. Instead, they invited corporate leaders to the table. COPS members listened. They listened to the concerns of those they might have seen only as adversaries. They listened to the companies' CEOs tell them of their own frustrations in not being able to find qualified employees locally. COPS members discovered a common interest with the business leaders: improving the city's job training efforts...COPS went on to develop an innovative redesign of the city's job training programs, which the city council passed unanimously (p. 241).

A listening, collaborative response worked well at that time; but would the CEOs have voluntarily given up some of their power to work with COPS, if COPS hadn't already established its power and ability to bring attention to the issues of poor and working class people, through many actions and activities, including some controversial ones?

Ernest Cortes, organizer for COPS, talk about the organization's willingness to be confrontational. Here he describes one such action, linking it to his own culture in home and community:

> My mother and my aunts used to love to browse in the department stores. We didn't have any money so they'd go downtown and window shop, just look at things. The sales clerks would call them 'pills' because they never bought anything.
>
> We were having trouble getting the City Council in San Antonio to pay attention to our counter budget, which included provisions to fight flooding and all kinds of public improvements in the city. So we decided that we had to take it outside the conventional political establishment and get the corporate community involved. I said, why can't we get a whole lot of people to go window shop at Josky's of Texas, the biggest department store of San Antonio? COPS took five hundred folks and we went window shopping. They went in and they looked at furs and sables and so forth. More than five hundred of them went up to the most exclusive department store in town, just trying things on. They didn't hurt anything. They didn't do anything illegal.

> Window shopping is legal. But they did it at one time and one place. COPS had made this commitment to justice and equality and fair play, and we were trying to get the corporate community, the political community, in San Antonio to be responsive. Sometimes you've got to get people's attention first (p. 148).

"Getting people's attention," this willingness to be confrontational, to understand how class and race and gender issues impact on political decisions, and finding creative ways to publicly point this out, often gets ignored by some of the leading thinkers and writers in the field of civic participation.

These differences in conceptualization of strategies and tactics are crucial for adult educators to examine. Not only are they indicative of beliefs about power and how power is developed, they also may be a real barrier for literacy programs incorporating community work into their programs. The kind of community work done by COPS, UMWA and other organizations Lappe and DuBois cite is confrontational, and based on a willingness to confront, whether the authors acknowledge it or not.

What are the implications of this to community-based literacy education that takes place within community organizations built on action, reflection and a desire to bring about social change?

Borgos and others in the progressive foundation funding have engaged in a discussion and reflection process to understand the differences between social change organizations such as COPS, Save Our Cumberland Mountains (SOCM), Kentuckians for the Commonwealth (KFTC), and other voluntary groups. Citizens' groups

working for social change almost always have a history of confrontation in order to get to the negotiating table on issues of importance to their members. They tend to use confrontation as one of many tools to bring attention to their issues and gain power.

Borgos (1996) writes about this ongoing discussion in an unpublished paper, *Community Organizing and Civic Renewal: A View from the South.* He notes that Putnam and others describe how voluntary associations generate valuable social capital by providing their members with:

- practical experience and skills in the "democratic arts" (how to conduct meetings, lead discussions, develop consensus, etc.);
- "Safe space" to listen to each other and engage in sustained discussion of public issues;
- A sense of collective efficacy and competence, the conviction that problems can be resolved through cooperative effort;
- A broad sentiment of solidarity and social trust that spills over into other arenas of civic, political, and economic activity (p. 2).

Borgos writes that "these notions leave us intrigued, as well as skeptical. Our ordinary experience suggests that voluntary associations can deliver these goods, but very often do not" (p. 2). Borgos questions Putnam's acceptance that any civic activity to equal to any other in generating these results. He asks, "Are certain types of associations especially productive in this respect, and what are the features that make them so...these issues...are crucial...to the question of how democracy might be strengthened through the medium of civil society (p. 2). Borgos also notes that there are characteristics of democratic, open, accessible, multi-issue groups (such as the

aforementioned KFTC, COPS, and SOCM) that may make distinctive contributions to the nation's social capital.

These characteristics include a participative culture, the practice of inclusiveness in the organizational culture, a breadth of vision and purpose (not just single-issue) and a critical perspective (p. 3-4). Borgos continues to point out differences:

> Most of the secondary associations cited by Putnam -- PTAs, fraternal organizations, service clubs, bowling leagues, etc - tend to accept the existing order as a given. Community organizations seek to change policies and institutions that are not working, and in many communities they are the only force promoting institutional accountability and responsiveness (p. 4).

This confrontational approach makes many people uncomfortable. It surfaces questions about the appropriateness of a publicly-funded program like adult basic education taking sides on local, state and national issues. How can we retain support for adult basic education, if students, teachers and programs are on the front lines in local or national issues? And how does a class act collectively, when opinion within the group is split on volatile issues, or agreement on strategy and tactics cannot be reached? Putnam, who reminds us of the importance of including all people in the civic networks we build, particularly those previously excluded because of race or class, (p. 43) does not say how this is to be accomplished, or how to convince others of its importance.

Traynor (1992) and Fisher (1984) add more to the discussion of defining effective ways to work toward change in the community. These scholars address the contradictions within both models of "community development" that often do not address issues of power, class and race, and may ignore skill-building among residents; and "community organizing" that claims to focus on critical action and reflection, but may mobilize around issues while not developing individuals.

Traynor is critical of a "narrowly focused, technical-production related model of community development, which is estranged from strong neighborhood control and which does not impact many of the issues affecting poor neighborhoods"(p. 1). He calls this the major failure of the past twenty-five years community development work, which in his view, should have been focused on the "development of a legitimate, skilled, non-profit sector". Traynor describes the technical process that is often at the center of community development work, including the presence of a non-neighborhood professional, who overshadows and in a sense becomes the personality of the organization. No room is left in this technical process for leadership development, skill-building or empowerment of residents.

Community organizing comes under the scrutiny of Fisher, who says much of the organizing ignores the wider political, social and economic spectrum outside the community. Organizations often work within the comfortable and safe boundaries of their communities, even though their concerns may be embedded in larger problems outside their communities. They seek to maintain or improve property values, and sometimes to limit encroachment of commercialization into their neighborhoods. They

generally want to maintain the status quo; injustices of race or class or gender are mostly not conceived of as proper targets for their efforts. Or else the community organization takes a "social work" approach and seeks to deliver needed services in the neighborhood, with charitable motives that don't include residents' need to make their own organization, define their own needs, and work toward achieving them.

Both men suggest that community organizations, whether focusing on development or social change, will not bring real power to the people without creating and sustaining "a vision rooted in people's lives and traditions" (Fisher, p. 14), opportunities for members to practice the skills and develop the confidence they need to solve their own problems, and an organizational balance between organizing, leading and education.

If, as the Southern Appalachian and New England Civic Participation Project suggests (p. 79- 80), many forms of community participation may be steps along the way toward civic involvement, then surely volunteerism without reflection on the institutional causes of the problems that confront communities is an early step for students and their teachers, a step that begs for more involvement, more opportunities to talk together with others, reflect, evaluate, draw conclusions, and take more action.

And where does this leave Putnam, who appears to believe that connectedness and participation (in just about any group activity) builds social capital and strengthens community? Is it true that joining a bowling league contributes just as much to the community as working with a group on getting a toxic spill cleaned up or

as much as working together to get more stringent laws passed about corporate disposal of toxic waste?

Is the appropriate role for adult basic education programs to encourage students to get involved in their children's Little League, and join the community chorus? Or to create opportunities for adult students to explore issues of concern to them, develop skills to participate in the untidy world of "living democracy", and take collective action? Or is our appropriate role to prepare students to take action, but be sure their action is disconnected from the publicly-funded adult education program? Or something in between? Or all three and everything in between? What if students' values and actions are in fundamental conflict with the teachers', the program's, and other students? Many unanswered questions remain.

Conclusions and Theoretical Framework

The roots of my interest in many of the ideas explored in this literature review lie in my experiences in the doctoral program and in my work at the Center for Literacy Studies. My interest also stems from experiences while growing up, seeing forms of knowledge important to my family's surviving and flourishing in our farm community devalued in other contexts by people in positions of authority. They also come from my experiences as a member of a grassroots democratic citizens group, where I have spent 20 years "learning in community," to borrow Bingman's (1995) phrase. And, my interest comes from observing, as a special education teacher, the

inadequacy of our current systems and structures in determining, assessing, and acting on what is seen as useful and important knowledge, skills, and behaviors.

This literature review has helped me tie together these threads of interest and experience to the efforts of scholars and practitioners in adult education, sociology, community development and organizing, and has made clearer for me the theoretical underpinnings of my research.

Notions about what constitutes literacy are socially constructed. Bogdan & Bilken (1977) and others have suggested that in fields with a limited theoretical base, unexamined prejudice and common sense notions can multiply. They point to tests and the culture of social service systems as constructors of positivist notions of normality. Rogoff & Lave (1984) describe the socially contextualized nature of literacy, and further discredit positivist notions that suggest literacy is stable across contexts and can be adequately assessed through standardized means, such as standardized achievement tests. This literature confirms my own experience in teaching children and adults. Now I am able to use the literature to build a theory applicable beyond my own experience.

Smith (1989) and others have shown that concepts like "literacy" and "illiteracy" are socially constructed, built upon the beliefs and needs of the culture in which they live. The nature of our reality is constructed, and can by changed as we adopt new cultural practices and new societal needs, and as we learn, think, write and talk about the concepts. This way of thinking lies in opposition to positivist concepts. It fits well with what I know about the world.

Lytle and Wolfe's (1989) four conceptions of literacy illustrate the ways that these definitions can be seen as current social constructions of literacy. Much current literacy programs and educational practice seem to be based on what Lytle and Wolfe describe as the *skills orientation*, in which literacy is thought to be a set of decontextualized skills that are generic and portable across contexts, or as *tasks orientation* in which literacy is seen as the ability to do the reading and writing tasks required in daily life. Increasingly, however, practitioners and scholars are giving credence to the conceptions of literacy described by Lytle and Wolfe as *social-contextual practices* and as *reflection and action.* It is these last two conceptualizations on which I base much of my work. I have observed, written and thought about community-based literacy through the lenses of social context and social change.

Fingeret (1984) writes about the need to understand the purposes of literacy programs. She argues that may be either *individually oriented* or *community-oriented.* According to Fingeret, the purposes of most individual literacy programs are understood to be empowerment for individuals, by helping them feel a sense of control over their lives by becoming more confident readers and writers. Instruction usually addresses social mobility needs, such as improved skills, or possibly greater mastery of tasks, in order to get a better job. Community-oriented programs involve learners in designing programs that are "tailored to their needs and respect their backgrounds, but also support them in working with their communities to develop a better quality of life for everyone" (Fingeret, 1992, p. 13). Fingeret's eloquent

statements have helped me articulate my own thoughts that adult basic education could meet individual and community needs.

Freire (1970) embraces a community-oriented conception of literacy as critical reflection and action in his literacy work. Freire writes compellingly of adults who "read the word" and "read the world." *Conscientizacao,* becoming aware of the conditions which hold social and economic injustices in place, and *praxis*, the combination of reflection with action, are central to his thought. Freire wrote that both the awareness of injustice and action to remedy injustice was necessary to bring about social change.

Freire's and Horton's willingness to confront injustices through social action, to work for change in communities, to act, not just think, encourages me and helps validate for me the idea that education should not be separated from the things a student or a community cares about.

Community-based literacy is closely tied to critical theory. Both Gaber-Katz and Watson (1991) and Curtis (1990) suggest that a critical perspective is necessary for this approach to literacy. Giroux (1988) and other critical theorists write about the need for unconscious values and beliefs to become clear so that they can be examined. Critical theorists urge that we question "who benefits?" from existing conditions.

Connecting with a rich history of adult educators like Lindeman, Horton and Freire, who integrated education with community issues and social change reminds me that my work is steeped in an important tradition. I am further encouraged and

challenged by recent work on building social capital and civic participation through education at all levels, including community development and community organizing. Work by Putnam (1993, 1995, 1996), Lappe and DuBois (1991, 1994), Boyte (1995), Cortes (1990), Borgos (1996), Fisher (1984), Traynor (1992) and others theorists, educators, and organizers underscore my own beliefs that we work in a group to examine our own experience, to learn skills of public participation, community organizing and development, and to integrate these efforts with whatever else we do--including adult basic education.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

What is community-based adult education, and how is it practiced? What factors contribute to the development of programs that integrate literacy and community development and organizing? How are students, teachers, organizations and the community impacted?

To answer these questions, I used a case study approach at Mountain Communities United (MCU), a community organization in Eastern Kentucky. MCU works in a two-county area in one of the poorest regions in the nation, characterized by high levels of unemployment and poverty and low levels of educational attainment. In Fairmont County, where this study takes place, housing is inadequate. Access to clean water, efficient and adequate disposal of household and industrial waste, and lack of public transportation impacts the quality of life for many. The county has an inaccessible local decision-making process open only to the few residents from established families with relatively high incomes.

But at the same time, the area has abundant beauty and holds vital natural resources, a rich cultural history and tradition, and resourceful people who have devised creative ways to better their own lives and confront problems within their community.

At various times throughout its history, MCU has included in its work adult basic education, health outreach and education, nutrition programs, child care, craft-making, community education, development and grassroots organizing, and many other activities. Although this study focuses on the adult basic education program at MCU, the adult education program can not be separated from the organizational context of MCU, and also can not be separated from the larger context of the community of which it is a part.

In this study, I use "literacy" and "adult basic education" interchangeably, unless otherwise noted. "Adult education" includes literacy and adult basic education, but also encompasses even broader purposes and activities. Names of the organization, the places mentioned, and the study participants are fictional.

Case Study

This study meets Yin's (1989) definition of an appropriate case study inquiry in that it "investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context; when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident; and in which multiple sources of evidence are used" (p. 23). Its strengths are those associated with case study research: in-depth examination of one situation, which may suggest appropriate questions and paths of inquiry for other situations. Whyte's *Street Corner Society* (1943) is an example of the power of the case study approach. The

relationships, social structure, culture and interpersonal events of "Cornerville" have illuminated sociological issues for decades.

Still, case study researchers must be prepared to answer questions about generalizability. Yin points out that the generalizability question for case studies is really not so different from that of experimental studies. The power of experimental studies comes from the same phenomenon being replicated over a series of different conditions. One experimental study may not offer "proof," any more than a case study provides "proof." Yin points out that "case studies, like experiments, are generalizable to theoretical propositions and not to populations or universes" (p. 21).

More about The Study Site: Mountain Communities United

In 1974, a group of parents came together in Fairmont County, Kentucky, to try to bring a Head Start program to the community for their children. In many ways, there was little reason to believe that they could accomplish such a feat. In the mountains of eastern Kentucky, grinding poverty overwhelmed many. Illiteracy rates were among the highest in the nation. There was no hospital and few doctors. There were no colleges or vocational schools. Unemployment was high and job and training opportunities few. Despite these obstacles, the group formed MCU and began working. They organized themselves into parent councils at each of three communities and formed a county-wide council. Working together to find resources,

the parents brought, for the first time, a federally-supported Head Start program to Fairmont County.

Since their beginnings more than twenty years ago, MCU has expanded to include work in neighboring Tate County. Staff and members have instituted volunteer programs in the schools, have worked collaborativly to establish Family Resource Centers as a part of Kentucky educational reform, sponsored neighbor-to-neighbor health education projects, created a day care center, and education programs for new mothers. All these efforts help shape the context for the MCU adult education program, where my study is situated.

MCU work. MCU has developed adult basic education classes at all levels, as well as some classes which are not academic in nature. Teachers are often graduates of MCU's GED programs, close to their students in class and culture. MCU holds classes in their Learning Center in the town of Jonas Ridge, and in various other communities in Fairmont County, in the jail, the prison, and other places. In 1992, over 500 people were a part of MCU's literacy and adult education program in Fairmont County. Currently, about 400 people participate. The form each class takes changes with the needs and wants of the participants.

For example, MCU has held a series of adult basic education classes that built the curriculum on craft-making. As participants worked on their crafts, they read and wrote about craft-making. They learned measuring and other mathematical operations by figuring materials or measurements they needed for their crafts. MCU gives coupons for attendance in any class (and double for bringing someone). People trade

in the coupons for craft materials and kits. The kits are often put together by volunteer participants in other MCU activities.

In 1991, when state regulations changed and school bus drivers had to obtain a commercial driver's license (CDL) or lose their jobs, passing the CDL test became a pressing concern for many local people. MCU offered a preparation class for these drivers, and many completed the class and passed their test. Several enjoyed the experience so much they didn't want to stop going to class. The "men's reading class" has continued even though their original goal of passing the bus driver's test has been met. The teacher of this class feels that one of her responsibilities is to create a community within the class, an atmosphere of acceptance, one in which participants are respected for the experience and knowledge they already have. These adult learners sharpened their reading and writing skills in the context of their community and their lives.

In 1992, MCU developed an effort and found funding to bring together groups of Fairmont County residents and students in classes to plan and carry out community "projects". These projects are generally service-oriented, and include recreation efforts such as picnics and ball games, community improvement efforts such as clean-ups and service and relationship-building like visiting the sick and elderly, making crafts, and arranging holiday celebrations.

One class of mothers, all AFDC recipients, worried that in their rural community, where there are no scouting programs, no public recreation centers, and few organized activities for youth, their children didn't have constructive things to do. So that group of women worked to transform part of the Learning Center building

where they went to school into a Teen Center so their kids could come and be a part of positive activities.

In 1995, a group of adult basic education students were tutors in and managers of Appalachians Learning More (ALM), the MCU community literacy program. Although the students do not hold diplomas themselves, they are competent tutors who are able to reach many people, through their own families and networks, who would likely never attend a school-based literacy program.

The last three efforts will be reported at more length in chapter five.

Barriers. MCU staff and students also point to many internal challenges that sometimes prove to be barriers to the development of the kind of community-based literacy program they are working toward.

The last two years have been difficult for the adult education program. Changes in state law have resulted in much higher numbers of mandated students. Teachers feel this has driven down numbers of voluntary students and caused other problems for the program, which they have not responded to well. Because of loss of funding from a few sources, some staff have left and teachers have taken on additional responsibilities.

Some internal difficulties have also arisen in the organization regarding information sharing and decision-making. A bright spot for a year was the addition of an administrator at the Fairmont County Learning Center to ease the teachers' day-to-day burden of the operation of the center, and to help provide direction. However, that administrator has left, and in July 1996 teachers say the program feels adrift and

more fragile. Students don't seem to talk about that; they seem as positive as ever. This is definitely another time of transition.

Participatory Research Group

I knew from the start that I would need help from the people who lived in the community, from those who worked at MCU, and especially from those who were students, volunteers and staff of the adult education program. I have worked intermittently on various projects with MCU since 1990, and I know and am known by many in the organization. I share much of their culture and social experiences from my own upbringing and community. Still I needed their help in understanding the world in which they function every day. I needed guidance from them so that my methodology, choice of community-based projects to investigate, and choice of people to interview, as well as my analysis of the results, would be valid. And just as importantly, I needed to know that the organization and the participants would get something out of this, would be co-learners with me. So we formed a Participatory Research Group.

The group, it was agreed, would have decisions to make and regular opportunities to give input and ideas, comment on the study's progress, and review summaries of interview results. (We decided together that interviewees would speak more freely if they knew their words and identity would not be shared with co-workers and community residents, thus the use of summaries rather than transcripts.) Participatory Research Group members understood that much of the study would be in

their own words. I knew I couldn't retell their experiences with the same power and richness that they give to their stories. But I would also have a chance to reflect and comment on what I saw and experienced. All this felt comfortable to them and to me.

Particularly in the past decade, the need for this kind of participatory research has been recognized and valued. Researchers are becoming more sensitive to the need for reciprocal relationships between themselves and those researched. Relationships which leave participants feeling like "guinea pigs" (Merrifield, 1989) are sometimes labeled exploitative. At the heart of participatory research are values that emphasize shared power and give-and-take with each party recognizing the unique contribution of the other. Researchers such as deCambra (1992) recognize that to ensure validity, they need the "perspective of community residents to determine how the cultural norms of the community relate to the appropriateness of the research question, the methods of study, and the results" (p. 3). In addition, participatory research methodology assumes that

> "...communities can benefit from research. It seeks an ecological, give-and-take approach to community resources. If something valuable is to be taken, such as participants' ideas, time, or bodily fluids, then something of equal value such as skills, employment, training, mentoring or increased access to funding, should be given in return" (p. 4).

Habermas (1972) recognized that there are many kinds of valid knowledge, including but not limited to the instrumental knowledge associated with positivism and the natural sciences. People come to understand and act on the world through many

paths. In addition to instrumental knowledge there are also ways of knowing which come through interactions with others, from "sharing a life-world together"--interactive knowledge and knowledge that comes from action and reflection--critical knowledge (Park, 1993). Participatory research acknowledges that these ways of knowing are valid, too, and community members who are not trained researchers still have much to contribute to understanding a given situation.

This study fits well within Hall's definition of participatory research. In Brown and Tandon (1983), Hall says participatory research is "an integrated activity that combines social investigation, educational work and action" (p. 279) and has some of the following characteristics: the problem originates in the community or workplace itself; the ultimate goal is fundamental structural transformation and the improvement of the lives of those involved; the term "researcher" can refer to both the community or work-place persons involved as well as those with specialized training; and outside researchers are committed participants and learners in a process that leads to militancy rather than detachment.

The possibility of doing this research was first informally discussed with several staff and students at MCU. I then made a brief presentation at two MCU meetings attended by potential participants and asked for volunteers for the Participatory Research Group. I suggested that the volunteers should have significant involvement in one or more community-based literacy education projects or processes; that volunteers should plan to continue to be a part of MCU in the foreseeable future since this group will help shape the adult education program in the coming months;

and that volunteers should be interested in engaging in a participatory, reflection-action process which would include inquiry on the three research questions.

Eight volunteers constituted the original Participatory Research Group. Another teacher, who was hired after we began our work, joined a few months later. These nine people included eight women, five white and two African Americans, and one white man. MCU teachers were Lydia Mills, Pearl Dutton, Joyce Brazeale, Charlene Johston, Susan Renfro, Jessie McNabb, June Reece; and two adult education students, Sarah Redford and Curtis Hughes. The average attendance at group meetings was six. These meetings occurred over a course of 14 months and twelve meetings.

Participatory Research Group notes
May 19, 1995

Today we talked about participatory research. At the last minute before our meeting, I decide to write a summary of what I am asking the participatory research group to do. I worry that they won't think much of my methodology, sitting there clutching 9 copies of my handwritten page. I read over the description of what I am asking of them: talk about what it is you would like to accomplish with your work; identify 3 or 4 projects for us to study: identify who was most involved in the projects so I can interview them; help think of interview questions; look at summaries of the interview; help figure out the meaning of what was said in the interviews; help me think through recommendations about how to do adult education in even better ways; and talk to other organizations about what you've learned about doing adult education. Although none have heard the term participatory research, it's not hard for group members to understand. They've always said that they know their world better than anyone else. How could a researcher--even one who has spent lots of time here--know it as well as they? We talked for a while about community-based education. The group begins naming examples of projects they think should be studied. Before long we have our list narrowed down to the Teen Center, ALM, and several community service projects. The group identifies who was most involved in those projects. I go away from the meeting feeling good: I have projects to be studied, my list of people to interview, and a feeling that this project really "belongs" to the group.

Seven of the nine original participatory research group members were individually interviewed. Susan, a relatively new teacher had not been at MCU when the community-based projects under discussion were carried out, so she was not interviewed. However, her comments were important to the group and she was a part of the decision-making in the group. Over the course of the study, only one group member dropped out--Curtis, who took a job and left the adult basic education program at MCU. Although he left before I was able to interview him individually, Curtis was a part of the initial group interview and was a very involved participant in one of the community based projects investigated. His presence is reflected in this report. Two of the teachers changed from an adult basic education emphasis to health outreach, but continued as group members. Charlene, one of the MCU teachers, resigned in August 1996 just after the study was completed. Also during the course of the study, Sarah, an MCU adult basic education student, earned her GED diploma. She continued to be very involved in MCU activities and remained a member of the group.

Over the course of the year, as a group we worked toward two goals: to complete a participatory evaluation of the adult education program; and to complete this research project which would then feed into their evaluation of the MCU adult education program. The time lines for the two pieces of work were not the same: the evaluation was open-ended and started, in a sense, with the first Participatory Research Group meeting in March of 1995 and continues today. The research project began in October 1995 and continued through July 1996, although the two projects

had much overlap in subject and activities. The reflection journal and field notes data I collected from earlier work with MCU was also useful in writing this report.

Data Sources

Three sources of information were used to gather data: interviews, my own meeting minutes, field notes and journal, and various artifacts.

Individual Interviews

At an early meeting of the Participatory Research Group, we identified three areas of MCU community-based work involving the adult education program staff and students which we wanted to investigate. Then group members identified the staff, students and volunteers who had been most involved in each of the three areas of work: the Teen Center, the ALM program, and MCU service projects. About twenty-five people were on the original list. We narrowed that to eighteen. I later added interviews with two program administrators.

The Participatory Research Group and I decided that before doing individual interviews, I should conduct a group interview at a Participatory Research Group meeting. This allowed group members to advise me on my interview technique and questions in the context of a real interview. It also helped me get an overview of the three projects to be investigated from the participants' perspective. Then, interviews were done with 20 students, staff and volunteers at MCU who had significant

involvement in one or more community-based literacy work identified by the Participatory Research Group.

Interviews were conducted with nine current students; two former students; six teachers (three of whom had also earlier attended MCU as students); a VISTA volunteer who worked full-time at MCU; and two administrators. I originally planned to do individual interviews, but four groups of two people wanted to be interviewed together. They felt their stories were so intertwined that they really couldn't be separated. Those interviews included two pairs of students, one pair of teachers, and an additional pair made up of a teacher and a student.

Of the twenty people interviewed, seventeen were women and three were men; two were African-American and eighteen were white. They ranged in age from early twenties to early fifties.

The interviews lasted between 45 minutes to two hours in length. They were semi-structured. I began interviews with a question about the interviewees' early school experiences. Then I moved to questions about what brought them to MCU, what their experiences had been while a part of the program, and how they felt about them. Some of the interviewees told their stories without any additional questions being asked. Others I prompted to follow up on earlier statements or to introduce other elements about their experience at MCU. During the interview I listened for both *what happened* and *what it meant for that person.* In some cases I probed to be sure that I understood, or to follow an interesting path the speaker had gone down.

Meeting Minutes, Field Notes, and Journal

Before, during and after the time the Participatory Research Group meetings and the individual interviews were being carried out, I also was at MCU on many occasions for other purposes: as a tutor trainer, as a facilitator for meetings of ALM tutors, as a GED graduation speaker, as a facilitator for meetings of volunteer team leaders for various MCU service and development projects, and as a facilitator to meet with teachers or administrators around various topics. I was also a guest in the homes of two teachers and one administrator. During many of those occasions I was at MCU, I took minutes, wrote field notes or wrote in my journal. I have used my notes extensively in this report. They are enclosed inside boxes and the source and date of the notes are identified.

Sometimes I collected artifacts offered by staff or students, like newspaper clippings, copies of proposals, program reports, board meeting notes, and student writings. Those too informed my study.

Analysis

In a sense, analysis began at the first participatory group meeting, in our reflection on the community and the organization. The group analysis of their community, their own teaching, students' needs and participation, and use of

community-based approaches continued over the course of the research. This work was the first level of analysis.

The second level of analysis involved examining interview transcripts, and identifying themes and examples. I completed this part of the analysis by sorting key words and phrases, as well as whole quotes. I checked the emerging categories of words, phrases, and whole quotes with the Participatory Research Group.

A third level of analysis involved reading and re-reading my field notes, journals, Participatory Research Group notes and other sources of information collected over the years I worked at MCU. The field notes and journals stimulated more questions and further examination of the interview transcripts. The notes also raised a few additional issues and contained some observations that were not mentioned by interviewees. I included several of my own observations in the final report, because MCU's "story" didn't seem complete without their inclusion. I was careful to label these so that readers would know they were my own thoughts, not words and ideas from participants.

To triangulate the data, I used my colleagues at the Center for Literacy Studies as the third point of the data triangulation. If the research group, the interview transcripts, field notes and journals, and discussions with colleagues all yielded similar results, I felt secure in including them in this report. If all sources did not yield similar results, I have noted differences in this report.

CHAPTER FOUR

DESCRIPTION OF THE COMMUNITY, THE ORGANIZATION, THE STUDENTS, AND THE TEACHERS

This chapter has four parts. First, I describe the place, Fairmont County, Kentucky, that is home to Mountain Communities United and its members. I use census data to describe demographics, especially social and economic characteristics. But I am also interested in MCU participants' experience of Fairmont County. What is it like to live in Fairmont County? What do MCU participants like and dislike about it? To do that, I draw on individual interviews and field notes, primarily of meetings of the participatory research group.

Next, I describe the organization Mountain Communities United. In this part I include an overview of the organization and a history of the Center for Literacy Studies' and my own involvement with them. I describe what students and teachers say they are working to accomplish at MCU, and include a description of how they do their work.

The third part describes students, particularly the ones involved in this study. A table describes the twelve student participants and their involvement at MCU. I also include brief reflections from student interviews that relate to their MCU experience.

The fourth part of the chapter is a description of teachers. Again, a table is included that summarizes information about the six teachers involved in this study, and other material provides a context for understanding the teachers' educational experiences and how those experiences impact their teaching approaches, as well as how they feel about their teaching role.

This chapter draws from many sources of information, including census data, the participatory research group interview, individual interviews, field notes, and journal.

Fairmont County, Kentucky

Lydia, an MCU teacher and life-long resident of Fairmont County, has deep roots in Eastern Kentucky. She understands Fairmont County not only as a particular spot on the map, but as her mountain home with overlays of culture and tradition and heritage and a certain timelessness.

But the last decade has brought change to her county and community. Now there are McDonald's and a Wendy's restaurants and a Walmart. There is an improved road to the town of Riley to the west and York to the east. Retail trade has overtaken coal as the primary employer.

But many things stay the same: church and family are important, raising children is a woman's highest calling, not much schooling for young people, early marriage, and overwhelming poverty, all in a place incredibly rich with beauty and

natural resources. Like much of the rest of Appalachia, the county is tightly controlled from the inside by ruling families and from the outside by corporate interests such as large coal companies and the timber industry.

Here Lydia describes a community in Fairmont County, one of many in which MCU does its work. Her description shows how people and the land are entwined, and how families relate across generations. Lydia's words also hint at the way MCU does its work, which is also the subject of her story later in this chapter.

> *When we're talking about Johnny's Branch, we're talking about a right fork and a left fork. The main road goes straight through, but the branches are on each side. I guess their holler is about two miles long and I would say there are 200 or more people on the creek. Everybody is related one way or another. And you have houses on mountains, up on top of mountains, some of them. The left hand side, there are houses up there, but not as thick as the right hand fork. Up in the left fork is more of the older generation, and then the younger people is more on the right fork. Which they are all related, because lot of people had three or four sons off the left hand fork and married girls off the right hand fork. That's the way it is.*

Poverty is a fact of life in Fairmont County. In 1989, the median household income was $12,732 and per capita income was $6,034. Over 40% of the population have incomes below the poverty level, while in female-headed households, an astonishing 76% of children under five live in poverty. The official unemployment rate is 14.2%, with unofficial estimates much higher. More than 60% of Fairmont Countians have not graduated high school or earned a GED.

But wealth co-exists with poverty. The county is endowed with the natural beauty of towering mountains, green valleys, and rushing streams. There are rich

natural resources. Coal reserves are in the ground. The land is covered by hardwood and softwood forests. Cattle graze in fertile fields. Bountiful gardens are a common sight. Resourceful people are accustomed to "making do." Although years of formal schooling are limited for many, there remains an immense store of practical knowledge, especially in older generations who know how to hunt, fish, trap, grow and preserve food, are acquainted with medicinal uses of many common herbs, leaves and roots, can care for animals, construct houses and barns, and repair tractors and trucks, if they are lucky enough to have them.

Field Notes
Participatory Research Group meeting, 4/7/95

Today we've planned to go for a drive around Fairmont County. Though I've been to this place many times, it's true I've mainly stuck to the Davy Crockett Parkway and the highway to Jonas Ridge. The group thinks I need to see the backroads. And anyway, a bunch of them want to show places that are important to them. We get the van and take off. We drive over a hundred miles, up and down the valleys and hollers, over mountains, beside creeks. We look at the places where group members grew up. I hear lots of growing-up stories. Besides homeplaces, we see schools and communities and land marks important to members of the group. I tape it all, try to take notes but the bumpy roads and the noise (about 4 conversations going on at once) interfere with both. What a great day!

Despite the problems, Fairmont County is home, and most do not want to leave. When the two adult education students and six teachers who made up the Participatory Research Group talked about their home, it was easy for them to come

up with reasons to like Fairmont County. Excerpts from my field notes capture some of the participants' feelings about Fairmont County.

Excerpts from Field Notes, 3/17/1995
Participatory Research Group meeting

What do you like about Fairmont County?

it's home
it's small
everybody knows everybody else
it's safe
plenty of churches
good places to hunt
you can climb mountains
big rocks
places to fish
there's ginseng
pace is slow
school buildings mostly have good heat and air conditioning
you can trust some of the schools
family is here
I like most of the people here
there are mountains and streams
it stays the same
it's friendly
I like my grocery store
we've got a Walmart
now we have a Wendy's

The group also came up with another list of things they'd like to change about their county. Much of this list describes what life is like in many Appalachian communities; not just that the people are poor, but that they are treated differently because of it.

Excerpt from Field Notes
Participatory Research Group Meeting, 3/17/95

What do wish you could change about Fairmont County?

everything is political here-it's who you know
you have to have pull to get a job
you have to have pull to get gravels on your road
some people look down on you
in doctor's office and welfare office they look down on you
nowhere to work; won't hire if black; won't hire if overweight
clerks look at you funny if you have food stamps
if children don't come from families with money they are pushed aside at school
parents without diplomas are looked down on
doesn't do any good to complain here
big difference between schools -the best teachers are put in Jonas Ridge, not out in the county
no where to take garbage - it's all over the place
there are bootleggers and pill pushers
not much for teens to do
not many social services
didn't train local people for prison jobs like they promised
half a dozen people have all the money and control the county
not everybody has water or an inside bathroom
people run sewage lines into their yard or creek
not enough housing
people look down on you if you're from Mule Creek or Johnny's Branch

Many of the things participants wish they could change have to do with access to jobs and a good education for their children, a clean environment, adequate housing, and an equal voice and standing in the community, advantages that many of MCU's participants have done without all their lives.

Mountain Communities United

One of the best ways to understand MCU as an organization is to look at some examples of how it works. In this story, Lydia and Joyce explain the way MCU began and expanded its work on Johnny's Branch. Along the way they explain their approach to their jobs, and how they build on the social systems in place in a community. It's easy to see how their enthusiasm for their work and for the people makes them well-liked all over the county.

Working on Johnny's Branch

Lydia: *One of the reasons we went to Johnny's Branch was that the people wouldn't come in. They were shy and backward and they didn't feel comfortable away from their area. That's why we started having the classes right in the area, to get them to learn a little bit about us and the program and all this. When you go out to do enrolling, you'll find one that's the mayor of the holler. And the mayor is the main person who can just say to people, we're having this, and they'll come. You don't really have to do no more. So if you can find that person, they can help you round up the others. I had this one woman up there who's a diabetic and she can't read. And so we started talking, how are you going to know what kind of foods to get in the grocery store, if you can't read? She said, well, I'll take somebody along with me. And then I asked her if she would like to learn to read. And she said, Lord yeah. Then we come back and told June [literacy teacher] about the lady. We took June out there and introduced her. Right at that time we didn't have no place there to start. This girl gets on the phone and says you can use the church. It'll be ok. She had another sister who couldn't read much, and the preacher, he couldn't read at all either. So that's how it started. Kindly family relations that got together.*

They have to learn you a little bit before they give their trust. Then they kindly started, you know, hollering at us and anywhere we go, they'll holler how are you, why don't you come in, do you want a cup of coffee? And they'll be cooking soup beans, and they'll say, you want a bowl of soup beans?

Joyce: *When we started the Teen Center, we needed a large number of people to tell the city council how bad we needed it. A bunch from off Johnny's Branch wanted to go. After the meeting we thought we'd get a treat. So on the way home we stopped at the Dairy Queen. And we was going to get them all an ice cream cone. Well, I think we had two van loads or more. When we got there, some of them wanted a hamburger. We didn't have the money. There was the sheriff there and the jailer and all kinds of people there. So this little boy off Johnny's Branch, he went over and he asked the sheriff, why don't you buy me a hamburger? And one of the adults said, well look at all these children. If you buy one, you have to buy them all. So he bought them all one. And somebody said, well, there's the jailer, why don't you get him to buy fries? So he goes over there and says, why don't you buy all of us some French fries? He says, I can't do that. The little boy said, the sheriff just bought us all hamburgers. The jailer said, I can't help that. The kid said, Damn you, I don't care, I didn't vote for you noways.*

Work of Mountain Communities United

The work of MCU has ranged from organizing parent councils in pre-schools and elementary schools; to creating alternative curriculum with the parent councils that connects children's interests and everyday experiences outside the classroom to the subject matter inside the classroom; to more "hands on" experiences for students; to working for more power for parents in school decisions.

MCU's work has not been limited to schools. It has included health outreach like the Mountain Scouts program that encourages women to have mammograms and pap smears through a neighbor-to-neighbor approach and work with pregnant teenagers. MCU's work has also included community service, development and organizing efforts, and, since 1986, adult basic education.

Although much of this work happens in "hollers" and tiny, isolated communities, there is also a great deal of activity at the Learning Center of MCU in

the small town of Jonas Ridge. The MCU Learning Center is located in an old Dollar Store building. Remodeling converted the store into two large rooms, an office, a storage area, and a kitchen and bath on the lower level. One of the large rooms houses the Teen Center, while the other is a classroom, meeting space and general purpose room. Upstairs are three classrooms and three offices for staff of the various programs. Much of the cleaning, remodeling and painting work was done by students and staff of the Center. The result is a spartan but improved space for activities.

Work with Center for Literacy Studies

The Center for Literacy Studies at the University of Tennessee began work with MCU in 1990, when both organizations participated in a Highlander Research and Education Center workshop series. In 1991-1992, MCU participated in the Center for Literacy Studies-sponsored "Community in the Classroom" project, which brought together ten Appalachian community groups who were concerned with adult education and broader community issues (Bingman and White, 1994). Since that time, I have worked with MCU staff in various workshops on learner-centered and community-based approaches, and in support of their Teen Center, M.A.L.T. and other community service projects.

My role has been one of insider-outsider. I have done staff development, tutor training, evaluation and other work with MCU students and staff. But I have also remained somewhat outside the process, because of distance, time and other

constraints. I have watched MCU's efforts to connect adult basic education with community issues and other work of their organization from the middle of the fray, as a participant observer, but also from afar.

Goals of MCU

It is difficult to present ready-made, participant-defined mission, goals statement, or self-evaluation reports for MCU. The structure of the organization's board, for example, meets all legal requirements for non-profit groups but in the past has not included a process for yearly reviews of the organization's mission and goals.

There are differences between and within groups of teachers, other program staff, board members and students regarding the expressed goals of MCU. The workings of the organization tend to be informal, subject to frequent change, and without much definition. Follow-up on organizational policy changes seems to be lacking in some cases. Yet the values that board members, students, teachers and staff talk about carry over time, and include respect for all people, regardless of poverty or life situation and belief in every person's ability to contribute. Many in the organization also value the involvement of ordinary people (like MCU students) in community decision-making, although these statements are often paired with references to lack of opportunity and systemic blocking out of lower-income people in the public life of the community. Despite this, the teachers in the participatory

research group came to quick agreement about the things they were working to accomplish at the MCU adult education program:

Excerpt from Field Notes
Participatory Research Group meeting, 3/17/95

What are we working toward at MCU? What are we trying to accomplish?

help students build and keep own self-esteem; never look down on self
help students learn to read
get them ready to take the GED
help students learn more even if they can't get GEDs
help students learn responsibility
help students get involved in community
help students learn in different ways and with different experiences
help students get experience that will help them on the job
help students set realistic goals
help students read things that are important in their lives
learn "we" not just "I"
learn to get along with each other

Only two or three of the goals stated by teachers and students look very much like traditional academic skill learning. The rest of the goals are based more in student's lives and the community, giving us a glimpse of what this non-traditional kind of literacy education is all about.

Students

In many ways, the students who participated in this study are like other MCU students and people everywhere. They live, grow, dream, raise families, accomplish goals, contribute to the community. But most students also face the stark realities of

lives made hard by poverty. They are among the poorest of the poor. In a county where nearly 900 of about 8,000 housing units are without complete plumbing, where over 2,000 of those homes have no telephone and over 1,000 have no vehicle, many adult education students face hardships not even imagined by most Americans.

Twelve students took part in interviews for this study. Two students were part of the Participatory Research Group and were included in the research group interview in 1995. One of those students left MCU to go to work while this study was in progress, and couldn't be interviewed individually. The other student, plus ten more, were interviewed individually, or if they requested, with another student. The ten students were chosen by the Participatory Research Group as those adults who were most active in the community-based projects undertaken by MCU and chosen for study by the group: the Teen Center, the ALM tutoring project, and community service projects.

Table 1 presents an overview of the adult education students participating in this study and is presented on page 101. It will familiarize readers with the names of the students and the nature of their MCU involvement. Additionally, the table associates key quotes with the students who made them. These quotes refer to themes raised by adult education students, and reveal some of the educational, organizational and community issues that are important to them.

Table 1: MCU Students Participating in the Study

Name	MCU involvement	Reflection on MCU experience
Doreen	GED student Team Leader service projects	*There's something about this place that makes you want to cling right to it.*
Mary Ann	GED graduate Team Leader service projects	*I feel like I fit in here.*
Becky	GED student Team Leader service projects	*At first I dreaded coming back, but now I look forward to it.*
Sarah	GED graduate M.A.L.T. tutor Team Leader Teen Center Board member Participatory Research Group member	*They saved my life. In a manner of speaking, they did.*
Sharon	Literacy student service projects	*Now, I'm not afraid to speak up. If I got something to say, I say it, whether it be right or whether it be wrong, because it's my voice.*
James	Literacy student service projects	*Lots of people can't read and write is ashamed to let people know. I used to feel that way but I don't no more. Because it ain't going to help you none to keep it in. I've been embarrassed a lot in places. I've been put down by different people...but I just keep going on. Looking ahead, you know. Hoping for success, you know. Education means a lot.*

Table 1 (continued)

Name	MCU involvement	Reflection on MCU experience
Burl	Literacy student service projects	*I think you ought to do [school] like we are now, is my opinion. Not a great deal of one thing, but a little bit of everything. Like making soup, you got to throw a lot of things in to make a good soup.*
Rae Nell	Literacy student Board member service projects	*I've never sat in on a board meeting, but now I have. I used to just sit back and wouldn't say a word. But now I will speak up for what I believe in.*
Gloria	GED student Team Leader service project	*It ain't just going to school. You have fun. You have your work to do but you have fun too.*
Debbie	former GED student Teen Center service projects Board member	*It's helped me to put stuff in better order. It learned me how to do stuff better...it helped me to depend on myself.*
Martha	former GED student Teen Center service projects Board member	*There was a lot of experience, like the Teen Center, working with your hands and your mind together. I'll take leaning hand and mind together, than mind and book, anytime.*
Curtis	former GED student M.A.L.T. tutor Board member	*Now that I'm trying to help other people learn how to read and write, it kindly gives me more inspiration to learn more myself...you learn as well as you teach.*

Teachers

Six teachers were a part of the Participatory Research Group and were interviewed for this study. Before the study was complete, two of the teachers moved into health outreach work at MCU full time.

Only one of the MCU teachers is a college graduate. Two others have some college work. Three teachers are GED graduates, including two who received their GEDs from the MCU program. One of the literacy teachers does not have a diploma or GED. None of the teachers are certified. One of the strengths the teachers often identify is that they are similar to their students in class and culture. Their growing-up experiences, and to some extent their adult experiences, are much like those of their students. Pearl, a GED teacher, talks about some of those experiences and how she uses them in working with her students.

> *I have learned to stand on my two feet. I'm not a yes person. When I went to grade school, I lived with my grandparents. My clothes weren't like the rest of the kids. I was always classified as an orphan. And now I'm nobody's orphan. I would give my dinner to the other kids because I thought they would like me. And that didn't hurt nobody but me. So I don't give my dinner to nobody no more. I tell my students, don't give your dinner to nobody, because nobody is going to like you any better. It has to come from within, what you are, not what you can do for people...I want to keep working, keep teaching the GED classes. I want to keep learning. I just hope they don't do away with the paraprofessionals. And I hope we don't have to take a test, because I do terrible on tests. I can relate to the students with that too.*

Table 2 on page 105 familiarizes readers with the names of teachers and their educational backgrounds. Additionally, the table contains quotes from the teachers about their own early educational experiences before dropping out or graduating high school. The quotes reveal experiences important to the teachers as they choose the educational approaches they take with MCU students, as well as hint at some of the struggles they continue to confront in their teaching careers.

Table 2: MCU Teachers Participating in the Study

Teacher	Primary responsibilities at MCU (1995)	Educational Background	Early Education Experiences
June	literacy teacher, literacy coordinator	GED, more than 3 years of college as an adult	*I always loved school. My parents were poor people so none of us could go to college. I met a man and at sixteen I married him.*
Pearl	GED teacher	high school diploma, some college classes as an adult	*I was always the last one in the class to learn. But then in high school, I did real well in biology and history. The rest I just drifted through.*
Jessie	GED and pre-GED teacher	GED earned at MCU	*I was really scared and I didn't learn too good. I was in tenth grade, and then I quit. I got married. And then my problems began.*
Charlene	GED and pre-GED teacher	college graduate	*I taught myself most of what I know. I had real low self esteem and never would ask for help.*

Table 2 (continued)

Teacher	**Primary responsibilities at MCU (1995)**	**Educational Background**	**Early Education Experiences**
Joyce	recently left GED and pre-GED teaching to do health outreach work in MCU	GED earned at MCU	*I enjoyed school. I did pretty good and I really liked it. I quit school in tenth grade to get married. That was crazy but I did.*
Lydia	part-time literacy teacher, now spends most time at MCU as a health outreach worker	began ninth grade	*It was always hard for me to learn different things because of the experiences I had in school.*

Their own economic and social backgrounds and lack of professional teaching certificates are recurring concerns for adult basic education staff. These concerns are also endemic to the conflict felt by several teachers as they struggle with embracing the community-based model of teaching, and at the same time, seek to be more like the "professional" teachers that are held up as role models in the mainstream adult basic education community.

The following journal excerpt shows how those questions affect the teacher's everyday lives, their work, and their inner worlds.

Excerpt from Journal, 11/30/92

This afternoon some of the adult education staff and I talked about this morning's Advisory Committee meeting. It seems that this committee is a special one set up to help think about the Teen Center. It's unlike the Board, which is drawn almost entirely from the people MCU serves. This Advisory Committee has some members who are local professionals and other movers and shakers.

Teachers talked about some things they liked about the Advisory Committee meeting: *I liked how just about everybody had something good to say. It was nice to eat together, it made it feel like family.*

But this different kind of group did not entirely suit the adult education staff. There were several comments from the advisory group referring to MCU adult education participants as "those people" and "low class", particularly by a social service professional. The comments offended staff. One teacher said, *I'm poor, I'll always be poor. I guess she was talking about me.* Another explained how alienated and shut out that conversation had made her feel: *When people start talking like that, about "low class people", start using big words, the first thing I think about is, "why am I here?"*

Still another said, *To her we are lower class people. Their kids will get music lessons and tennis lessons. I want to work with kids in our center who don't have that.* And then the ultimate insult was levied at the Advisory Group member: *She was raised as poor as us. She's got above her raising.*

Excerpt from Journal, 11/30/92
Continued

But after a few minutes, some of the same teachers ventured some other viewpoints. *I think she didn't mean it like it sounded. She has been helpful too. She has good points and we can use a person like her.*

Seeing the adult education staff confront classism in this way--not denying their analysis or their anger, yet moving to accept the volunteers' contributions--makes me wonder why they struggle so, and seem at times to partially accept, the "expert" college-educated, state-certified model of a teacher. They often feel their lack of certification forever excludes them as "real" teachers, at the same time they celebrate their similarities to their students in class and culture. It's a dilemma and a tension that never seems to go away.

As a part of the Participatory Research Group reflection, MCU teachers thought about what they do well, and what they would like to do better. As can be seen in my field notes, several of the teachers felt they needed "more education" and to improve their own self esteem. At the same time, they listed as strengths a peer-like relationship with students and an understanding of students that comes from shared experiences and similarity of backgrounds.

Participatory Research Group notes 7/7/95

The group discusses the MCU adult education program. We have small group and whole group activities that focus on strengths and needs. We write lots of newsprint pages. The teachers talk about their strengths being that they are similar to the students. Again I hear a story that has attained mythic proportions at MCU. Once someone from the state, aiming to criticize, said of MCU: you can't tell the teachers from the students. The teachers love that, they tell it with great enthusiasm and pride.

The next excerpt shows how MCU teachers feel about their strengths and challenges.

Excerpt from Field Notes 7/7/95
Program evaluation discussion by teachers in Participatory Research Group

What do I do well as an adult educator?
don't act as a teacher, but as a friend
show concern and respect for students
can work with students on personal needs
have enthusiasm for learning
form good relationships with students
can teach basic subjects

What helps me do those things well?
I have sympathy (not pity) for students
I like to work with people
I love learning
I have patience
I understand students' feelings - been in same situation
I favor friendship over books
my paycheck
values I was brought up with

What gets in the way of doing your best job?
not enough time
not knowing what's expected
lack of materials for students and for teachers
lack of privacy/rooms close together/hard to concentrate
not able to make decisions on my own
very stressful
can't plan-everything is too spur of the moment
personal problems (mine)
personal problems (students)
students required to come and have a resentful attitude
other organizational priorities (not mine) get in the way

What are some things you'd like to improve?
follow through with what I start
knowing more about computers
being able to do group work with different levels in my class
new techniques for teaching
help with my own self esteem
make it so students see subject as useful
more education myself

Summary

The context in which MCU operates - the place and the culture, the ways of living and working in Fairmont County, in Eastern Kentucky - are vital to understanding how community-based literacy is practiced here. MCU is situated in a region where some of the nation's worst poverty exists amid great natural wealth. Per capita income, employment and educational levels, and other measures of social and economic health are low. At the same time, most of the study participants were glad to call Fairmont County home.

Poverty is an experience common to many residents of the county, but students are the poorest of the poor. Despite lives made hard by poverty, students have hopes and dreams, especially for their children. They contribute to the community. Students and teachers, who are paraprofessionals, are mostly alike in class and culture. There is a strong equalitarian ethic spoken here, with teachers considering their peer relationships with students as their strength. At the same time, they express doubts about their lack of college degrees and teacher certification.

Understanding the place, the organization, the teachers and the students will make the examples of community-based adult basic education more meaningful. The descriptions that follow in Chapter Five include the Teen Center, the ALM tutoring program, and community service projects.

CHAPTER FIVE

PROJECTS

The description in Chapter Four of the place where MCU is located, the organization and its' work, and the people who teach and learn from each other provides a context for understanding the impacts of a community-based approach on adult basic education at MCU. In this chapter, I include a description of the three examples of community-based adult education projects chosen by the Participatory Research Group as fruitful areas to investigate. I describe each of the three examples: the Teen Center, developed by students in an adult education class, responding to their children's need for someplace to go and constructive activities to do; the ALM project, a community literacy tutoring program developed by GED students who are themselves the managers and tutors of the program; and community service projects, planned and carried out by team leaders, who often are adult basic education students. At the end of chapter, I summarize the projects and the questions and dilemmas raised.

This chapter draws off many sources of information, including the participatory research group interview, notes from the group interview, individual interviews, field notes, journals, and publications generated by project work.

Teen Center

In late 1992, MCU staff started discussing the possibility of opening a Teen Center in Jonas Ridge, to provide positive activities for community youth. Adult education students were involved from the start. The MCU director felt that the adult basic education class could do much of the work required to get the Teen Center off the ground. This work of getting the Center going would be integrated with their classroom work, and adult education students learned valuable skills in the process.

The adult basic education class was very enthusiastic about working on the Teen Center. Many of them had children who could participate in the Center. About a dozen students in the JOBS class volunteered to be a part of the Teen Center Committee. They met regularly and worked hard to start the Teen Center, all through the winter of 1992 and spring of 1993. The Teen Center opened in late summer of that year.

Many Teen Center Committee meetings were held leading up to the opening of the Center. Several of these were facilitated by me, others by teachers or a student-member of the committee. Two of these meetings are described below, taken from my journal and my field notes.

Excerpt from Journal 3/24/93
Teen Center Committee Meeting

As usual at MCU, nothing went as planned today, but, also as usual, a lot of good things happened. This morning was to have been given over to a discussion with the whole JOBS class, mostly about a different way of looking at leadership, using some of the activities we did in the last Community in the Classroom workshop. Then we were going to talk about the different leadership responsibilities JOBS class participants were taking on. After that, we would meet with the Teen Center Committee to do a workplan. Finally, the JOBS class and their families would do a community service project.

All these activities were planned from 9 to 5, but we didn't count on the Fairmont County High School girl's basketball team winning at the "Sweet Sixteen" level of state tournament play. Since they did win the night before, school was called off, which threw the MCU plans. When school doesn't meet, they don't hold adult education classes, so a few of the students showed up and most didn't.

We regrouped and made phone calls and trips to nearby students without phones to reschedule the day's activities beginning at 12:30. Then an impromptu staff meeting began, apparently because most of the adult education staff and the director was at one place at one time.

Craft making: The students and their kids started showing up before 12:00. Soon families were engaged in making a craft to later deliver to nursing home residents. Black women and white women worked together with their children. These families, who clearly had almost nothing themselves, were making tissue flowers to take to the nursing homes. This kind of work challenges the notion of "charity": middle class people giving things poor people.

Anyway, the crafts project happened (for kids and adults) and the Teen Center Committee meeting happened and the pizza party happened, all in one chaotic afternoon.

Teen Center Committee meeting: The group gathered downstairs at the Learning Center, and we circled our chairs with a kerosene heater in the middle. After everybody said their names, the first thing we did was throw out the agenda, because without the class discussion of leadership, some of the planned activities wouldn't work. Also, I wasn't expecting that fully half of the committee members were under the age of sixteen! Of the twenty people in the room besides myself, one was a teacher, one was a VISTA volunteer, seven were JOBS students, and

Excerpt from Journal 3/24/93
Continued

eleven were teens or children who had participated in the community service project and were asked by staff to stay and give their ideas on the Teen Center.

Such a good spirit and good humor was evident in the meeting. It felt comfortable and fun, even with so little planning. We talked about what the Teen Center might do, did lots of brainstorming, and all the ideas went up on the newsprint. Kids as well as adults participated fully.

The next Teen Center Committee meeting happened the following month. It was both more organized and less joyous. Without the kids, and with some of the issues that had come up, committee members were more somber. Still there was much good discussion, and a good analysis by the group of how to carry out a trip to a neighboring county to visit its' Teen Center.

Various students volunteered to take on tasks. Already I saw a difference in their confidence and skills in doing this work.

Excerpt from Field Notes, 4/8/93

Teen Center Committee meeting: The meeting on April 7, 1993 took place during the last hour and a half of the ABE class. Eight ABE students, four adult education teachers, and me were present.

Students talked about how pleased they were to be a part of the effort to get the Teen Center open, even though they were beginning to see some of the difficulties that would be involved. Jessie said *I've never done nothing like this before. I've never been asked my opinion before. It means a lot to a person to be asked their opinion.* Carolyn added *A lot of women just sit at home. But this gave us a lot of opportunities. It's made a lot of guys mad. Women are seeing that they can do things.*

We talked about some of the issues and concerns that were coming up regarding the Teen Center. There was a lot of concern about discipline issues, and a fear that there would be problems with some children and teens, especially on field trips. There was disagreement over whether it was alright to discipline other people's children if parents were not present. Clearly several of the parents in the group had experienced problems and differences of opinions with other adults over disciplining their children, and they were very sensitive to this issue.

I noticed that one of the teachers really stressed how important it was to talk things out when there were disagreements, and not just "up and quit". Pearl said *we have to learn to solve problems together. We have to learn it's ok not to agree with everybody all the time. We need to speak up and say what we think, but not get mad just because there's disagreement. We can work things out.*

Most of the rest of the meeting was spent planning a trip to McEvers County to visit a Teen Center there. We developed a "to do" list together, and asked for volunteers to complete the tasks. Here is a portion of the list:

1. Plan the trip and what we want to do on it. Make out our list of questions to ask the Teen Center staff, parents and kids. (All- total committee, including young people and adults).

2. Decide dates for trip. (Carrie will call the center to arrange the date and then get with others to be sure it's alright.)

3. Find out where it is, and write down directions. (Carrie)

4. Figure out how many are going, the time to leave, and return. (Robin)

Getting the Teen Center Open

Teen Center Committee meetings continued over the next four months, and many topics were discussed. There was a recurring interest in being sure that children and teens be treated fairly, that it be a place where all could feel comfortable *Not just the kids from families with money*, the committee warned. In some meetings we wrote articles about the Teen Center for the newspaper. In other meetings we tried to sort out the many issues that arose over time, and talked through problems.

There were disagreements over rules. The JOBS students pointed out that even though an age limit for participants had been established, what about their children who were younger? They could not afford a baby sitter-did that mean they couldn't participate as adult leader? How many adults should be at activities? If teens weren't allowed to smoke, should parents be allowed to smoke? Is there a way to have kids regularly involved in making decisions about the Center?

Those issues came to the top, but there were others simmering underneath. One JOBS student, a white woman, was quoted in a newspaper article. She talked in the article about how difficult it was for most people to accept her marriage to a black man. There was some tension in class and in the committee after the article was published, that moved like an unseen current, but would not be publicly acknowledged. It was as if the Teen Center Committee members thought it was too dangerous to confront. The article created a tremendous stir, and some obvious hostility toward the woman by a few of her white classmates. Yet this was the same

group that earlier talked about how important it was to create a place where all races and classes felt comfortable.

The theme of speaking up appeared again and again over the course of the Teen Center work. The work involved so many decisions, and there was much room for interpretation and differences of opinion. People really struggled with being able to disagree with each other. Sometimes there was surface agreement despite the tension underneath. But there was also much support and encouragement of each other, and lots of hard work.

After the Teen Center opened in 1993, for the next year it was operated mainly by parents, many of them from the JOBS or other adult education classes. The Teen Center was open for children and teens to play video games, play pool, watch TV and movies, and visit with other kids. Special activities were often offered, including picnics and ball games and swimming trips and crafts. Dances were held for teens. Almost all the activities were successful, with good participation from children and teens in the county, especially those with "connections" to the Center through neighbors and kin.

The parents planned and supervised the activities, got other parents involved, kept financial records, reported on their work to the organization, and helped develop the youth programs at MCU. In 1994, VISTA volunteers (both locally recruited and nationally recruited) began running the Teen Center with the parents as helpers. Adult education students continue to be involved.

Parents, including adult education students, spent a large amount of time on Teen Center activities. Some of their teachers felt students lost too much valuable class time. Students "were out more than they were in" class, according to several teachers. Teachers questioned whether the students were getting what they came to the Center for, a GED.

In the next section, Martha and Sarah, two adult education students who were instrumental in opening and operating the Teen Center, talk about their work. Then Pearl and Charlene, MCU teachers who were also a part of the operation of the Teen Center, offer a very different viewpoint about the value of this work to the students involved.

Martha and Sarah Talk About the Teen Center

Martha: *When they first started talking about the Teen Center, it was really exciting, because everybody wanted something for the kids to do. They wasn't nothing. They closed the parking lot down and they couldn't go there. They run them off. They just wasn't no where. They was so much going on with the kids. Seem like they wouldn't listen to their parents, or they was driving their parents crazy, or whatever.*

And some of us just got to talking about opening a teen center and they couldn't figure out where to start to even go about one. And I don't know who brought up - I guess it was Janice - brought up this teen center that they had in McEvers County. The Teen Center from McEvers County was holding a meeting there up here at Pizza Hut. Somebody volunteered to go to Pizza Hut to talk to them, and take pictures and ask questions. Someway or another she found out about it and she got Carrie Williams and Carrie went and set in on the meeting and get an invitation as she called it, Janice called it press for an invitation, to come to that teen center to see what it was like and how it was operated and get as much information there as she could. And she did, she got pamphlets and information. Carrie was good at that. And everything that they had they give her copies of it. And she got that invitation that Janice was talking about.

And then one day a bunch of us students loaded up and we went down there and checked it out. Talked to that man, I can't remember his name, he was nice thought. He told us all about how it was, showed us how it was run, and told us how they did their budgets and everything, and some of the activities that they did and some of the points that the kids could do to earn field trips, swimming trips, picnics or movie days, keep them busy and occupied, keep them from getting bored. So we liked that idea. We kept in touch with him pretty good.

And then we come back and we just started talking about it and Janice said, how are you going to manage all this without any money? We would just have to raise it to get started. And she asked us if somebody wanted to go to city hall. We set in on one of their meetings, just went over there and asked them for some money. And that was a real, real good experience right there.

We went to city hall and there was 52 of us, I think, women and kids that all piled in over there. They got the law on us out there and everything. I don't know what they thought we was trying to do! They got the law on us. Then when we got to go inside we saw all the council members that were there. They talked to us and asked us what we wanted. We told them that we was asking for money to start the Teen Center. And we was just asking for, I can't remember, anyway we got double for what we was asking. And we got a stove and refrigerator donated and a table donated, and we come out of there a whole lot better than what we started out. So that just encouraged us that much more! We knowed we'd got something started and we was going to have to finish it out. We did. We went to a lot of meetings and everything. We went to a lot of people and they donated. Donated the couches and a lot of stuff. Games the kids got, and the pool table. Just the little bit that we started with, and then took it from there.

The way I feel about it, it was really, really exciting, it was something to get a natural high, get your adrenalin started. We worked in it, worked in it, set the rules and the kids went by them. They did. What time I was there, they went by the rules. And they started coming in more and more. A lot of kids, bring their friends you know. A lot of new faces. It was still exciting, even when I left. It was really alright. I really liked that part of it.

Sarah: *The parents all got together, and we decided that because the children don't have anything here - they have no movie houses, no roller skating, not nothing for the younger kids, and we had so much problems going on with teenage pregnancies, and the drugs and all this kind of stuff, the parents, a lot of them were students here, we all got together and we decided we would make a place for these kids to go. But we didn't have the funding for it, and Janice couldn't get the funding for it. So what we done, we all ganged up, there was like 80 of us, and we went to city hall. We barged in right in the middle of the city council meeting. We just told them, this is our idea, we are members of this community, we're voters and we are tax payers and we want this. And we went in asking for $500 in money, and any donations they were willing to give. And when we asked for the $500, by the time we done our presentation and everything, we left the city council meeting with a new*

stove, a new refrigerator which Daisy House Furniture donated. We left with a pool table which one of the board members over there donated. We left with $2500 in cash which Oren Brownlow and city council donated. We got free TV cable for the Teen Center for as long as the Teen Center is in operation. All in all, we probably got, between the banks, we went to the banks and talked to the bank presidents, all in all, we come out probably close to $10,000 dollars in money and most of the equipment was donated.

At first, the parents, the adults at this school, run the Teen Center. We runned it Mondays and Fridays, from 3 to 6, and the parents took turns, today would be my day, next Friday would be somebody else's day. We took turns, that way the parents had a little leeway. Now, we have VISTAs who run the center and the parents help. We do Mondays and Wednesdays from 3 to 5. We take the kids roller skating. This coming week we'll be taking them to Riley, to roller skate and see a movie. We take them to cook-outs and camp-outs and sleep-overs and bowling. We take them swimming in the summer. We took them to Garrison McCay park. We take them over to the park and have ball games. We're trying right now to start our own ball team. That's kind of up in the air. But hopefully we'll get it. We do a lot of community service. We go out and we make crafts and we give them to the people at the old folks homes. A lot of community service things like that.

And we also have incorporated the Boy and Girl club into the Teen Center. The Teen Center ranges from 10 to 15 year old children. The Boy and Girl club ranges from 6 to 9 year old. So on Tuesday and Thursdays we have the Boy and Girl Club. The Boy and Girl club, it's got, oh I'd say, thirty kids between 6 and 9 years old. They do a lot of the same things the Teen Center does, the same activities. You know, being that they're a younger age we have to scale it down some. They do pretty much the same thing Teen Center does. Any activity we do for the Teen Center, we try to do for the Boy and Girl Clubs also. It's been a good success. It's been a real success.

It's got a lot of kids that are 14 and 15 years old off the streets of an evening. The kids are becoming committed to the Teen Center, there's actually a commitment there. They don't do drugs, the biggest majority of them that I know have never done drugs that I know of and we do a lot of programs to encourage them to not do drugs, to not have sex and we talk to them a lot about teenage pregnancy and AIDS. We have a lot of guest speakers come in and they do programs on health and any number of different things. And last month we had Career Day. We had a fireman and a police officer and a doctor and a lawyer, a paramedic, an ambulance driver, a nurse. We had social workers, we tried to get as many key people from different occupations in to demonstrate for these kids the kind of job they do and find out if these kids would be interested in any of these. They gave out brochures. That was a big success. They're still talking about being firemen and all this kind of stuff.

The teen center as a whole has done the community a world of good. I can't say that it's actually cut down on teenage pregnancy. That's the goal, to try to cut it down. I can't see that it's actually cut it down, but I know it's not contributed to it

either. It's definitely been a deterrent. To me, the Teen Center is the place for kids in Fairmont County. It's been a success for me and for the kids and a lot of parents.

Charlene and Pearl talk about the Teen Center

Charlene: *Well, it got to be too much I thought, pulling the students out, because it got to be three days out of five for meetings and other stuff. They were just lost in their GED classes. I think the extra things is fine, but it was too much. Some of them that was really involved in that, they had to drop out of GED classes. And the reason they have not got their GED now, is because they were pulled from class too much.*

They got to do extra things that they never would have been able to do, if they hadn't worked on the Teen Center, which was good. They learned a lot of things outside of the classroom. But I still think they came before the Teen Center was started and they came for a GED.

Pearl: It got to be bad, too much. I agree with Pat. I know two for sure that are no longer here that should have gotten their GED. Due to circumstances beyond their control, they never received them and are not longer in classes. I think it was unfair to them. I talked to them as friends. They said they needed more time with their books. They were dedicated to the Teen Center, but their purpose for being here was to get a GED. So the priorities clashed. They wanted their GED but they wanted somewhere for their kids to go.

There was almost no class going on. If you are going to do alternative curriculum, let's call it life skills for adult education. Life skills are fine, and our people in this area need it. But under the guise of adult education, I think it is a little phony. Because they don't get a lot of adult education. They do now. For a while they didn't. I'm glad things have calmed down.

Differing Perspectives

The conflict between students' perspectives and teachers' perspectives of experiences such as opening and operating the Teen Center reveal concerns which continued to arise at MCU throughout this study. Is it important to enrich students'

education and contribute to the community? Is it more important to spend focused time on GED preparation so that students likely will be more successful at accomplishing their stated goals in a timely fashion? Do enrichment and community activities really help students learn important skills and behaviors that are vital both in their adult basic education classes, and more broadly, in their lives? Or, are students' own goals being sacrificed for organizational or community goals, with no direct benefit to them? The next two sections of this chapter, concerning a student-led tutoring program and an adult education community development and leadership program, may help illuminate these issues.

ALM

In late 1994, the director of MCU had an idea for a student-led literacy program. The idea was that MCU could create an adult education student-led literacy tutoring program that would be beneficial to residents who wanted to become better readers and to the tutors who would sharpen their own reading skills by teaching other adults. The adult education students themselves would manage the program, thereby gaining skills they can apply in other parts of their lives and to the benefit of the community.

By January 1995, ALM was created. The tutors included four JOBS students. Each of the tutors had between one and five students. They generally went to students' homes to tutor. The length and frequency of the tutoring sessions varied

greatly. Training for the students who managed the program and were themselves tutors in the program was provided by the Center for Literacy Studies, and funded by an organizational development grant from a private foundation.

Tutor Training

With the support of others at the Center for Literacy Studies, I began holding tutor training sessions for the ALM project one to two times per month. In the tutor training sessions, we worked on teaching approaches, like whole language, on finding ways to use our literacy students' lives as the basis for curriculum and on adapting commercial workbooks and other materials to the needs of local literacy students.

For instance, one of Curtis's students was Jerry, who made his living by going to wholesalers to buy and trade to get items at flea markets. Curtis knew a lot about what Jerry needed to know and be able to do because Curtis was well acquainted with flea marketing himself. Curtis said Jerry needed to be able to read the names of items he wants from wholesaler's lists: e.g., radio, coffee maker, hammer, rod and reel. He needed to be able to keep track of how much he paid for items and how much he sold them for. He needed to be able to figure out how much profit he made. The tutor group, with Curtis being the lead informant, prepared lessons for Jerry, and in the process, discovered ways to use the student's life as the basis for curriculum.

During the tutor training sessions, we also worked on managing the program, such as thinking about how to get more students and tutors, meeting state

requirements, and completing paper work. That was difficult for most tutors. They did not easily identify with the role of manager. The program lasted about six months, before running out of funding. After a few months, it was replaced by a teacher-led program at MCU. The ALM tutors who were still active began tutoring through the teacher-led program, retaining their autonomy regarding who and how to teach, but no longer being responsible for the program as a whole.

Critical Incidents

There were a few critical incidents during the ALM work that defined and described strengths, challenges and issues in the literacy program with relevance beyond that moment in time. One issue concerns telephone privileges that were powerfully symbolic to tutors:

> Excerpt from Journal, 1/20/95
> Telephone Dilemma
>
> What a slice of real life today was at MCU! When I arrived for the tutor training session, Curtis came up to talk. He explained that *there had been changes around here that we [tutors] don't like*. He said that all adult education students had been forbidden to use the phone on their own. If they have to use the phone, they can find a staff person and let her dial the number for them.
>
> The rule applies to tutors also, even through they need to use the phone often to make arrangements with their literacy students, to get in touch with me, and to do some of the managing tasks for the program. It was clear the tutors pride was wounded.

Excerpt from Journal, 1/20/95
Telephone Dilemma
Continued

They tutors had been led to believe that they were respected as peers by the other staff. They were trusted to carry out a tutoring program, represent the organization in the community, be reimbursed for their expenses, use MCU materials and supplies. Yet with this removal of phone privileges, they were being denied trust and treated as children, they felt.

We sat on the steps and talked a while. Curtis said the ABE students decided they would not participate in ALM if they were going to be treated like that. He acknowledged that phone privileges had been abused by adult education students. As a board member, he reviews the budget and knew the phone bill was outrageous. He described how the abuse often happens: people come out of the classrooms or even off the street and use the phone at the front desk, because often no one is there. Sometimes they arrange for people to call them collect, and then they just be sure to be there at that time.

Curtis went on to say that despite the problems, it was important for all adult students to be able to use the phone independently. Many of them did not have telephones at their homes, and they need to make doctor's appointments or do other legitimate local calls. It was not right to treat any adult like a child, and deny them privacy, he said.

I didn't know what to do. The students obviously felt strongly about this. And they had a legitimate gripe, I thought. Yet I have only a certain number of days to come, and a four-hour round trip. Each opportunity to work together was precious. But I didn't want to demean their protest by pointing out my own situation. And I doubted they would change their minds, anyway.

I talked to Charlene, their teacher. Charlene said, *They're all mad. They haven't hit a lick this morning. They won't do anything. I feel bad because you've come all this way.* I asked her not to worry, and not to tell the tutors to come to the session.

In the meantime, Curtis and Cassie decided to come to the session, noting that if this doesn't get worked out, we're quitting. Mandy came in later, but was only half-committed to the session, going in and out several times over the course of the morning.

The telephone dilemma shows the seriousness with which tutors took their work and their new role and responsibilities as tutors and managers of the program. Had they identified themselves as "just another student," their treatment by one of the MCU staff would not have bothered them so much. It was that staff person's failure to recognize their roles in the ALM program as highly responsible that angered them.

The next example concerns students' perspectives on the role of planning,scheduling, and documentation for their literacy tutoring sessions, all of which were tied to cultural patterns and norms.

Excerpt from Journal, 2/17/95
Tutor Training

I don't plan, Sarah said firmly. The tutors were writing on strips of paper all the things they considered in planning a learning experience for their students. We had stuck the strips of paper up on the wall and were reading them off: *think about what we did last time, remember what level he is at, what does she want to accomplish, can he write his letters?* In the middle of the strips was *I don't plan.*

Sarah explained what she meant by telling a story. The last time she went to see her student, he had company. He introduced Sarah to the people at his house as a friend who wanted to look at his chickens. They all walked out to the chicken lot, looked at the chickens and talked about them, then came back inside. After a while, Sarah thanked him and left. She told us that if she had brought a stack of books in, or even mentioned *Do you want to do a lesson*?, that she would have betrayed her student's desire to keep the literacy tutoring private.

Excerpt from Journal, 2/17/95
Continued

After that conversation, it seemed to me that there were two issues for us to consider: one is the outward appearance and trappings of a literacy teacher and tutor, and the other, the more real and important place that planning has in literacy teaching. I chose to ask questions about the former and leave the latter alone for that week, if nobody else chose to bring it up (they didn't). We listed some things that might be to our detriment in approaching students. the tutors said, *Don't come in with some big notebook. Don't write stuff about them on a paper. Don't make them sign anything.* Sarah said *all this book work is ruining the tutoring*. Part of me mightily resisted this attack on planning, scheduling and documentation. How can you have a good program without those things? How can there be anything but chaos? But the conversation also reminded me of important things that I knew, but hadn't applied to this work.

For instance, you might think that if you have agreed on a time to come to tutor, then it's alright to assume the student will be able to work with you. But lots of people don't live by a schedule. They may say "ok" to a certain date, but it just isn't a thing that stays in their awareness, and they have no habit of keeping a calendar. Or they may grudgingly go along with a schedule in some parts of their lives, but not others.

I remember the last years of my father's life were dominated by doctor's appointments, but he always resisted scheduling with his children. *I don't want to have to make an appointment to see my kids,* he'd say. *You just come anytime you want to.* To him, appointments were for unfriendly strangers, not for people he loved. My neighbors on Cave Creek are the same way. It's not polite to ask

them to come to your house at a certain time; that implies it is <u>not</u> ok to come at another time. So you say *Just come on by anytime.* And sometimes they will, and it may not be the best time, but you can't get righteous about it, because they don't live their lives by appointment books. Thinking about it in that way, Sarah's advice, *don't plan*, made sense.

Curtis and Sarah Talk about the ALM Program

Curtis: *ALM is Appalachians Learning Together. About a year ago, a little more, Janice started talking to the ABE class about the ALM program. When it first started there was quite a few interested in it, or so they said they were. But then as time went on, it come down to about four. Me and Sarah and Cassie and Mandy. Since that, we've got the news about February that we needed 10 students enrolled by February. So we got some training and got some more tutors and since then we've been working with them.*

We go into the homes or wherever we can recruit people at that's wanting to learn to read or write. Sometimes its a whole lot of fun, and sometimes its pretty aggravating. This one guy I'm working with, I started him in the New Beginnings Reading book, he liked silly sentences. He was all frustrated when he first started, but he liked the sentences like "The goat is in the road." I said, huh-oh! You better watch out Joe! He looked right funny. He said what? I said you might get run over. From that every time he would read, we would read together. Then it got down to, can the goat drive a car? He started making jokes out of the sentences we'd read. Now he's reading half-way through New Beginnings.

I've got this one woman I'm working with that her main goal was to learn to write her name, her husband's name and her children's names. She didn't even know her alphabet when we first started. She couldn't write her own name, but now she can. She's a different type of person. You've got to learn their attitudes and how to adjust to them, and the way that they think about things. I really enjoy working with them, different ways that you can go about it. Some like to start the day off with a prank. This one fellow throwed his books down on the table and said, you ought to have been here at one o'clock! I said, where was you at? I was in bed asleep. Well if I was here I would have disturbed your nap! And on like that.

So it's really a joy to work with people like that and get to know people. You've got to let them learn you, as well as you've got to learn them. You've got to gain their trust, which is a hard thing to do with some if they don't know you to begin with. And some if they know you it's a hard thing to do. There's this one guy that I'm working with, I've had two sessions with him. It took me six months to talk him into lessons. He felt like he couldn't learn to read. He felt like he couldn't learn to write. I kept encouraging him. I don't think you should ever put anybody down.

I think tutoring has made a little difference in my way of looking at things. Now that I'm trying to help other people how to read and write, it kindly gives me more inspiration to try to learn more myself, and learn more about the ways I can help. You learn as well as you teach. While you are learning somebody else something, you are also learning yourself.

Sarah: *We've went out in the communities and we've gone into their homes and we work with them in their homes. We'll work with them anywhere they want to work. I've worked with them in hog lots. If they want to do it, I'm there to help them do it. A lot of people have problems coming in saying I need help I need to read, I can't read. They don't want to let other people know that. But they can come to me and know that whenever they tell me that it don't go any further than me and I promised them that from the very beginning. Anything they tell me is strictly between me and my student.*

I worked with five students at one time and I worked with them for six or seven months before the ALM program ended. Some of them wanted to be tutored once a week, some twice a week. Some I could hardly ever catch. I felt like it was a success. They didn't learn to read enough in that length of time to get a GED but they did learn to spell their names, they did learn to read books on the first, second, third grade level. They learn how to spell their kids names, they learned how to count. One lady learned how to count, she learned how to write her name, her address and stuff like that. I didn't have enough time with them because it took me so long to get a familiar background with these people so that they feel comfortable with you that they are willing to say I don't know that. Because if a person's not comfortable with you they're not going to say, well I don't know that. They gonna think you're gonna judge them. It took two or three months for them to break down and say, That's too hard for me. I can't do that. By the time I got the barriers down, a set pattern of learning, the things I knowed worked and didn't work, by the time I got all that sorted out, we had maybe a month until the ALM program had to end, run out of funding. I had five students. I still go and tutor three of those students. I do it once a week and sometimes maybe once a month. Anytime I can catch them and they are willing to sit down with me, I still go back and I still tutor them. It's just not under the ALM program anymore.

One lady I worked with she couldn't spell her name, she didn't recognize her name when she seen it. She was not retarded in any way, in my opinion-and I worked with her for eight months-she had no kind of mental troubles. She just simply had no education of any sort that I knowed of. At the end of that eight months, she could spell her name, she could write her address, she done exceptionally well. She had a lot of troubles at home and she ended up in an institution for the insane. That didn't go very well because of my input and a lot of neighbors input who knew that she was not-there was nothing wrong with her. So she is back home now. She spent seven months there. But she's back home now.

I went Wednesday and I tutored with her for a couple of hours. And she comes dragging all these old workbooks and all these old papers out. She said see I didn't forget. She said I've been working on these. And that tickled me so good because, even myself as a teacher, as soon as I went out the door, all them old papers, they went in the garbage. But she didn't. She had every paper I'd ever give that woman. She had set and she had copied the words off and I could see where she

had scribbled and messed up and started over. Till she had it right. And I told her, you didn't give up, did you? And she said I didn't give up and you're not giving up on me either.

So I'm going down there, I'll start week after next going three times a week. And eventually I hope to bring my students into the Learning Center, you know when I get them up to a level where they feel comfortable working with other people. I want to bring any student I tutor, if I can get their literacy level up to where they can feel comfortable then that's what I want to encourage them to do. If not the learning center, any kind of center that will give them a chance for more education. And I'd like to see a lot of them out here. This lady I feel maybe in a year will be here. She's doing real good. She's an excellent student. She's tireless, she never gets tired and gives up and just throws it down. She's had such an emotional roller coaster to have to go up and down on. And she's come through it all. I'm real proud of her. She's done more than I could have done. I imagine I would have broke a long time ago but she didn't. She come out stronger and more determined to learn than she was to start with. She's determined to show people that she is not a mental case. She's doing it. She's showing them. So I'm hoping maybe by the end of this coming year, she'll be in classes here.

What interested me in ALM was the fact that I didn't have to have a bunch of diplomas to go out and try to do some good. To me, the diplomas are a waste of time, I don't need them. It was just the fact that I could go out and do something without needing the diploma, and I can work with these people one-on-one, I can be involved as much as I want to be, and if I want to pull back I can. I've got to the point where I enjoy going down there and working with the people and stuff.

This one man said something to me the other day. I was talking to him about getting his GED and we was looking to the future. He said well I need to learn to read first and I said, we can do that, that's no problem. And he said, well, I'm just an old fool, I can't learn. I said, yeah, you can learn. He said only thing I'd be if I had my GED would be an educated fool. He said that's the worse kind of fool, an educated fool. And I didn't have an answer for that. I was sitting there thinking, but I couldn't come up with nothing. I tended to agree with him. But he's not a fool by no means.

I can relate to these people because they live pretty much like I do. They are no better than I am, I'm no better than they are. We're flexible, I can go when I want to, stay as long as I want to. If I want to stay a half a day I can, if I don't, that's fine. More or less being able to work without the paperwork, that's what interested me and that's what keeps me coming back. Other than that, I wouldn't give a quarter for it.

Well, I always figured I was a nobody. But if you think about what you know, and see some others who can't read, it makes me feel better about myself, because I do have that advantage. Before, I didn't know I had an advantage. But I do. So it helps. It helps a lot.

How is ALM like and unlike a traditional literacy tutoring program? What advantages or disadvantages to tutors and students result? The rest of this section, and the student interview results reported in Chapter Six, help answer those questions.

Excerpt from Journal, 4/18/95
Tutor Training

For our last several meetings, I've talked a little bit with the participants about how I organize things I think we need to do in the training and support session: one part is supporting each other, answering questions, and learning more about tutoring; the other is managing the literacy program. I started setting up the session agendas into those two parts. About the third time I said it, it seemed like the JOBS students got more tuned in to being "managers." They started talking more about setting goals for the program-getting more tutors so we can have more students, etc. Does it take some getting used to, the idea of having the ability to shape something in response to your own thoughts, not someone else's dictates? I remember my father being so proud that his children were "paid to think," that our work involved creating things out of our own minds. If a person hasn't ever had that experience, maybe doesn't even know anybody who has, is it so surprising that it would be hard to get engaged in the doing of it?

Literacy Program in a Community-Based Organization

How are literacy efforts such as this in a community-based program different? What sets them apart from traditional programs? In this literacy effort, it's both the "who" and "how". Tutors are themselves adult education students, sometimes not too far ahead of their students in skills. Tutors are similar in class and culture. Cindy's statement, "I can relate to these people because they live pretty much like I do" is an insight that reveals and acknowledges some of the difficulties in traditional programs.

In traditional programs, tutors and students tend not to be very much alike. Tutors tend to be middle or upper class with a mainstream cultural identity. Students frequently are not well-off, and differ in cultural traditions and ways of life from their teachers. This often results in a power imbalance, not just because of greater knowledge on the teacher's part, but because the teacher is more likely to have resources and live in culturally-sanctioned ways.

But the MCU program is very different. The tutors are non-traditional. They are able to reach people in their own families and networks that often are not reachable by other means. Often the students are related to the tutors, sometimes even a spouse or a parent or a child. The students of MCU tutors would probably not go to a traditional program. They tend to have very low skills-many are non-readers. And they often do not possess the means or the desire to voluntarily interact with a traditional school, community college or social service agency.

Just as the "who"-tutors and students-of the literacy program in a community-based organization was different, so was the "how." Culture plays an important role in how students do tutoring, for instance, in the use of planning, scheduling and documentation. Students resist those practices as being too much like school. Planning and documentation, and in some cases scheduling, are seen as contrary to the best interest of the person being tutored. Those practices are viewed as the tutor imposing her will and they suggest a power imbalance between tutor and student. Students want to experience tutoring as a neighbor-to-neighbor experience, not as a

schooling experience. These preferences about approach are embedded in the culture of the community.

Excerpt from Journal, 6/19/95

I realized with great surprise at today's tutor training session that we spent half our time reviewing skills (at trainee's request). I wanted to skip and skim skills, wanted to emphasize that the tutors knew plenty in order to help someone else, but they did not want to. They are unsure that they are able to do the things they will be called on to help their students with. I don't think this is typically the case with tutor training sessions. It turned out many of the skills were a bit of a struggle for some, but I still think they would do fine. I doubt that this is much of an issue with mainstream tutoring programs. How many of those are filled with people who want to help their own husbands, mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters, learn to read? How many of those have tutors who do not themselves have a diploma, and are maybe just a few years beyond their students in skills?

Another thing I thought about today is the importance of not getting caught up in insisting that tutors always sit still and listen to the trainer. (Sounds like school, doesn't it?) I know it is always important to keep training sessions lively, participatory, relaxed, display good humor, etc...but still there is so much chaos at MCU churning around, still so many conversations among participants. I notice two things about that: there is no cultural norm of quietly listening and staying focused. This definitely affects training sessions! The other thing I notice is that often the side conversations parallel the main conversation, and I realize that there are many participants who don't believe their comments are important enough to be contributed to the full group. Have to think more about this...

Tutors resented some of the state-imposed requirements, particularly having to ask for students' social security numbers. They did not think of it as an aggravating but basically benign requirement. They could not imagine some anonymous state worker in far-away Frankfort, Kentucky, impersonally copying social security

numbers onto forms. Instead, they were suspicious of the use to which that information would be put. They feared it would somehow be held against their students if anyone else knew they were receiving literacy instruction. The tutors said their students worried about being denied benefits, of having children taken away from them, of news of their inability to read getting back locally and causing people to take advantage of them.

Thinking of themselves as managers of the program was not easy for most tutors. Most tutors seemed to identify with that role very slowly, and only after much discussion. Their lifetime experience of poverty and struggling to meet basic needs, trying to keep one step ahead of calamity, did not prepare them to initiate and shape a program. It seemed that it took some getting used to, the idea of having the ability to shape something in response to your own thoughts, instead of someone else's dictates.

Thoughts and behavior are shaped by the experiences students have had. Poverty, abuse, and isolation does not encourage agency. It does not prepare you to think of yourself as someone capable of creating, managing, and making decisions.

This lack of experience in that role means that it can be hard to start behaving in that way, hard to know the steps to take. Tutors were not automatically able to think of themselves as managers. The jump from being a student themselves with not much experience in overseeing and organizing and directing, to managing the tutoring

program was sometimes difficult. And the same organization which supported and encouraged non-traditional tutors also erected roadblocks through its weak infrastructure and an inconsistent treatment of tutors as sometimes peers to teaching staff, and sometimes not.

The tutor's resistance to planning, scheduling and documentation was not necessarily the problem that educational professionals might assume. The tutor's unstructured approach seemed to fit well with the way students lived their lives. Controlled studies would be needed to compare a community-based literacy tutoring approach, such as ALM, to more traditional literacy tutoring programs in terms of recruitment, retention and learning gains of literacy students, but ethnographic studies such as this one can suggest strengths of ALM and similar programs.

Tutors were close in culture and class to their students, a strength which allowed the participation of many students who otherwise would not be a part of an adult education effort. Tutors reached many marginalized people in the community who were part of their families and their networks. Many of their students made substantial progress by their own and their tutor's estimation. Strong friendships were forged that lasted beyond the program. Tutors felt positive about themselves and their contribution to the community.

Excerpt from Journal, 4/28/95
Tutor Training

Today we talked about Cindy's most recent tutoring session. When she arrived at her student's house, she found him trying to round up his hogs. The hogs had rooted a spot out from under a building and escaped their fence. Cindy told her student if he would take time for a lesson afterward, she would help him get his hogs. So they chased the hogs all over the yard and finally got every one of them put back up. Cindy said they both had manure up to their knees. *We sat on the front porch to do the lesson*, Cindy told us, *because we couldn't stand to smell each other in the house.* We congratulated Cindy on her flexibility.

Community Service Projects

Children First Foundation (CFF) is a long-time supporter of MCU. CFF provides the resources for the Teen Center, Boys and Girls Club, and team leader projects. The children in member families receive birthday and Christmas presents from their "sponsors," and money for school supplies and other benefits distributed by MCU and paid for by CFF. In return, member families contribute back to the community through volunteering. Many CFF families choose to work in community service projects sponsored by MCU. Families must volunteer in six projects per year.

At MCU, the community service projects focus on families working together with other families on community issues and service projects. Community service projects are carried out by individuals and families. Some families participate to "get their projects in" (volunteer for working on six projects in return for benefits that

come with being a CFF family). There are also many others who are not required to participate, or who volunteer far more hours than required.

Community service projects are sometimes organized by teachers or other full-time MCU staff. But most often they are developed by team leaders, who are often current or former adult education students. Their status is officially volunteer, but their responsibilities in many ways resemble those of staff. They are officially unpaid, but get some expense reimbursement and limited Walmart gift certificates.

Every student interviewed for this study has participated in community service projects. Seven of the eleven students are team leaders with the responsibility of initiating and carrying out the projects. Along with other Team Leaders, their responsibilities include: working with families, planning and organizing projects, working with other Team Leaders to share information, working with their Team Coordinator, completing paper work, and attending training and staff meetings.

MCU draws Team Leaders from other sources in addition to its adult education students. Like most of the adult education students, many other team leaders are themselves a member family of CFF. They are not the typical middle-class volunteers. They do not fit the stereotype. They are most often AFDC recipients themselves, working with other poor families. This is almost always a strength, since they relate peer-to-peer with community people. If team leaders are seen primarily as neighbors in the community, it seems that a sense of informality and good will is easier to maintain.

In some cases former MCU students who now have their GEDs but have not found jobs, return to the school and serve as team leaders or in other capacities to fulfill work requirements levied in exchange for continuing to receive A.F.D.C. benefits.

Field notes, 4/19/95
"Passing" in a job-literate world

I think this thing of "job culture"-the kind of procedures, habits, ways of relating in a workplace-is much more of an issue than most of us think. I notice this particularly with local VISTAs, people who are working in exchange for welfare benefits, and new staff who have been in Team Leaders' training at MCU. There is not much awareness of the value of work time. One way this gets expressed is the kind of thing that traditionally has been seen as a problem with individual workers-goofing off, chatting excessively, wasting time, working inefficiently.

It seems to me that this may have more to do with "fitting" new workers without job experience, or workers who have had little experience in jobs that depend on thinking independently as well as doing, into the work environment.

Many of us never see close-up a job that presents the opportunity to think, to create, to see your own ideas come alive. I remember my first taste of that...how intoxicating, how exhilarating. But not everyone is fortunate enough to have that experience in her life.

Field notes, 4/19/95
Continued

It's as if new workers don't see how important their intellectual contributions are- it's only the "go here, fetch that" part of the work that seems like work and seems worthy of their attention. I guess you have to realize that you are capable of intellectual contributions before you can focus on making them. People who have not been in a workplace, or have been valued only for kinesthetic tasks that result in a tangible product have a hard time valuing themselves for their intellectual efforts.

A staff person may devalue herself, not realizing that her contribution to the organization heavily depends on how she uses work time. Staff unused to doing this kind of work seem not to realize that planning, reflecting, figuring out better ways of doing things, doing the mental work of a job is where much of their contribution is made.

I think we have to talk about this with each other in adult basic education/job training situations, and talk about it in training sessions with new workers, or workers who are doing jobs that are not primarily doing-type work for the first time. If a new worker hears this issue addressed directly in training and development sessions, and see that the people around her are asking her what she thinks, asking her to be a part of decisions, and listening to her viewpoint, then she is a lot more likely to understand how her thinking, as well as her doing, is important to the organization.

Building skills. Typically, every month team leaders attend one staff meeting concentrating on logistics. There is also one training per month concentrating on skill-building, including ways to think critically about community needs and work effectively with people. I facilitated those meetings as part of my work at the Center for Literacy Studies.

The group of team leaders who began work in 1995 identified the need to have a written guide for doing their job. They had many questions about their responsibilities, paperwork requirements, and project ideas. They wanted write a

handbook to include a job description and recommendations on how to best do the job, a sample set of forms, and descriptions of projects they might do with families in the community. Over the course of the year, the handbook was written as a part of ongoing training, with almost every Team Leader contributing a project idea as well as participating in discussions that resulted in a job description and tips and guidelines for doing the job well.

Working with people. In the course of writing the handbook and participating in trainings, the group of team leaders decided that working well with people was the most important requirement for the job. They listed "people skills" that they wanted to do well in their jobs as team leaders: explain Children First Foundation, and MCU to community people; develop the trust of families we work with; be informed about families we work with, be patient and understanding; involve families in planning projects; get information out to families; stay in touch with families; carry out projects with families; and keep up with families' volunteer hours.

Team Leaders also said they need to work with their supervisors and other team leaders in order to ask for information and advice, share information, support and encourage each other, as well as help solve problems.

Literacy Needs. Team leaders need basic literacy skills, and sometimes that has been a barrier for them. A Program Proposal is the first of up to five forms to be completed per project. On the Program Proposal form, Team Leaders describe the project and names the families who will participate. The 54-A form requests the amount of money needed for the project. If a van is needed for transportation, it

must be requested and a maintenance checklist completed. Receipts must be gathered and retained. On two separate forms, project participants evaluate the project, as do Team Leaders. Some team leaders fill out their own forms. Others ask for and receive help from MCU staff or other team leaders.

Projects. Craft-making is the most frequent community service project. Sometimes project participants come to a church, or someone's home in the community to make a craft which the team leader has prepared for. Sometimes they make two crafts and take one to the nursing home, or kids will make two crafts and give one to a friend. Many Fairmont County residents enjoy making crafts, and usually community residents will turn out for a craft-making activity. Most team leaders are comfortable with craft-making activities, and enjoy leading them.

But craft-making projects have also been problematic. Some MCU staff have wondered how useful homemade crafts are, and have suggested resources would be better spent in other ways. Some staff have said that there is low interest among men in crafts, so a barrier is created for male participation. Others have pointed out that not all women enjoy crafts either.

Although craft-making projects predominate, there have been plenty of other community service efforts. In the team leader handbook, of the 22 sample projects described, 11 are crafts related. The others are community improvement, such as clean-ups and flag pole decorating; self-help, such as clothing exchanges; and recreational, such as community picnics. There is also a description of a successful series of blood drives and a trip to the movies for a group of children.

The community service project described below was planned and carried out by two adult education students who serve as Team Leaders. They decided that the flag symbolized a public space, the heart of the community. It seemed that working together to make the flag pole area a beautiful place was an important thing to do.

Excerpt from Team Leader Handbook

Flag Pole Decorating
by Gloria and Becky

When we first started our project we had about thirty people to help. We hauled rocks and dirt. We stood the rocks on end into the ground and made a fence about 5 feet from the pole all the way around. Then we put dirt about 6" deep. We planted bushes and flowers. We got flat creek rocks and laid them on the ground and then cemented between each one and created a path to the pole. We put the dirt all around the pole and made a walk up to the flag pole. At Halloween we decorated with pumpkins and hay. The children really enjoyed painting and drawing faces on the pumpkins. This summer we have planted lots of flowers. The first planting got washed away by all the rain. The Joy Center at Big Creek donated us a lot more flowers and now they are really beautiful.

In December 1995, team leaders completed a self-evaluation as a part of the training process facilitated by the Center for Literacy Studies. The team leaders listed these strengths and accomplishments: families have worked together; better community awareness and participation in decision-making; people get a chance to feel good about themselves through working on community projects; as a team leader I have been a leader in the community and improved my own skills.

Team leaders listed these things that needed improvement: we need to do more projects besides crafts; we still need more involvement of families in planning

and carrying out the projects; we need to get more people out for projects; as Team Leaders, we want to find a way to take on more responsibility and do more projects.

This community service project is part of an ongoing, ambitious effort to contribute to Head Start classes by MCU adult education students. It was partially planned by adult education students and involved a class of MCU literacy students.

Excerpt from Field Notes, 5/30/96

There are nine of us in this MCU van headed out of Jonas Ridge toward Green Valley, a trip of about 15 miles. I had hoped to see the students plan this project that we are on the way to do; but I've learned the planning for teacher-initiated projects like this gets done in the nooks and crannies of the days, in this bit or that bit of conversation between students and teachers. An idea for a project often gets hatched in the teacher's (or in Janice's) mind and polished up in between the reading, writing, and talking that fill up the day.

This isn't the purity I'd somehow hoped for; I yearned to see students coming up with ideas and doing the decision-making about how it would be carried out. I'd hoped to see the democratic process at work as students tried to convince each other of the various merits of this or that approach to community work. I know sometimes that happens, but more often I think it is teachers or Janice who initiate and do basic planning for these whole-class projects. It is June, the literacy teacher, who has decided to make beaded bracelets along with reading stories today.

But whomever thought it up, it sure seems like a good idea: adult students who are new readers, reading children's books themselves in preparation for reading to the Head Start children, spending time in positive interaction with the kids. Who could lose in this deal? Not the Head Start children who get lots of love and attention lavished on them, or the Head Start teachers who get a moment to catch their breath, and certainly not the adult students who gain skills, get opportunities to interact with kids in good ways, feel good that they are contributing something important to the community, and maybe even spending more time as a result reading with their own children or grandchildren.

In preparation for today, the students had picked out two books to read to a child, and practiced the books with each other or at home with a child. I asked some student in the van about how they picked theirs. *I make sure I understand the words good so I can read them.* Another says *I look for interesting pictures.*

Excerpt from Field Notes, 5/30/96
Continued

Someone else tells me *The first time we did this we were kind of shy. But then the youngins were so much fun, we forgot about it. I like to point out the pictures to them, and they like to point out pictures to me.*

We arrive at Head Start which is housed in three mobile classrooms near the Green Valley elementary school. We are a little early, so we wait in the bus a few minutes. Another parent has come to join the activity, so she waits outside the bus, carrying on a conversation with June and the students.

The talk turns to the effort to get Ruth (a student in the class) a pair of glasses, and how difficult it has been. Hazel got a pair at the Dollar Store to tide her over till the real thing came through. She's also waiting for dentures. June says that dentures are the most difficult thing to get for students. She has learned to tell the social services worker *It's a matter of life and death.*

Sharon has talked with the Head Start teacher and there is little time wasted in getting things organized. Sharon and June begin putting out the materials needed for the bracelets at the children's tables just as they return from a trip outside.

Fifteen big-eyed children enter slowly, surveying the room full of guests. But in just a few moments, all are happily stringing beads on leather bands, assisted by MCU students who have placed themselves at the tables. There are lots and lots of smiles and conversation from the MCU students to the children: *What colors do you like? Do you want a red bead next? There you go! What's your name? Who's your friend there?*

I notice that the MCU students are talking to each other. *Five beads on here? Did we remember the scissors? Tie that knot so she can get it out.* Now I notice that the children, quiet at first, are really engaging with MCU students as they are busily stringing beads. They begin talking to the adults easily and comfortably. *I'm Allyssa. No, Uh-LIS-uh* she giggles as she slowly repeats her name. *I like a blue and a blue and a blue together. I have a girl sister and a boy sister at home.*

The bracelets are finished and tied around little wrists. Now the books come out and each MCU student gathers two or three students around. I notice that many of the MCU students, and Sharon in particular, are actively engaging the children in the book, by talking with great enthusiasm, making lots of eye contact, and asking questions of the students.

Field Notes excerpt 5/30/96
Continued

I got a good book! I got snakes and birds. Come sit right here and I'll show you. Other students make sure all the kids have a place. *Who ain't got a seat now? Look and find me some animals on this page. What do you see?*

The *Busy Farm Tractor Book* is a big hit. So is the pop-up book of snakes. I see that the children are very into the reading. Everybody is watching and listening.

Some grab the book after a minute and "read" aloud to themselves. Some would rather talk about the book than read, and a conversation ensues. After a while, most groups have finished their books. Sharon says to all the children, *Listen at me a minute! Youins all read another story today, hear me?*

The children say *bye*, and with the teacher's prompting, *thank you*. They don't want the MCU students to leave. Some don't want to give up the books.
So now, about an hour after we came in, we are ready to leave. We walk out the door, and when we turn around we see fifteen little faces pressed against the window. *Bye! Bye!* Pretty soon the job of hollering *bye!* overtakes their interest in our departure, and we hear them laughing and yelling *bye! bye!* to each other.

On the way back to Jonas Ridge, the conversation meandered from the project we'd just done, to the events in the students' lives, and back to the project. *How did they like the frog book?* I heard someone ask. *They liked the snakes better.* And someone else: *We need to remember to write that down.*

The morning ended with lunch at Mac's in Jonas Ridge. *Did you get what you came for Connie?* Sharon asked. *Come back anytime you want to,* Ruth told me. *Next time you see me, I might have my new teeth.*

Community Service versus Community Development

Organizationally, MCU is trying to move toward more of a community development approach, rather than a service approach. Some at MCU, particularly

staff, have recognized the limits of helping one family or individual at a time, without addressing root causes of poverty. Even when one poor person helps another poor person, avoiding the demeaning connotations of middle or upper class people bestowing "charity," long-term, institutional issues are not addressed and poverty remains. Some feel that their efforts should address community development issues, like involvement of a broad range of people in decision-making. Some staff feel that an "organizing" approach that brings groups together to decide their positions on issues, and take action in support of that is a better way to go about the work. Service projects do not tend to challenge power.

The county just to the north of Fairmont is included in a large federal economic development project. MCU staff and members in that county are working to make their own voices and the voices of other low and moderate income people heard in the decision-making concerning their county's future and the use of the federal resources. But in Fairmont County there isn't a similar ready-made opportunity for organizing on a broad scale, though at times parents have come together over school and other issues.

MCU is looking at its own programs and internal processes and questioning how it might more effectively move from a community service approach to a community development or organizing approach. Its staff, board and active members are engaged in a foundation-funded process of reflection that includes a re-examination of mission and goals. The next year should bring changes to address these questions of community service and development.

In the next section, four adult education students - Becky, Gloria, Burl and James - describe community service projects they've been involved in, and the effect it has had on them and other participants. Then, June and Charlene, teachers at MCU, describe projects from two very different perspectives.

Becky and Gloria talk about Community Service Projects

Becky: *I'm a team leader. I put together projects in the community to make crafts and things. We've had quite a few of them that's been successful. We make things and take them to the hospitals, we've took them to Ivy Creek Nursing Home. And like to some old people in the community. There's this one man who's paralyzed, we've done things for him. We've took Christmas baskets at Christmas time, stuff like that.*

What it is, it's like bringing the community together. We work with people in the community. That's what it's all about. People around here, there's not really a whole lot to do, and some of them it's really hard to get them involved. But once you get them involved, they're there. I mean they will be at everything, once you get them involved they will stay with you. I think they take pride in it. I know I love it. It tickles me to see them all come out and they laugh and have a good time. Even if it's not a good project they'll still laugh and have a good time.

This one man in the community, e's paralyzed from the neck down. Our class visited him and his wife. Some of them took their children. We had a good group. We made him an album. A picture album, with the cloth and the lace. And we made his wife one of those wind chimes. We took fried chicken and gravy and mashed potatoes and we went and had a picnic with him out on his patio. And one of the girls brought her guitar and she sung and he was really touched. Before we left he had to have his picture took with us all. He hugged and kissed each one of the children. And he cried. And he said, that had really made his day.

There's a radio program called Swap and Shop. And you can call in and talk about anything. Well the next day, everybody in Fairmont County knowed us. He was talking about how we came and talked to him and what a nice group of people we were. Talking about the little children. That was a good feeling to see him. It was sad, it made you want to cry, but I'd like to do it everyday. It was such a good feeling to see the look on some of these people's faces when you do something nice for them. He really appreciated it. He loves that. We did that project during class time, but that was alright. This is a class within itself, I think. Anytime you work together,

and learn how to make something, and do something for people that needs it, that's a class within itself.

Gloria: *I just love doing all these projects you know. Working with kids. It ain't just about going to school here. You have fun. You have your work to do but you have your fun too. You have days set aside to do things. You look forward to doing things. I love going shopping and getting ready to do a project. I love to go through Walmarts and think about what we need. I enjoy that. I do. Most of all I love working with kids. Just like last Friday. We give a party at the Learning Center to the handicapped kids. And I was invited to help out with that. They was about 75 kids. And I went to the church where I go and got a bushel of apples. They donated a bushel of apples and everyone of them a stuffed animal. I enjoyed that, doing that for them little kids. See how you do different things at this school? I think things like that will help me. Because there's jobs working with handicapped kids. They need people to take care of them and watch over them and everything. I got experience working with handicapped kids now. And now you have to have your GED to do that.*

Burl and James talk about Community Service Projects

Burl: *Our teacher said this person needs her house painted. Do you all have any spare time? We said yeah, several of us did. And said, well, we're going to meet here, on Saturday I believe it was, between 8 and 9. If youins want to go, just be here. She didn't say, well youins have to be here. She said, we going to be here and if youins want to go, just be here and we'll all go together. You just want to help out.*

This building here, we did a lot of this work. Lydia would say, like on Saturday or Sunday or Monday, ever when it was, we said, well, what time you going to start, and we would just come down and help on our own. She didn't ask us to, we just done it because we wanted to. She didn't say, well, I'm trying to help youins, you got to help me. She'd say, well, I'm going to be there and we need to do so and so. We just volunteered to help out.

We've done quite a bit of work, some of us have. Well, we built, me and Lydia's brother-in- law built that wall. I think it's that next one over. Not this one here but that next one. We built that wall. We cleaned the building up first didn't we. And we moved all the books and all the old clothes. This is on our own time. They just said we going to be here and we said, we'll come. And we painted one or two houses. And week before last we built a ramp for an older lady for her wheelchair and stuff.

James: *Anymore people don't mix like they did. But it pleases me to do something for some older person. I've had a lot of sickness in my family. My grandmother has been in a wheelchair for 17 years. She had sugar diabetes. She got past going and you know how it is when you got family helping out and stuff. So anybody that's sick or anything, we'd help them if we can. Take them food if they need it. At this place we do all we can for anybody.*

Two Teachers' Perspectives on Service Projects

June: *I love to do crafts. A lot of he people in this area do. So we have got a local nursing home here that's got a lot of patients that never has company. There's probably 40 people in our local nursing home that at Christmas time, they don't have a Christmas card, they don't have gifts, they don't have anything. It's just so sad to see. So my class decided that they would do things for them. Like maybe they would do Christmas cards and they would do a card holder to put on their door. Then they decided that for the ones that didn't have decorations in their room, they would do a tree. So we collected magazines. I had this one lady in town here that donated us 3 or 4 hundred magazines. So then what they did-the men and women both folded. Then the men spray painted them and they took them outside. And then we put a star or an angel either one-some of them had stars and some had angels-on top of the tree and then we delivered them to the nursing home. We made cookies. And all the time that we're doing this, the students are learning. Because they, like they would have to write. When we come back from our trip to the nursing home and we'd made our cards and we'd made the trees and things, then they had to write about their experience there and then we would build on those stories and keep adding to them and things like that. Or when we did the cookies for the nursing home then they had to do math, like they had to measure and they were in groups, they were divided up into three groups. One group was responsible for getting all the supplies and working on the budget. They had to make sure they stayed on a budget. Some would measure and they had to count the time. It worked out pretty good.*

Charlene: *A lot of things we did in the name of community service was arts and crafts till it came out the ears and eyeballs. It was ridiculous. We would do these projects and call them community service. Let's make these gifts and take them to the senior citizens or the people in the nursing home or the shut-ins. A lot of times we made these gifts and we threw them away in the garbage simply because they were never delivered. The families made them but the families never delivered them. They could make 12 projects and they might deliver one. So it was a farce. Real community service, yes, I would love to do, I'd love to spend my life doing, if I had a million dollars I would probably open me something like a soup kitchen. Something*

real. Something meaningful and worthwhile. But arts and crafts for these shut ins that they don't even always get?

We always did arts and crafts an called it community service and took it to the nursing home, and we took the teens down there, or we took the Boy's and Girl's club, but we made something, and we took them down to deliver it. So we go in one day and we take these little gifts that they'd made. One of the residents gave us back some arts and crafts that he'd made cause they do it down there too. Yeah, we were taking them little gifts that we made, and they have an arts and crafts class once a week where they made things. So he was giving us better quality stuff probably than we were taking him. And it was so funny. The kids were trying to give him something, and he was trying to give them something. And they are both handmade arts and crafts. I mean there is like, working with these churches, and working with these neighborhoods, and cleaning up these neighborhoods. There is worthwhile projects. It's just that for so long, we've called things that weren't worthy community service. The Teen Center was a wonderful community service. The Boys and Girls Club is a wonderful community service. It gives these kids somewhere to go. It takes them off the street and provides for something they're not going to get unless somebody does do it. And it's wonderful. But some of other things, I didn't agree.

Clearly there are differing perspectives between teachers and students. And, we see again that there are differences of opinion on community-based education even among teachers. This suggests that many factors are involved in making judgements about community-based adult education, even from within the organization and from within a single vantage point of teacher.

Summary

In 1992, MCU staff began talking about the possibility of opening a Teen Center in their building so that young people would have a place to go and positive things to do. Planning for the center was done by the staff and the adult education JOBS class and kids in the community, mostly children of class and staff members. A variety of tasks were done by adult education students, including forming a

committee, visiting other centers to get ideas, discussing and documenting ideas for programs at the Teen Center, writing newspaper articles, thinking through rules and ways of operating for the Center, and going to City Council to ask for resources. JOBS students used class time to do these activities. Students were deeply involved in these activities and felt they were doing lasting and important work. From their differing perspective, some teachers raised questions about the amount of time students were out of class and the usefulness of the activities to their academic program.

For a time in 1994 and 1995, some MCU adult education students managed a literacy tutoring program called ALM-More Appalachians Learning Together. The adult education students made decisions on materials, recruited students, made training arrangements, completed paperwork, and did the tutoring for the program (some of these tasks were done reluctantly). Sometimes the weak infrastructure of the organization made program management difficult. There was some inconsistency among staff in sometimes treating adult education students as trusted peers, and sometimes not, even though the adult education students were doing important work as tutors in the community. At times it was difficult for them to confront many of the larger management questions. Due to funding changes, ALM was later absorbed into the literacy program managed by the literacy coordinator. Though adult education students no longer manage the program, they continue to serve as tutors. The adult education students are not traditional tutors. They reach many students through their families and networks that would not participate in a school-based program. They

resisted many of the trappings of teachers, such as planning and paperwork. They proved to be flexible, dependable and competent tutors. They valued the experience and knowledge of their students, and consciously approached their students as peers. The value and significance of this experience to students, and it's application to other adult education programs, will be discussed at greater length in later chapters.

Many community service project were organized by MCU adult education students in their role as Team Leaders, a kind of "volunteer staff." As Team Leaders, they plan projects to bring together community people to make crafts, do community improvement, participate in picnics, cook-outs and other recreational events, and visit sick and elderly. Successful projects require planning and coordination, a fair amount of paperwork, creating small budgets and being accountable for money, and many "people skills."

Sometimes community service projects are organized by teachers, and whole classes participate. Occasionally classes also plan these projects. Almost all students enjoy these projects and look forward to them as a part of their work at MCU. They see them as significant contributions to the community. They like the involvement with other people. They feel they have gained skills and been enriched by their participation.

While some teachers share this whole-hearted enthusiasm, others sound notes of caution. Of particular concern is whether the projects take students away from their studies too much causing them difficulty in reaching their academic goals. Some teachers wonder about the value of some of the projects. Teachers themselves do not

feel equally comfortable with planning and carrying out community service projects. Some staff have noted the service projects, while helpful to individuals and to all the people involved, do not address issues of systemic problems that keep poverty pervasive in Fairmont County and most of Appalachia. A development or organizing approach would do that, they believe.

The dilemmas presented by these community-based activities is explored further in the next two chapters on student and teacher impacts.

CHAPTER SIX

IMPACTS ON STUDENTS

In this chapter, I report the results of interviews with current and former MCU students. These interviews constitute the heart of the study, and the results also suggest ways to think about the program as a whole.

The chapter is divided into four sections. The first section includes three students' stories about how they have experienced adult education at MCU and what it means to them. The second, third and fourth sections contain the results of my thematic analysis of all student interviews. The second section presents an analysis of students' perceptions of their own learning and growth that they connect to their experiences at MCU. These impacts reflect the whole of their lives, not only their roles as students. The third section presents an analysis of students' ideas about program characteristics or other factors that contributed to their success at MCU. The fourth section presents an analysis of the three kinds of factors students name as barriers or deterrents to their success at MCU.

I believe it is important for readers of this research to experience at least a few student stories as a whole, without the fragmentation that excerpted quotes sometimes bring. The first section of this chapter begins with three students who talk about their experiences at MCU. The women interweave their adult education experiences into

the fabric of their lives. This gives a rich context that helps us understand the meaning of the experience to them. Their personal interpretations ground this study in their own everyday reality and helps ensure the authenticity of the findings.

Debbie, Doreen and Sarah are three of eleven students who told their stories for this study. Portions of the women's stories were transcribed from taped recordings, with only slight editing for clarity. These stories were chosen for inclusion because the themes of these women's lives were echoed throughout the study by other MCU participants, and seem representative of MCU students.

Debbie, the first student presented, was forty-three at the time of the interview. Debbie is an African American woman who was involved for three years in MCU as a GED student, a Board member, and as an active participant in the formation and operation of the Teen Center. She describes herself as "shy" but adds she "likes people." Debbie dropped out of MCU when her mother became ill. Debbie now cares full time for her mother.

Debbie's Story

When I was a kid and first started to school I was sick a lot and wasn't able to attend classes the way I wanted to because I stayed sick all the time. And because of that, I stayed behind all the time. I maybe averaged going to school twice a month or something like that. And I just stayed behind all the time with my classes. I tried tutoring and stuff. That wouldn't help. You know you can just get so far behind in school that you just can't hardly catch up. And I just had to drop out completely. I finished eighth, so I had to be maybe twelve or thirteen. I did get through eighth barely. I could have started back over. Really I needed to have done the primer because I was so far behind and stuff, and all the medication I had to take. I couldn't concentrate and stuff, it made it really bad. You know I stayed in pain a lot.

Nerve problems. It was really tough for me. Cause I always wanted to go to school and get a good education because I always wanted to be a model. I always dreamed of being a model. And that hurt a lot. That was really disappointing to me. You learn to live with stuff like that I guess.

They started this program about if you are on AFDC you are going to have to either get a job or start taking classes or some kind of training. I got a letter from a social worker and I came in and I talked to her about it and she explained to me what it was. I really liked it. They didn't have to pull me or anything. I volunteered to do this at a meeting we had. I thought, you know, that's me a start. Trying to make something of myself. My daughter was eleven, ten maybe, so she was getting to the point that she could pretty well look after herself. So I thought for sure that was going to be a start for me.

And when I started I was really scared. There was a lot younger ladies there than me so they was a little bit more educated than I was at that time, at least I was thinking they would say, well, she's dumb, she don't know anything. She's been out of school too long. Which I had been out of school for quite a bit. I was scared to death the day that I first walked in. I wouldn't talk to anybody. I just sat there. Wouldn't ask for help but God knows I needed help. I was afraid, ashamed, embarrassed mostly I guess. At the beginning, I would leave before it come time for me to go. Because I just felt out of place there or something at the beginning. I was wrong about a lot of them there. It took me maybe a week or two to start feeling a little bit of ease but it took me longer than that to begin to talk to people and socialize and stuff with them. It did, it really did.

I worked in the Teen Center. We were trying to help the young teenagers, the children coming up was what we were trying to do. We were trying to fix a place for them so they would have somewhere to go. Cut back on drugs and alcohol and teen pregnancy. We felt like if we could put something down there for them to come to that would keep them occupied, they would have somewhere to look forward to going to, and get to meet different people and stuff.

It helped a lot of those kids coming in there. They would look forward to coming there and they wouldn't want to leave when they come either. They felt right at home. They sat right down and they talked to you and stuff. Get to know you. Sometimes they would ask things I guess they wouldn't ask their parents. Things that would be going on in their lives. I know it's happened to me. I can't speak for the other ones there but they did me. So Teen Center was a big part of me too.

At the beginning I wouldn't associate in the groups at all at school. Even at breaks, I wouldn't associate with nobody there. I'm pretty sure there's some there that could tell you that. But just one person kept after me, and kept talking and talking to me until I began to just pull in a little bit. And after I realized I wasn't alone, there was a lot more there that felt the same way, I said well shoot, I may as well start to get to know people better. I started feeling really at ease. I looked forward it. I mean every morning I looked forward to going to MCU.

I started working with people through the Teen Center and service projects. Working with people has helped me a lot. I began to see that I wasn't alone.

There's a lot more people exactly the same way I was. When I would sit and talk to them and see what kind of shape they was in and everything. Sometimes it made me feel ashamed because I got to know a lot of people in lots worse shape than I was through that program. They was just as ashamed and embarrassed and shy as I was. Sure was.

I really began to push myself with recruiting for the Teen Center. You know just whatever they would have going on. I'd get involved in it. I sure would. Most of the time they wouldn't even have to ask me. I'd volunteer my services. I'd do about anything.

Just a little push from people down there helped me. At the Center down there they encouraged me. They told me I could do anything I wanted to do if I would just try. They encouraged me. It worked. Sure did.

What worked for me at school would probably work for other students. Keep them doing different things, keep them interested. And don't keep them in those book all the time. They are going to get burnt out on studying those books. I know I did. Let them get in different things. Maybe like different programs they could get involved in. Not just studying five days a week. I know it didn't work for me. That would help them a lot. And like I say, encourage them. Sit down and work with them and ask them what they need help in. Sit down and go over things. That would help them.

One thing in particular that I benefited from was when we did the march on city hall. Now that was really an uplift for me. I really enjoyed doing that. Meeting the city council and the mayor of the town. That really helped me there. I learned just because people have a title that don't mean they are different from you. I mean I would think, the mayor, he might not want to listen to what we have to say. Or city council. See I was wrong again. It helped me see that we were important and our kids were important to them too. Because they helped us and they really encouraged us to get the Teen Center going.

And another thing that helped me was the projects we did. With the work I did in it, trying to get families to come out and help their community. And maybe the Washington trip. I really enjoyed that Washington trip! I did a few interviews there with people. I met a lot of important people there. And they really wanted to listen to what I had to say. They really cared. Agency people. Higher offices. I did a little talk with them. They really surprised me. I didn't think they would be really interested either. But they were really interested in what we had to say. There's a lot more I've done that I've really enjoyed doing and impressed me a lot.

Before, I never got out or anything. Except for the doctor's office, hospital, that's it. Sure was. I just didn't feel comfortable. I just felt lower. With no education. Staying at home and doing nothing. I just felt lower. I felt that people wouldn't associate with me. Because I just didn't have the education and stuff that I needed. Grammar and stuff. Half the time I knew what words meant and half the time I didn't. It was just rough. For me it was.

MCU helped me a lot. It's helped me to put stuff in better order. It learned me how to do stuff better. In the beginning I really didn't know how to do anything.

With all the training that I'd had and the meetings, it helped me to depend on myself. Just like I'm doing now. I just do everything practically by myself now. Keeping my mom and everything financial together, and that's a big problem.

I'm more outspoken. If there's anything I don't know or need to know, I'll ask or I'll phone. At the beginning, before I started going to MCU, I wouldn't do that. It's true, it's right. I wouldn't do it. I just felt ashamed or afraid I'd say something wrong with my grammar and stuff. I thought maybe people might laugh at me or something like that. Saying the wrong word or something like that. But since I've got involved in MCU, well, you'd just have to be me to understand how it's helped me. It has, it sure has.

A big change is that I learned how to do stuff. How to set meetings up. How to be responsible for other people besides myself. Taking care of kids and things. I got to talk to people and ask people for stuff that we needed. Ordinarily I would not have done that back in the past. There's just no way I would have done it.

I learned a whole lot. I just can't put into words what MCU helped me and done for me. There's no way I could. Like deal with insurance forms. Make sure my mom don't get into something she couldn't handle with finances and medications. All that stuff like that. It's helped me to just take my time and focus on it. And that's where it's come from. All those meetings I sat in, and all that. It's been great for me. I couldn't have asked for nothing no better. It's helped me a lot.

Debbie is clearly very reflective, shown in part by her ability to think about the breadth of her experiences at MCU and how they helped her learn and grow. She describes for us how her involvement in the variety of programs and projects based in the community, or bridging MCU, adult basic education and community, supported that growth.

Doreen, a white woman, thirty-nine years old at the time of the interview, tells the second story. Doreen's journey holds much in common with Debbie's. She began adult basic education classes three days a week conducted by MCU teachers at a nearby school. She later increased her class hours and moved to the MCU center. She earned her GED in three years, and continued her involvement at MCU as a community service worker in a state program that requires work in exchange for

welfare benefits. During the past four years, Doreen has been instrumental in establishing, along with her friend Mary Ann (also a MCU student) a literacy tutoring program in several communities. She has carried out literacy tutoring and many other projects as a Team Leader. Like Debbie, Doreen says that she is "shy," but goes on to describe the a process of personal transformation that has led her to leadership within MCU.

Doreen's Story

When I was little I mean it was pretty rough. We had to walk out of the holler. They didn't have buses and I'd walk out of there with my dad every morning. And it was rough but I got through grade school. And then when I got into high school it was a lot different. I felt like I just didn't fit in with them because you know I felt like most of them had a lot more than I had.

I had a good home but we were poor. I tell you what I did, and I'm not ashamed to tell it. My dad, he had cancer. And he spit up blood bad. And he would walk over to Salt Lick school, he was the janitor, about 4 or 5 o'clock in the morning to build the fires. I would walk over there with him, cause to me my daddy was special, and I didn't want him to be by himself. And I tied light bread bags on my feet to get there with him. On my shoes and my feet cause my shoes were no good.

In high school I ended up getting married and then after I had got married, I had my kids and I raised them practically by myself. I used to stay home, raise my kids, see nobody. My husband worked every day driving a coal truck. I was abused real bad. He'd take a big mining belt, you know, and beat me, and choke me with a telephone cord. It was that big mining belt buckle broke my ankle. I had surgery on one of my ears, where he busted my ear drum, beat me in the head so much. It's hard to get away from it. But when you are involved in the outside world, you can let loose.

I've had some hard times to face by myself. Over in Adams County, there was four men, they kept getting around my house, every night, every night, they would shine a light in my windows, they'd get in my house when I'd come over to my mom's. For three months, me and my little boys sat in the window, I guess till 5 o'clock in the morning, just me and my two boys up in the holler, I kept my babies up till about 12 o'clock cause I couldn't lay down, because I was afraid what might happen. For about 3 months, I was terrorized. Then one day when we left and went

over to my mom's, they burned my house. I had no insurance or nothing, and they burned it. That was hard times. So I moved in with my mom but now we have our own place.

When my kids got of age, I said well it's time to do something for me. You know through the welfare office they send you to school. But with me it was something I wanted to do myself. And I've been going and my one goal was to get my GED before I got forty. And I did it. Sure did.

There's just something about this place that makes you want to cling right to it. I guess it's, if you like to do things for people, see that people gets together and does things, you'll automatically love this place when you get to know it just a little bit.

Me and Mary Ann has done lots of projects. We done the clean-up on Bessie's Branch with Jolene, and we had a clean-up on Johnny's Branch. And we've made things and took to the nursing home. All kinds of things. And we have tutoring classes. We started on Johnny's Branch and went on to Bessie's Branch. We're painting the church houses now. So we are busy!

The teachers here are great. They are real good people. I love every one of them. And they make you fit right in. And it was the same at Little Creek. The teachers they just make you fit right in. The older you get the more you realize that other people is just like you are. When you're little you don't realize that. But when you get older, you see it.

And we did some good work that was a big success. We did the clean-up. We helped Jolene on Bessie's Branch. For a while there wasn't nobody doing anything. I told my brother, if we don't pile the garbage at the road, where the truck can pick it up, then the other people won't know what we're doing. So I got some bags, I used my garbage bags I had at home, and me and him we got in the creek and in the yard, and around my mom's and I guess in about an hour we had a truckload of stuff there.

I told the rest of them I said, if we don't start doing it, they won't know what we're doing. If they just called, they might not get the message right. But when they seen us doing it, here it went all down the road. Sure did. And when we started doing that, the next house started doing it, and the next, and then it ended up the whole holler knowed what we was doing. And every one of them got involved in it.

And the most important thing, these people who were sick or old and couldn't clean around their place, we got a bunch of women and went and helped those people clean up around their place. We had twenty dump truck loads took out of there. And the people was really happy about it.

We plan the craft projects and we go to Walmarts and do the shopping. We tell the people the date, we set up the time when we think everybody can be there. And we work together to make things. We just recently had a key chain project.

And we done the mother's day project. I liked that one a lot. We made up flowers and put them on paper plates. They was real pretty. We took them around to the old people. The older mothers in the community. We delivered those and we got a lot of hugs and a lot of tears out of it. And they really appreciated it.

I like the tutoring classes. We enrolled about 20 people in our classes in all. We took the tables and books that we got from MCU and set them up there on Johnny's Branch. We just asked everybody. We stopped them on the road, or we stopped at their house. Anybody, we'd talk to them, tell them about the class. We'd say it's for people that wants to learn how to read, write, or do math or spelling, you know, anything you didn't catch in school. When they'd come we'd talk to them and show them the books. So they are there looking over the classroom to see if it suits them, to see if it's something they want to be in. I guess they're looking for our friendliness too. So we work with them and we encourage them. I have this one woman. She caught on real fast. She went back home and she come back and said, "You know what? I read this to my little girl." That helps me too you know. I know I'm a better reader. I've been out of school so long, I don't know, when I'm helping those people read, seems like I can read a little bit better, I can understand a little bit better, and seems like I can read a little bit faster. It's all come back to where it should be. And as far as writing is concerned, I was sort of bad about my writing. But after I have to do all the paper work, and sign the sheets on it, seem like it's just all there, better than what it was.

I feel a lot more confident in myself. And I feel better about myself since I got a lot more education than what I had. And I feel like if I was to be like out in the dessert or someplace out to myself, and nobody around, I would know how to live, even if there weren't nobody there. Seems like I've got more knowledge about how to do it myself. To me, each time you're helping somebody else, seem like you're learning a little bit more yourself.

Like when we get these applications from those stores to use with our tutoring class. If you haven't filled out an application in a long time, you're going to have to learn again. So if you're helping somebody else, you are learning too.

You get welfare all the time, you've not got the experience for anything else. You know, like big jobs. If it weren't for this, I just don't know what I would do with myself. I don't know what I would do without it.

I'd always been at home with the kids, never did get to do nothing. But I don't know, after we started going to school, it got us out of the house, it got us away from all that, then when we started going to school, we just wanted to keep doing more. Like getting involved. I want more and more of it. I can't give enough. After I've got started, I mean I always done things for people, and loved doing it. But after I got started with this stuff I just can't get enough.

I'll get in conversations with women. I've talked to women in Paint Rock County, about things that I do, about day care, about the projects and the tutoring. I talk about things that I do, and these women, they've got to where they get out more. When they hear it, even the abused ones, it makes them want to get out and do something with their lives instead of setting there and getting abused. They say, do you like what you do? I say, oh yes I love it. So really, being abused like that in a way, then coming out of it, if anybody could really set down and tell people they've been abused, it could really turn their life around. It might really help somebody. That's why we keep doing more and more, to try to help more people involved in all

they can, to get out of the abuse. So you see why I feel like I've been let loose and I want to do more.

Like Debbie and Doreen, Sarah, who tells our final story, speaks of an incredible personal transformation that happened alongside her participation at MCU. Sarah, a white woman thirty-six years old at the time of this interview, unwillingly began adult education classes in response to a state mandate. She grew to be one of the most involved students at the MCU Center. Sarah is a Board member, helps operate the Teen Center, is a literacy tutor through the ALM program, and has planned and carried out many other activities as a Team Leader. Since passing the GED, Sarah has remained involved in several activities through her position as a community service worker, in which she contributes about 20 hours per week to MCU in exchange for welfare benefits.

Sarah's Story

As far back as I remember, I always hated school. I always did. That didn't change until sixth or seventh grade, and by then I was up old enough to have other things on my mind. I got married at thirteen and I quit school at thirteen. I didn't think I would ever go back to school, because I hated it so bad. I didn't want to learn and I didn't care anything about it. I quit in seventh grade. I got married and had four kids and that was the end of that.

In 1992, twenty year later, I got a letter saying because I'm on AFDC, I would be required to come back to school to get my GED. It was supposed to be job training to help you get a job and get off welfare. So I come back in 92. I come sixteen hours a week. You done the five basic school subjects. [Later] I was asked to go into OWEP because there's a limit on how long you can be here. Now I do the OWEP, which is basically community service in exchange for welfare benefits. I work with the Teen Center, I work with anything that is community-based, to help out in the

community and I do 80 hours here a month. That is mandatory, something you have to do in order to draw your AFDC now. You have to put in the 80 hours.

When I first come in December, which would be three year ago, I hated it. I hated the students and I hated the teachers and I hated the building and anything that had to do with it, I didn't want it. I was ready to go home and stay there. And I even got into a deep depression at the thought that I had to go back to school. Cause I always hated school so bad. When I come in here, I was not willing. There wasn't a soul in here I'd give two cents for. Cause I hated the place. I've come a long way since then. Now I'm required to put four hours a day in, and I usually spend twelve.

MCU showed me what I had missed as far as education. I can't imagine a person who can't read. I can't imagine that. And even though I didn't have very much education I was blessed with the ability to read good. There's a lot of math I run up on that I don't know nothing about. But I can read anything you put in front of me. I'm a tutor in the ALM program. I have five students. I try to show people how important it is to know how to read. If you know how to read your self-esteem goes up, you feel more comfortable. I go all out for literacy because I feel like that's one thing I can give to people. And I feel good about giving people something they can use.

I work in the Teen Center, with 10- to 15-year-olds. We take them places. Right now we're trying to start our own ball team. We do a lot of community service. It's been a good success. It's kept kids off the streets. I can't help the Teen Center as far as donations. I don't have that kind of money to buy materials or games or anything. My time is what I give. It's something I enjoy doing. The kids get a big kick out of it because they get me started and I have a lot of fun out of those kids.

Mostly it was the teachers here. They'd bring me out. [Before] I didn't open my door when people would come to the house. They'd come to the house and I was never at home. Because when I seen them coming my doors were shut. I didn't involve people whatsoever. I'd go for six months at a time, people never seen me. Because I didn't stick my head outside my little two-room hut. I had a two-room house, and that's where I stayed, me and my four kids. I didn't come out, I didn't associate with people, because I always felt like they was watching me, they was judging me and I was paranoid about it. I got to where I was very paranoid about people, didn't trust them at all. But it's different now.

There was a teacher here then, his name was Arthur Springs, and he kept working with me. I always when I come into class would find me a seat in a corner away from everybody and I didn't have a smile for nobody cause I was mad at the world. And he'd come over and he'd crack little jokes off to me or you know just little things. Eventually he's the one that brought me out enough to where I joined the other students. He kept telling me that I could do it. I had low self esteem. And I was thinking I can't do this there's no way I can do this. That was one reason why I wouldn't try, cause I always would say "I can't." But he always encouraged me and he worked tirelessly with me. And the man never give up and he never got aggravated or tired or anything.

Being a board member has helped too. It give me a whole new perspective of these kinds of set-ups. Before I was a board member I had no idea the kind of money it took to run these places. I didn't realize the different jobs and responsibilities that was behind this place. Being a board member has shown me that I can do it. I didn't think I could when I come in, I didn't think I'd even like it. But being a board member puts you in a position where your opinion counts. And that's something I've been working to try to get. I didn't realize at the time that being a board member would get me that power but now that it has, now that I realize that a lot of people listen to me because I'm a board member, more than they listen to me just because of my name. It's helped me to understand bigger problems. I've learned a lot about the poverty in Fairmont County and just how bad it is. Through the board I've been able to assess different programs and listen to people's opinions of these programs and meet the people who participate in these programs.

MCU has showed me that being poor is not a crime. If you're not perfect, that's no big deal. You can always improve. And before I always had a hard time improving. Because I didn't want to, I always figured, what's the use. I'm not going anywhere, I'm not going to do anything, so why fool with it. But I see I am going somewhere.

I never would have done any of it without being pulled into here. You know a lot of people were resentful when they got these letters saying you have to go back to school. And I was one of them. I hated this place, I really did. I became suicidal over this place for a couple of weeks. I was just down and out so bad. But I learned that the people here are just like me. Even the teachers. They're not like the teachers in the public school system. They are different. They don't dress to impress. They don't throw away things you do. They appreciate and they don't care to show you they appreciate what you do. If you do something and you do it right, they are there to praise you and encourage you. And that means a lot to anybody. They praise their students. And when a student fails, they don't let you wallow in failure, they boost you up.

As my confidence built up, then everything else did too. For the last two years, it's been like I learn something new every day as far as people go. I've learned people and I've learned that you can improve, you can do what you want to do. There's been major changes with me. There's been major changes there. I never was an outgoing person, I never was a talkative person. I never was a people person. I didn't like anybody. I never liked anybody I ever met. I always found faults with everybody. I always shunned away. I shunned away from responsibilities anytime I could. If it didn't involve my kids and my home, I didn't want any part of it. I didn't trust anybody. Basically I was a very sad, bitter person. Coming here has changed all of that.

What it's done for me is made it possible for me to do my writing. I never would have done that before. If I had of done it, it would have been wrote, and I would have said, well that's no account, and I'd throw it away and forget it. I've been sending my writings off, and I have got two of those published. And I'm hoping for a third. I don't know if I'll get it or not.

I don't know where the transformation was, I don't know exactly the day that it happened, but gradually, it did. Little by little. I do thank MCU for what they done for me. Because they pulled me out of the suicidal cycle that I was definitely going down. It's not to sound corny but they did. They saved my life. In a manner of speaking, they did. Because if I'd continued in the life I was in, especially having to watch my kids get married and leave me. And to sit and think about being alone. I definitely wouldn't be here. I was determined that my kids were all I had in this world. That was it, I didn't want nobody else in my world. And I definitely had suicidal tendencies. At that time I did. I had them for a long time. But those are long gone and now I wake up and I just want to get out here and get started and I want to think about college and I want to think about my writing and I want to think about what I can do in the future and I want to think about taking the director's job some day! You know, I want to go up! I don't want to go back. I want to go on. I do. It don't matter to me about the money part of it. Just to stand up and say "I done it! You said I couldn't and I showed you, I done it!"

I'm going to college in January and MCU has been a major part of that. I've had a lot of encouragement here. Without that encouragement I wouldn't have went. But I do start in January, keeping my fingers crossed. All this had come about since MCU come into my world.

Debbie, Doreen and Sarah tell about experiences prior to entering MCU that were also voiced by nearly all the women students I interviewed: childhoods made difficult by poverty, but at the same time, in most cases, also characterized by love and support from family; failure experiences in school; health problems (themselves or family); abusive spousal relationships; isolation and few connections with community or others outside of immediate family; feeling bad about themselves because of poor basic skills; and feeling that they didn't fit in school or in social situations. They also had similar experiences on entering MCU: shy and scared at first; teachers and groups of students at MCU instrumental in promoting a sense of belonging; and a number of relationships formed and feeling of competence developed through work on community-based projects.

The male students I interviewed had similar experiences in some ways, but there were also some differences between their experiences and the women's experiences. Like the women, the men also experienced early lives made hard by poverty. The men also talked about supportive, loving parents. They talked about failure experiences in school, and feeling bad about themselves as adults because of poor reading and writing skills. However, male students did not talk about being isolated and without opportunity to interact in the public sphere prior to attending MCU. They did not have a parallel MCU experience similar to the women's ending isolation and finding their voices.

The experiences Debbie, Doreen, and Sarah relate give us a way to ground the student interview results in the reality of the lives of the three women. The remainder of this chapter presents the results of a thematic analysis of student interviews that suggest the impacts of the MCU experience on students' lives, and the factors students identify as promoting or deterring their success in the MCU adult education program.

Impacts on Students

In interviews involving eleven students, the participants talked about the ways they have been impacted by their adult education experiences at MCU. Although not specifically asked, all of them spoke about the effects their adult education experiences had on their entire lives-not just as a students, or as persons hoping to

learn basic skills, but as whole people. As the students talked about the impacts that participating in MCU's adult education classes and community work had on them, five themes emerged: (1) participating in community-based adult education helped with their skills in everyday life; (2) it changed the way they relate to others; (3) it changed the way they think about themselves and their lives; (4) it helped them find their voices; and (5) it developed their leadership capacity.

Skills in Everyday Life

I can get out of town now.

Every student mentioned that the MCU experience had helped with specific skills he or she needed in everyday life. Many of these were basic survival skills needed for a print-based society, the kind that promote independence such as being able to read road signs. Improvement in skills needed on the job was also frequently mentioned, such as being able to fill out a time sheet. Another area mentioned was improvement in everyday reading and writing skills, particularly getting into the habit of reading the newspaper or books for pleasure. Several students mentioned being able to do higher level, more complex and demanding tasks that they couldn't do before, like making financial decisions, understanding medication schedules and filling out insurance forms.

Survival skills. Students mentioned improvement in the skills needed to survive in a print-based culture that are often taken for granted by good readers. Reading restaurant menus, figuring out today's date, understanding newspaper

cartoons, locating an item in the store were all problematic. As those skills developed, students felt a sense of relief and accomplishment.

> *I can look at a calendar. Used to I couldn't do that...I couldn't remember one week, what the date was in the middle of the week, I'd get confused as to what week it was. I can read the calendar now.*

Students seemed to feel the absence of these survival skills most keenly when they impeded their independence or put them in danger. One student talked about being able to survive in familiar circumstances, but feeling inadequate out of his own home town.

> *This old hick town here, it's so small, any street can be a one-way street. They just let you go the way you want to. Down in Lexington, you get on a one-way street, you break the law, they'll take you to jail. You got to know which way you are going.*

The taste of independence is sweet, and as their world broadened to include more distant horizons, it was cause for celebration.

> *I can get out of town now, like going to Knoxville. I run across road signs that I can read. I can get around there, all them intersections and stuff down there. Signs that I couldn't read before. I'd get out of town, see mileage signs. I'd get over there around Riley, and figure out how far it is to Lexington, and all them places. Used to, I'd go somewhere out of town, I'd be afraid to get out unless I had somebody with me. Afraid I'd get in a lot of traffic, get in the wrong lane and couldn't get out, make a wrong turn. But anymore, that don't bother me. I just take it as it comes. I just feel like I can do it and I go for it.*

Students noted that in their class they practiced using calendars, maps, and other real-life print materials. They made a point of planning the route they would take on field trips, and reading road signs along the way. Interestingly, several teachers also said they had difficulty with maps, and benefitted from the practice.

Job-related skills. Students placed high value on learning skills useful to them in their current jobs, or skills that may help them get jobs. The only two students interviewed who were employed talked about their need for literacy skills on the job, and how their MCU experience had helped them.

A school bus driver talked about improving his ability to do his job:

> *I can fill out my own time sheet now. I couldn't before. I can fill out my bus report. It ain't too difficult. It's simple once you learn just a few words. Teacher took copies of it and showed us how to fill it out.*

And a coal truck driver discussed his on-the-job literacy needs and how the MCU experience had prevented difficulty with a new literacy task: filling out a safety book.

> *I have to make a pre-trip inspection of all that stuff [air brakes, tie-downs]. nd now at work I've got a book I fill out every morning. A safety book. If there's anything wrong with that truck, I have to put it down. I have to date that and sign it. I just got started doing it. And when it come to me, when they showed me one time, I learned it. If I hadn't come to school, I'd had trouble.*

A common activity in tutoring and literacy classes is to practice filling out job applications with area employers (and frequently, to role play job interviews). Both the students and their student-tutors found this helpful.

> *We fill out and sign that application too, and that helps you learn, because we'll take applications to give out, and when you're helping them you're learning yourself.*

One student, speaking of leading MCU projects with handicapped children, talked about her belief that the experiences have made her ready for a job in the field.

> *Oh yeah, I believe it would [help me be ready]. There's jobs with handicapped kids. They need people to take care of them and watch over them and everything. And now you have to have your GED to do that. I got experience working with handicapped kids. Doing all these projects we do you know. I just love that. Working with the kids.*

The comment from Doreen included in her story also supports this idea. She felt she wasn't prepared to immediately go out and get a "big job," but her experience with community service projects could be a bridge to employment.

Personal and community-linked reading and writing. Students talked about how improving their reading had led to positive changes in their personal lives too. Several mentioned enjoying reading books, particularly by authors whose works their class members explored together. The pleasure reading that started in school bubbled over into their personal lives, and became a real source of enjoyment.

I used to wouldn't sit down and read a book. But now I will. Now I'll sit with my nose in a book. There are some great books to read. They remind you of when you was growing up. Hard times, like in Vernie Mae Sloan books. I love to read now. Now I will just pick up and read. It'll help you in life.

Students mentioned other changes in their reading habits too. One woman said she now read all the newspaper, as opposed to only her church news column, as she used to do. A man commented that he liked reading the newspaper and knowing what was going on in his hometown. Also, for the first time, he actually understood and enjoyed the newspaper comics, he said.

Complex tasks got easier. Several students said they now attempted higher-level reading tasks, like filling out insurance forms. They reported that they felt more confident about understanding medication schedules and other health information. They felt that financial decisions and management was more under their control. There was a feeling of increased competence in general.

Debbie's comment reported earlier, that she *"can put stuff in better order now, like deal with insurance forms,"* is telling. The increased competence is consistent with the "spread" theory mentioned in Chapter 2. It seems that increased skills and experience in one area of their lives helped students feel better about themselves in other areas too.

Relationships with Others

My back was to the people.

Many students talked about how their world had previously included only their families. Other people were not a part of their world. With their entry into MCU and with positive experiences they had there, it was as if their world expanded to include their classmates, teachers, other MCU staff, and in some cases, the larger community.

Ended isolation. The most dramatic and pervasive impact for the women students interviewed was the ending of their isolation. Though many did not want to come to school at first, (and several came only after being mandated), eight of them said that coming to school was one of the most important things that had ever happened to them, because it ended the isolation and narrowness of their lives. *I felt like I was let out of prison,* said one woman, expressing a sentiment heard over and over in conversations with the women at MCU.

Martha, a student who occasionally helped in her mother-in-law's restaurant, said she tried to avoid contact with anyone outside her family.

> *I helped her do a little bit, but not much. I'd go back in the kitchen, I couldn't look at the people, I wouldn't wait on the people. I felt more confident with my back to them, with my face to the front of the stove, cooking. And my back to the people.*

Martha continued:

> *Before I started going to the Learning Center, the only ones I thought I could talk to was little kids. Mainly mine. I couldn't communicate with adults. I didn't know how.*

Why were these women so isolated? And what happened at school to break their isolation? Most of the women moved in a very limited range, and did not consider the world outside their homes to be theirs. Interestingly, the only woman who did not talk about the isolation of her pre-MCU life was one who left Fairmont County in her teens, and worked up north in a factory. She credited that experience with giving her the ability to move in the public sphere. Of the remaining eight women, several factors seemed to combine to create and foster their isolation. These women talked about cultural expectations, quitting school early for marriage or other reasons, abusive relationships, and their own feelings of unworthiness or incapability to function in the world beyond their homes.

Cultural expectations. Many women acknowledged that they were not expected or encouraged to step outside their own doorway, except to do the things required of them as homemakers and mothers.

> *It's always been expected that a woman stay at home. And I think everybody just sort of flows along with that old idea, that a woman's place is in the home.*

Another woman commented on the assumptions about women held by many men: *a lot of the men around here would think, this is a woman and she don't know much.*

Quitting school early. Quitting school early, sometimes as young as thirteen, meant the one reliable interaction with the outside world was gone for the young women. Most often they quit to get married. Sometimes they quit because they weren't doing well in school. Sometimes they were needed to help at home. Several women talked about feeling that they didn't belong in school because they were poor. Even in a community where poverty is common, to them it seemed they were different, and didn't fit in.

> *You don't realize how people have it so rough until you get older and you start talking to other people. You know they had it just as rough as you did but you don't realize that as a child, until you grow up.*

This idea of being different, set apart from the rest of their peers, is a pervasive theme throughout the conversations of women students. They didn't feel they fit in school. And later, they didn't feel they fit out in the world. Even if the home they made with a husband or boyfriend wasn't happy, at least they felt they belonged.

The young women who quit school never got the opportunity to practice adult interaction with the outside world. For the most part they went from being a child in

a family to being a wife and/or mother who felt confined to her home, with no time or opportunity to embrace the role of adult interacting in the public sphere.

Abusive relationships. Often the homes they made were not happy. Four of the nine women students said explicitly, without being asked, that their husbands or boyfriends were abusive. The women described the abuse as a major factor in their isolation from the rest of the world. *My husband was abusive and I just had to yield down to him*, explains one woman when asked about why she never left the house.

Feelings of unworthiness and incompetence. Their own feelings of being unable to cope with the public sphere served to enforce their isolation. When describing their own feelings of incompetence and fear, women often referred to feelings of inadequacy coming out of early experiences with poverty. Several women talked about being told in many ways that they were incapable of doing anything much outside the home.

> *When it comes to people, out in public, I just felt like because I didn't have money, I didn't have fancy clothes, I didn't have this or that, then I was not part of society. I was sort of like a reject, thrower back...I didn't want to be with other people because I felt like they were always thinking they were better than me. And in my mind, they was better than me. Cause they didn't have my problems, they wasn't doing what I was doing.*

Gender differences. The two men interviewed did not talk about isolation, cultural expectations, or abusive spouses. Another of the important differences between the life experiences of the men and women interviewed was employment

history. Of the participants who had lived in Fairmont County for their entire lives, only the two men held jobs outside MCU for a significant length of time. Both men described many experiences in the "public" world that would suggest they were not isolated. Several of these experiences were related to their employment.

Most of the women interviewed were not employed. Since employment was also correlated with gender in this study, it seems clear that gender played an important role in the women's isolation, and the force of cultural expectations on their lives, and their experience of abusive relationships.

However, the men shared with the woman many similar experiences: early lives made difficult by poverty; the feeling of love and support from parents and family; failure experiences in school; the support of teachers and other students at MCU; a sense of satisfaction gained from community work done at MCU.

Had I confined my study at MCU to only women, or done a second set of research questions using only the data from women, I may have been able to further explain or account for gender differences. Beth Bingman (1995), and other works she cites, including Judy Fiene (1988) and Virginia Seitz (1992) provide a good foundation for understanding the lives of the women participants at MCU. However, the limitations of this study (only two interviews with male students and research questions and design that did not structure this work as a comparative study) make it impossible to say much more about these gender differences. Questions of gender differences and life experiences deserve more inquiry within the context of adult education programs in Appalachia and beyond.

Ways of Relating at MCU. One of the most common metaphors heard in students' conversations about MCU was "we're just like a family." They talked about sharing their lives with each other through class discussions, work in small groups, and through doing projects together. They developed trust in each other.

> *We're all just like a family, at the Learning Center where the classes are held. We're just like a family. I think that's why we all feel so comfortable. If one's sad, we're all sad. If one hurts, we all hurt. We share our feelings with one another.*

Sharing their lives with each other is a powerful experience for students, and this did not leave them unaffected. Students talked about how, once they came to know each other, a caring and concern and connectedness followed.

> *You can really learn just being around people. I mean in our room up there. We've got one girl out because her mom is having surgery. Our heart really goes out to that girl. We've got some that's just quit, and we try to get a hold of them and get them to come back. That really learns you to respect other people. There's like one girl, if I don't come to school, she don't get to come, cause I have to go about 5 miles out of my way every day to pick her up and bring her here. I do that on my own time. I don't charge her for gas or nothing. But if I don't come, she don't get to come. I've taken it on my own. Thinking about other people.*

The family metaphor was used often to describe a positive connectedness that binds like blood kin. But as was mentioned earlier, several of the students had family experiences that were not positive. Sharon was able to reflect on and talk about the way that her isolated, unconnected life had negatively impacted her children and her

relationship to them. She felt that her experiences at MCU led her to be a better parent. She felt a sense of remorse and loss that her present ability to connect, interact and move in the public sphere came too late to benefit her little girl.

> *Our class reads to the Head Start kids. I really like that. Back when my little girl went to Head Start, they asked me to come to school with her sometimes. But I didn't want to fool with it. I was in my shell and didn't want to come out. But now that I've got involved in MCU, I've come out of my shell. I wish I had done things with my girl. I missed out on a lot. We both did. I've learned that families should show some attention to each other. A lot of them don't. I didn't, like I should have.*

Some students said they discovered delight and joy in the process of working in the community. The value and meaning for them was amplified by relating it to experiences in their family.

> *I really like to see old people have a good time. And them people at the nursing home, they really did have one. I guess because my grandparents lived with me, I know how it helps them to get out and have a good time. They were both in wheelchairs, and they couldn't get out. But we went to the old people. And they really enjoyed it.*

For students who were team leaders, there were opportunities to create situations that encouraged positive interaction. One woman explained that she saw working together in a crafts project as an important tool in bringing people together in the community.

To work with other people, you get a good feeling. At our crafts project, there's maybe 10 or 15 families, everybody just gets along, and we help one another with the project. Help each other cut the lace, make the ribbon or whatever. You always have to share materials and tools. You really learn from it. You learn to share.

Feelings about Self

I got big goals.

As their isolation ended, many students recognized changes in the way they thought about themselves. Some changes in thinking, like those that Sarah made, were at the very core of their identity, as important as life and death to them. Others were perhaps less compelling but still important to individuals. Students mentioned that they felt good about their accomplishments, their feelings of unworthiness decreased, they are more confident, happier, suffer less shame because of low skill levels, now have more purpose and plan in their lives, and are confident enough to try new things and take risks.

Interestingly, when students attribute these greater levels of hope, happiness and confidence to MCU, academic success is only part of the story. Mentioned more frequently are the work they've done to contribute to the good of the community, helping others, and being a part of a group.

I feel good about my accomplishments. Pride in their own accomplishments was evident in the conversations with students. Sometimes the feeling of accomplishment was related to progress in their studies, hard work that paid off for them.

We've learned a lot. We've come a long way. The books they started us in when we come here, we couldn't read it. And they worked with us and we did pretty good. We do extra good compared to the shape we's in when we first come. We couldn't read the books but we can now.

Some had their own internal goals outside of a GED or other recognized credential. Often these had to do with being able to help their children or set an example for their children.

Really what brought me back, what got me to really thinking about it was trying to help my kids with their homework. I couldn't because they were in the fifth, sixth, seventh and eighth grades. I didn't know how to do any of the problems they was doing. I didn't even know how to read some of the big words they was talking about in their books that they got stuck on...so I decided to just go back. [After I went back to school] I never did forget it. Even right now I can help my kids. My daughter, she went and got her GED about a month ago...and when it come to math, I helped her. And that youngin went and got [her GED]. She did! Tickled me to death!

Others mentioned rewards that were a complex intermingling of pride in their own academic success, and in "besting" others who may have made them feel badly in previous situations. The fact that Burl, the student who speaks next took the high moral ground, and still accomplished an important milestone was very satisfying to him.

Some of those [public school] teachers up there [who took the commercial Driver's License test]...they didn't study or anything and

they thought because they had a college education they'd just get the test, fill it out. They thought they could do that and pass the test. Well, they couldn't do that. But me and B.D. really studied. We passed the test...it made me feel like I had really accomplished something...and I want to tell you something else. This is important to me. Us six or seven from this class, they wasn't nary a one of us tried to cheat on the test. And them other people, they supposed to have an education and stuff, several of them tried to cheat. We caught one or two...we never even tried to cheat...see I'm high on that right there.

Several students talked about the pride they took in the work they did in the community. They felt their service projects were really something to be proud of.

We make things and take them to the hospitals and nursing homes, to old people in the community...it was a good feeling to see the look on some of these people's faces when you do something nice for them.

My feelings of unworthiness decreased. Several students shared Debbie's feelings of being "afraid, ashamed and embarrassed". Sometimes the students seemed not to know the origin of these feelings of unworthiness. Others pointed to events in their lives that they knew met with disapproval of others, or their own disapproval. Somehow the experience of MCU lessened those feelings. Sharon says:

I've been put down because of my weight. I've been put down because of how I look. I've been put down because I've had two children out of wedlock and had one marriage and didn't succeed in it. So I figured nothing I done mattered no way. But after I come here, I've learned there's all kinds of women that make the world. There's some women worser than me, some better than me. But we all got to try or we ain't going to do nothing. So that's my belief.

My confidence increased. Students recognized that helping others led directly to benefits of increased confidence and satisfaction for them.

> *I've got more confidence in myself. And I feel more confident about myself that I can help other people. It tickles me to death when somebody comes up to me and says, "Oh, look what I can read now! I feel like I've accomplished something. I really do."*

I am happier. Most every person interviewed indicated they felt happier and more positive since coming to school. There were many references to having fun at school, and how important it is to them.

> *We all have good times in our class. We all get along and have good times....Like birthdays and things come up, we always have each other a birthday party and we always exchange Christmas gifts and have a Christmas party. It's a lot of fun to go and I enjoy it...it has helped me in a lot of ways.*

Some mentioned that their families had noticed the difference.

> *My family says I've got a better attitude...they say I'm not half as gripey or nothing...I look forward every morning to coming here...I love coming. I don't miss a day. I don't take no time off or nothing. I'm here every day when the door's open.*

Three students interviewed mentioned serious, recurring problems with depression or "nerves." All of them talked about having an improved outlook since

coming to MCU. Interestingly, all of the three have taken on extra responsibilities as team leaders, and are busy not only with classes but with organizing activities, projects, and carrying on interactions with people in the organization and in the community in order to do the work. One woman said, *It makes me feel better when I get out and I've got somebody I know I can talk to of a day.*

I am no longer ashamed of low skills. Participating in MCU adult education and other programs had the effect of reducing shame about low skills for several students interviewed.

> *Lots of people that can't read and write is ashamed to let people know. I used to feel that way but I don't no more. Because it ain't going to help you none to keep it in. I've been embarrassed in a lot of places. I've been put down by different people. But I'm the type of feller to just take it and go on. I've been hurt a lot in life but I just keep going on. Looking ahead, you know. Hoping for success, you know.*

Though a lessening of shame about inadequate basic skills was a positive outcome noted by some students, a couple of students also spoke of a loss they knew they had suffered by that same lack of skills: a loss of options, a loss of job opportunity, a loss of a sense of belonging in the world.

> *Well, I've missed out on a lot in life. Probably if I could have had an education like I'm getting today, if I could have got that in my childhood growing up, I would probably have had a better job. I probably wouldn't have been in Fairmont County. I would have been up North. I probably would have a better job with retirement and all that stuff. I feel like I've lost a lot in life, because I never had an education. I probably could have been on the road somewhere,*

traveling, a salesman or something, and see I couldn't do that. I'm anxious to get all the learning I can get. I wish I could come every night. But it's impossible to do that. I'm pleased I got the opportunity to come one night a week.

I have purpose and plans. Almost every student mentioned some goals or plans he or she had as a result of their MCU experience. Sometimes the goals were simple and fairly immediate. But the way students spoke of them shows what a profound difference meeting even these simple goals will make.

I'm just looking forward to be able to read, pick up a book, be able to open it up and read, understand what it is saying and what it's all about. Take a notion to go somewhere, I won't get lost. I can read my way around. Go on vacation. There's a lot of things in life that you look forward to if you can read.

Rae Nell talked about how the classes gave structure to her days, and something to look forward to. She gained purpose and meaning through participating in MCU activities.

After I got my house cleaned up, I didn't have nothing else to do. I'd just sit for the rest of the day. After a while you just get lazy and you don't want to do nothing. But now I look forward every morning to getting up and getting ready to come up there. I have learned to look forward to that every day.

Sharon spoke of ambitious goals. She planned to carry them out, despite ridicule or resistance from family members. This woman recognized her present

ability to nurture her children, but she also wanted to be able to contribute to their material needs and wants. She wants her GED, but just as importantly, she wants a chance to do meaningful work, to be independent and self-sufficient.

> *Well, my husband would laugh at this, but I got big goals. I will get my license, I will have me a car, I will get me a job. If my youngins need something, I'll be able to say, here, honey, we'll go buy it. Now, I got to wait till I get the money, go out here and hire me a way to get it, and that ain't easy, but I love them and I feed them and I take care of them and that's the best I can do. For now. I would like to be a veterinarian's assistant. I don't know if I could ever be one but I'm going to try. I work well with animals. I have raised a lot of kittens, puppies, chickens, ducks, and anything else. I would really love to get in that work. I got a lot of home remedies I use on kittens and dogs when they are sick. Because animals are really just like us. They hurt and they live and die, just like we do. Remember that big oil spill come and they were getting them ducks and geese out of the water, all them little old animals, and they had to do special things for them to get that oil off them? That's what I want to do, something great.*

Several of the students talked about wanting to contribute back to MCU, and their goals included being a long-term volunteer, a teacher, even being the Director! Figure 1 on page 186 lists student goals.

to be a veterinarian assistant
to be a teacher
get my driver's license
be able to buy my children the things they need
my children learn to read and write well
my children have a better life
get my GED
get a job
be able to read the newspaper
be able to read the Bible
getting my literacy student ready to come to MCU classes
get the ball team started at the Teen Center
get parents more involved in the Teen Center
start college
get more writings published
get the MCU Director's job
be a teacher
work at MCU
better myself with a good education
keep my kid's medical card
not have to ask for financial help
be able to depend on myself
be able to read the road signs
be able to go places by myself
help women who are abused like I was
do more for older people
pick up a book and understand what it's saying
read cartoons
read a western

Figure 1: Goals Mentioned by MCU Students

I am confident enough to do new things, take risks. Sometimes the confidence led students to try out new things in class, like submitting their stories to Slices of Life, a student publication. The support and enthusiasm of teachers were important to students as they took the risk.

> *Like with Slices of Life. Me and Danny Jenkins, we got our stories in there. I didn't think it was nothing, just a little paragraph, but Pearl and June and everybody here, they all got a copy and they liked it. They thanked me on the story. They seemed to like it real good, so that made me want to write another one. I wrote four stories. But I ain't heared from one. It's women's rights in Appalachia. I ain't heared from it yet, but I probably will.*

Some students said that the confidence they gained from experiences at MCU spilled over to other parts of their lives and allowed them to take risks outside the organization. For Martha, the experience of going to the city council to ask for support for the Teen Center was such an empowering experience that she was able to use it to maintain confidence on her first job interview.

> *Really, MCU helped a lot. If I hadn't been going there, I wouldn't ave the confidence that I've got now. If I hadn't been going to that Learning Center, I couldn't have went for no job interview when they called me. They called me right at the Learning Center when I was in class. And if I hadn't been going down there, being with all them people and doing the things that I had already done, I couldn't have went. They ain't no way. When they called me to come on the job interview, the first thing that popped into my head was going over there to that council meeting. The whole time that lady was interviewing me, that's what I was thinking about. I knew that in my mind and in my heart, if I can go and do that, then surely I can go get this interview. And I went to that interview. I got there and I got the job. Just like*

we got what we set out to get at the council meeting. Sure did. It was the same thing.

This is the same woman who cooked with her back to the people, who couldn't find the confidence to even look at a group of strangers. Her sense of self underwent a profound transformation, and she credits the support of MCU and the experiences she was a part of there.

Finding One's Voice

Now if I got something to say, I say it.

Most of the women described their former selves in ways that resemble the stages of "silent" or "received knowers" discussed in *Women's Ways of Knowing: The Development of Self, Voice and Mind* (Belenky et al., 1986). The "silent" have nothing at all to say, while "received knowers" can speak, but not in their own voice. Yet nearly every woman spoke of finding her own voice, coming to have her own beliefs, opinions and ideas as part of her experience at MCU. Sharon said:

Now I'm not afraid to speak up. Now, if I got something to say, I say it, whether it be right or whether it be wrong, because it's my voice. But before, I was like in a shell and I hid from anything that would make me be in public...and I just didn't think I would be heard. But now I know different.

Students credit experiences at MCU with bringing the change. Rae Nell talked of how her teacher encouraged students to say how they feel in class discussions. The teacher listened, and was accepting of student opinions.

> *Our teacher learned us to say what we want to say, not to hold it in. Speak up. She'll just tell you if you got something to say just say it. Don't be ashamed of nothing you've got to say.*

Rae Nell continued speaking about finding her voice at school, and how it spilled over into personal relationships and home life.

> *Just like in my family. I will tell them my opinions more faster now than I would. Just like my house. My husband wanted to remodel my house and I wouldn't have it. And he said any other time I would have agreed to do it. But I wouldn't. I wanted it to stay the same.*

Finding a political voice is perhaps the most difficult of all, because it involves so much risk, so many unfamiliar situations to a person new to the world of politics and civic decision-making. Besides local efforts such as the trip to city council to request funds for the Teen Center, MCU students have also had the opportunity to attend rallies in the state capital of Frankfort and in Washington, to make their voices heard particularly in the area of family needs. As Sharon makes clear, the opportunity to participate in this rally and let her opinion be known was very important to her. She credits the group with giving her the courage and desire to speak out:

Well, we went to Frankfort [state capitol]. It was around election time. We got to hold signs up and listen to people and ask questions and stuff. For me, it was really good. I never been to Frankfort before....we made signs and we packed them. I made one, Feed the World. And we made another sign to not cut out the lunches for schools...not cut funds like coal vouchers and food vouchers. Because a lot of people in the world ain't got nothing to eat, can't keep warm, can't do nothing to help themselves. They need a helping hand. When I was there, something gets in you. You want to be heard and you want to speak out. And you want to go for the right. And you see all these other people doing the same thing you are. They don't want stuff to be cut out because it hurts the old people, like Medicaid and stuff. And everybody is speaking for it so naturally you speak too. You all join together.

This student credits some seemingly insignificant events at school as preparing the way for her to be able to understand and act on political questions. Here, Sharon talks about how the school responding to the power of the students encouraged her to believe in her own potential power and to see how important it is to join with others.

We all put in a little word for our times to be changed. And all of us agreed. Everybody in this school voted on that and we all come to agreement. Whatever they want to do here, we can agree on it or we can oppose it. That's our right. Because we're here too. If it wasn't for us, they would have no reason to have this place...I used to think that if you didn't have money, you didn't have power, so you wasn't heard no way. But really, if you'll get into a group, and everybody's believing on that subject, you can have great voice to move, and it will help and it will come. Your voice is great. You have power. You have a certain amount of power with yourself but all grouped together you have more power. And if it's for the right, then I believe in it.

Related issues raised by adult education efforts aimed at increasing citizen participation, and the body of literature describing social capital (discussed in Chapter Two) support the importance of a strong role of group or connectedness in finding

voice. This area of inquiry is rich with potential and will be discussed further in later chapters of this report.

Leadership

In our lives we could have a bigger say, if we all joined together.

Many, many experiences at MCU contributed to the development of the skills and confidence that build leadership capacity. Some of the building blocks are in the way classes are conducted, with freedom to chose books and areas of interest to study, lots of small group work, class discussion in a safe and accepting atmosphere, and active participation by students. In some classes, students had the extra benefit of being a part of decision-making about how the class is run. In many classes, students enjoyed field trips and other stimulating experiences that encouraged reflection and questioning. Another essential ingredient was the provision of opportunities for the students to be asked their opinions, and to be listened to, in situations as varied as a board meeting, an interview for a TV show, and a trip to Washington to talk with agency officials. Participating in a city council meeting and a rally at the state capital were empowering, life-changing events for some students.

The team leaders themselves saw that their work could be a bridge to even greater responsibilities, and provided a good experience base from which to grow. Doreen's words *You get welfare all the time, you've not got the experience for anything else* and Gloria's statement about gaining valuable job experience from doing

projects with children acknowledge that they need some experiences from which to learn in order to be ready to do other things.

Predictably, it was the students who had the greatest role in decision-making, responsibilities and accountability who seemed to be the leaders emerging most quickly. For example, it seemed to build more leadership to serve as a team leader, responsible for planning and accountability, than solely a participant in service projects. But it is also important to note that any level of participation was helpful for students in learning and caring about community work. And, the first step for most team leaders was generally as a participant in service projects led by more experienced people. In this way, participating and then leading offered a way to continue developing skills and responsibility.

Besides the experiences acknowledged above, students had important opportunities to grow in leadership and responsibility, step by step. One literacy student became a full participant in board decision-making. Rae Nell described how being on the MCU board had helped her learn to speak up, and develop her leadership skills.

> *Well, I've never sat in on a board meeting before, but now I am. I used to just sit back and wouldn't say a word. But now I will speak up for what I believe in, and that's really good. Everybody needs to speak up for what they believe in.*

Other students became recognized for their political analysis and their courage in speaking their minds. Here Sharon talked about laws that mandate AFDC

recipients to come to adult education classes. Sharon was herself originally a mandated student, but feels the government should take a different approach.

> *You got some voice and say. They don't need to overpower you all the way. You got to give people a sense of direction, not get them scared. The government don't have to keep them scared. If they keep people scared, then what is the point? It's just making them more powerful, them more richer, and us more poorer. In our lives, we could have a bigger say than they do really. If we all joined together. See, if them people wasn't rich, and didn't have a lot of money and power, then they would be like us. And if they was like us, then they would be scared. They got to know people's feelings too. It ain't all about having money and power. You got to feel for the people too.*

For several students, being able to leverage resources for their projects was tremendously empowering. Perhaps this is related to their life experiences of never having enough, of always doing without, of feeling powerless to get things for their children and families that they needed. But whatever the source of the power-the request of city council for help for the Teen Center, Mary Ann and Doreen's appearance in front of the school board to ask for books for their tutoring classes, or Gloria's request for apples and toys for children involved in her service projects-it made strong impressions on each of the students involved.

For many of the students interviewed, all these experiences clearly resulted in greater involvement in the community, even outside MCU activities. Rae Nell said:

> *Used to I would just sit. Now I get out a lot more than I used to. Before I used to wouldn't volunteer for nothing. But now I will. When you come up here, you learn to do that....I make phone calls. If they*

ask me to cook for something, I will. I read the newspaper. I vote. I volunteer at church.

Factors Leading to Success at MCU

What do students say is important to their success at MCU? Many factors are acknowledged. Four primary factors emerge: having a strong relationship with the teacher; having fun in classes and variety of all the program work; having a class structure that helps academic progress and at the same time permits building strong ties to others; and having the opportunity to contribute to the class, the organization, and the community, and to take on responsibility and be recognized.

Strong Relationship with the Teacher

If you got someone on your side, the world ain't so big after all.

According to every student interviewed, the most important factor in their success was their teacher. Nothing else mattered as much; no other factor was as vital. Students expressed an unqualified appreciation of their teacher's role in their success.

Students commented on the personalities, values, and character of their teachers as often as their competence or teaching ability. It mattered a lot to students that their teachers genuinely liked them as whole people, and saw their potential.

When I met June and got acquainted with her, I found out she will give you attention. When she thinks you got something in you, she'll bring it out of you, no matter what. And she will not hurt you. And she'll help you in every way she can. And that's really what's got me to where I am now.

"Heart" was a frequently-used metaphor when talking about teachers. *She really puts her heart in it*, one student said of his teacher. Another student identified her teachers as the heart of the organization, *...talking to Pearl and Arthur is what helped me. Sure did. Them two right there, they are the heart of MCU.*

It was important to students that their teachers believed in them. It enabled them to believe in themselves.

A little push from the people down there helped. At the Center they encouraged me. They told me I could do anything I wanted to do if I would just try. It worked. Sure did.

It was important to students that their teachers were available and accessible to them. Students' needs were not only for school work, but for a friend and a guide, a trusted advisor.

At MCU, they will help you any way they can. If you've got a problem, you can talk to one of the teachers or one of the board members about it or anybody. They will help you in any way they can.

There is a strong theme of "teacher is a lot like me" running through student comments. Sometimes it is direct and speaks clearly to the student's cultural identity: *Lydia has lived around here all her life in these hillbilly towns. These hillbillies, that's me.*

Sometimes it was more subtle, expressed by several students in their reference to a teacher as a friend.

> *She's willing to go out of the classroom with us, share a little time with us, show us that she's our friend, not just our teacher.*

Students describe their teachers as being the opposite of an authoritarian or disciplinarian. *She ain't no drill sergeant, trying to just drill us down in the ground. We. communicate.* It was clearly very important that students feel they have a say in their assignments and in the classroom. They granted their teacher authority, but wanted their own agency to be acknowledged too.

> *Like I say, them women are nice to us. How can I say this right now? They'll say, if youins want to come, we're going to be here. If you come, we'll be here for you. And we come. They don't say, now you got to come. They say, well, we're going to be here, if you want to come, come on. We're not forced to come. We come on our own. And they are so nice to us...they take time out for us. And they show us concern and everything...she don't put no pressure on you. Lots of teachers say, "Now you got to do this here," and that's it. Lydia says, "Well let's try to do this." She don't say, "You've got to do this."*

Students also appreciate in their teachers the ability to lighten a situation, to relax the class with humor, and to sometimes approach academic content in a less-than-serious manner.

> *My teacher always helped a lot by saying little old dumb things or something to pep you up or something like that. You know I have to give him the most credit.*

One student summed up her feelings about her teacher, and the value of good teachers to adult education students.

> *To mothers like me with children and not much money, the world can be scary. But if you got someone on your side, like this Fairmont County Learning Center, or June, somebody you believe in, just somebody that can help you out, the world ain't so big after all. And that's a fact.*

Fun in classes and variety of program work

You got to throw a lot of things in to make a good soup.

Students enjoyed the variety of things going on at MCU. They liked getting to do different activities. They commented that variety is a real motivator. *It's something a little bit different just about every class. It's interesting and it makes you want to get deeper in it.*

Variety and fun were important, both in classes and in other activities at MCU. Students talked about how they like classes to be a mixture of things. They enjoy discussion, and small group work, and games. Everything goes in the mix.

> *I think you ought to do [classes] like we do now, that's my opinion. Not a great deal of one thing, but a little bit of everything. Like making soup, you got to throw a lot of things in to make a good soup.*

Students say that the inclusion of games helps them achieve academic success. They like the change of varying activities. Students say they thrive in the relaxed, informal atmosphere that enjoyable activities and good humor promote. This man talked about how the games his teacher developed helped him learn:

> *Like with them little word games. She makes a game of it. They'd be like six or seven of us around the table and she'll hold up them words and you'll try to get the most of them. Lydia, she's slick now, buddy. She makes it more interesting, like a game. She don't pressure you neither.*

Students acknowledge that they have done things that are totally outside the rest of their life experiences as a part of their MCU program. Many students relished those opportunities. James talked about how much he enjoyed it:

> *We met people, we got acquainted, we met people we would have never met in a lifetime if it hadn't been in this school. One time they was people visiting here from other countries. So we all got together, went down there to meet one another. We had a dance. I believe they charged us a dime, yeah ten*

cents, to get in. We had a ball. We danced with anybody that would dance with us.

Doing things that are fun is a tremendously motivating experience for MCU students. They credit fun with keeping them in school and with making them successful. Almost every student spoke extensively about fun when describing his or her experience at MCU. Does a life made hard by poverty lead a student to value an element of fun more in her adult basic education program? Though no student said that directly, the description "fun" was noticeably absent when most students talked about the rest of their lives.

Though not asked directly to do so, every one of the eleven students discussed many MCU activities they found to be "fun" or "enjoyable." These were some of the most important reasons, students said, that they loved coming to school, kept coming back, and were successful. Figure 2 on p. 195 is a list of "fun" aspects of the students' experiences.

steak dinner at Bonanza
trip to Village Stones
trip to Kern's bakery
playing horseshoes at the park
birthday party for classmates
shopping at Walmart to get supplies for projects
being filmed for TV
being interviewed for articles
reading Vernie Mae Sloan books
playing word games to win prizes
going to an MCU dance
meeting people from other countries
cooking together for a project
working in a group
laughing and joking with students I tutor
our Thanksgiving dinner here at school
going to Dollywood
going to Bear Creek Mission
our Christmas party for kids
our Halloween party for the nursing home residents
working with children
having class discussions
going to city hall to ask for money for the Teen Center
joking with my teacher
talking to other people in class
seeing people in the community work on a craft project I put together
seeing community people laugh and have fun even when the craft doesn't work out
hearing a shut-in that we visited call a radio talk show and brag on us
our creative writing in class when we all work on a story together
having new experiences
meeting people in Washington
having help from others in the class when I need it
having coffee together
getting my stories published in Slices of Life
going to the rally in Frankfort
seeing how my literacy student saved all her papers, practiced all her words
being with the kids at the Teen Center
doing the Mother's Day craft project and delivering it to people in the community
seeing someone I've tutored learn to read

Figure 2: MCU activities students described as "fun" or "enjoyable"

Students put much of their community service work, tutoring, and Teen Center work into the category of "fun." But students just as often spoke of how the community work helped their academic progress, an idea discussed in more detail in the next section.

Structure that Promotes Academic Success and Permits Building Strong Ties to Others

It ain't all about the books.

When talking about factors that led to their success in the program, students credit their class along with their teachers. They acknowledge the importance of the support of other students. They describe the way the class is conducted as key. They point out that working in groups is vital to them. Several mention respect, fairness and equal treatment among class members. Students say that there are different paths to knowledge, and they have been allowed to learn in their own way. Several mention concrete-type learning activities, and almost every one points to field trips, projects and extra activities as strengthening their learning.

Support for each other. The family metaphor came up again and again. *Our class is just like a family together. If one's absent, seems like we are lost.* Many students spoke of friendships and support they got from their classmates. They talked about how important is it to them to care about the other students at MCU, and to know that they have the concern of others. Two students identified how this caring part of themselves was encouraged by MCU staff, and used in ways that not only

built community within the class, but also helped them build ties that broke their isolation.

While some students at first were unable to reach out to others in friendship on their own, they could offer help when put in a nurturing role. It was as if they couldn't ask for help in connecting for themselves, but in giving help to someone else, they received it back. It took a sensitive staff person to "give permission" to them to assume the role of helper.

> *Arthur encouraged me to go sit with a new student that come in. Help them. Go talk with them and get acquainted with them. And I'd do that you know. He pushed me real hard to do that because I wouldn't talk to nobody for a long time. I'd sit by myself and wouldn't talk.*

Working in groups. Just as one-on-one conversations with classmates helped students connect, working in groups helped bring many into the mainstream of organizational life. All students interviewed acknowledged the importance of working in groups not only to help them learn, but also to connect them to others. This GED student talked about how essential the groups were for her in building relationships:

> *At the beginning I'd sit alone by myself for weeks. I'd just feel out of place. But as things started getting better for me and we started groups off, that was good. I really enjoyed that...and after I realized I wasn't alone, there was a lot more there that felt the same way, I said well shoot, I may as well start to get to know people better. I started feeling really at ease. I really enjoyed it. I looked forward to going there. I mean every morning I looked forward to going to MCU.*

Working in groups was perhaps the most important structural feature of the classes, because it was through group work (and class discussion) that many of the positive attributes of the class came to be.

Students commented over and over about how well they learned through group interaction. They talked about it as a kind of "painless" learning that happened in the midst of conversation, positive interaction, and fun.

A literacy student talks about the importance of the group to his learning:

> *We work in groups. When we work together, seems like if one can't come up with it, the other can and we all work together. We gather around one table like this. Most of us is slow. We all try to help one another and it makes it easier for everybody. Lydia says that's fine with her. We have a good time and you learn in the process.*

A student in another class had observed how her teacher used groups to push forward students' learning, and especially to help assure that nobody got left behind.

> *She'll divide us off into groups. Like if she thinks maybe two or three don't really know what's going on, she'll put one in there that does. And that way, we can help them, she can help them, and we're all helping one another.*

Still another student talked about how groups work in her GED class:

> *Working in groups, it helps. If I can't solve the problem, there is somebody in my group that can. And we all sit there and figure it out. All of us over here we are all a group. If one of us gets stuck on*

something, there are eight or nine of us in the group, either one will help you. We all work right together.

All students treated equally and respectfully. For several of the students interviewed, the assurance that all are treated equally was a bottom-line value. *We all get the same share*, a literacy student said in explaining one of the reasons he likes his class.

Another student referred to hurtful experiences in her early schooling, that left a mark and made her appreciate and thrive under different, more equitable conditions.

If anybody's got a question in there, they raise their hand and it gets answered. Nobody goes unheard. And I think that's a big plus. Because when I went to school, we had like thirty kids in a class, and most time a lot of them was snobby kids, fancier, and the teacher had his picks. And there you was, you were ashamed to ask anything because you didn't want them to know you didn't know it. And that was my problem. I stayed in a shell when I was in school. When it came to working, what I know, I did. What I didn't know, I didn't ask. But I do now.

When asked for her advice to adult education teachers, one student made a powerful case for respect, mutuality and a realization that education is not the same as schooling. She believes that an educational experience is holistic, that learning is not confined to narrow academic skills, and is best done in an atmosphere of acceptance and consent.

It ain't all about the books. You got to communicate and have an understanding or you'll not get nowhere with them. People don't like to be pushed around and they don't like to be drilled. You cannot overpower people. People are not like machines. You can stop a machine, you can start a machine. But you can't do people that way. They have their own mind, voice, heart, soul. They are individuals. So you work with them. You become less of a threat to them and they get more done.

Different ways to learn. An often-repeated statement at MCU is "there are different ways to learn." Many students were not successful in their early schooling experiences, and several talked about their difficulty in learning from only "book work." Many referred to needing real objects to use in their lessons. Martha said that for the first time, she was successful at math because her teacher encouraged her to help herself by using real items.

When it come to math, my teacher would always say, if you ain't got enough fingers or toes to count on, get you some clothespins or match sticks or something, or get you a pencil and piece of paper and make you some marks.

One woman recognized that she needed more than one sensory path to learn.

I'm the type of person if I can't get right in there with my hands and head working together, I can't do it.

Another woman acknowledged the usefulness of building on shared experiences, and integrating the extra activities back into the class.

It really helps to go on field trips. We come back and write what we learn on our trips. We write a story and read it to the class...just like when we went to Bear Creek on a trip last week, we come back and wrote a story on what we had learned on it.

Role of Service Projects and Other Activities

You don't have to set with a book in front of you to learn something.

Students were nearly unanimous in their judgement that service projects, field trips, and working at the Teen Center or as a tutor all contributed positively to their learning. They vigorously rejected the idea that those activities got in the way of learning to read or working toward their GED.

Only one student said she "may have spent too much time" away from her studies when she first worked to get the Teen Center opened. But she went on to explain:

There is only so much studying that you an do. I mean if you sit down and just concentrate on doing that studying, I mean it's going to get boring and you are going to lose interest. You need to have something else to go to for a while and then come back to the studies. I know because I tried that for a while. Just focus on studying. I just got tired of it.

Another student echoed the sentiment that working only in her books was not rewarding enough to cause her to stay with the adult education program. But when some interesting work through service projects in the community was offered to her, her outlook changed.

I believe they come out a whole lot smarter, when they do something like the projects, than just sitting with your nose in a book all the time. Because you are going to get burned out on it. I did. I got burned out on it. You just get so tired of it, you don't care whether you learn or not. When the Children First Foundation projects come up, then you look forward to going. Every day there was something different that you knowed you was going to get into. You would be more willing to go and do it. But when it come down to just sitting there with a book, you just don't want to do it, or I didn't.

Martha pointed out that her work in the Teen Center included paperwork which reinforced reading and writing skills. She talked about how much more meaningful working in crafts or with service projects was to her, than working from books. From that work she had a sense of accomplishment, something she could see. Often her experience with "book work" alone was frustrating and confusing. What she learned was soon forgotten. Martha felt that the activities provided a "way in" to book learning, as well as motivation, meaning and fun.

You don't have to set with a book in front of you to try to learn something. When it comes to the crafts and things, that was hands-on learning experience. Just like with the Teen Center, which was lot of paperwork too. But then there was a lot of experience working with your hands and your mind together. I'd take learning hand and mind together, than mind and book, anytime. I would. If you spend two hours making a craft, you aren't gong to forget. And you are going to be wanting to do that more. You see that you've really accomplished something instead of just sitting there in front of a book, trying to figure out the meaning of this, how do you go about even doing it. It's confusing to me, is what it is. It has more meaning to you when you can do something hand and mind together with somebody else, than just sit there in front of a book.

The activities outside the classroom provided opportunities to develop skills and knowledge beyond basic academic skills. This student talked about the value of learning to plan and organize work, as she had learned through her activities as a team leader.

> *Doing these projects has helped. We sit down, we plan it. How it will come about. One does this, one does that. I think that's a lot of experience.*

Another student said working as a team leader and in the Teen Center had helped her see how to undertake important work, and not be afraid of tasks that seemed big and scary. She felt it made a lasting difference in the way she approaches the challenges of her life.

> *Working on the projects helped me. Yeah, it did. It showed me how to set my mind to something that I want, something that had to be done. Just go at it. It not just book learning. It helps you in your life every day. If you just set you mind to it.*

The Opportunity to Contribute to the Class, the Organization, and the Community; and to Take on Responsibility and be Recognized

I always helped them and that would help me.

Students need opportunities to grow into leadership and responsibility. The program at MCU provided those opportunities for the students interviewed. Sometimes the chance to contribute came in a class.

Other people would come in, and my teacher would say, "Get Martha to help you." We'd sit there and figure and figure and figure and if we couldn't get it we'd go to the teacher. And he'd always help us. But we'd usually sit there and figure it out until we got it. And I always helped them and that would help me.

Other times the opportunity came because MCU consciously created leadership development experiences in the organization, including serving on the board. The students who had been board members were very aware of board membership as a learning experience. None of them had a similar opportunity in any other part of their lives, and it made a lasting impression. Rae Nell said:

I've learned more about the school and what goes on and how they spend their money. 'Cause they have to write you out a budget report for every board meeting every month. I've learned about that.

Many of the students interviewed said working for the good of others and the community had increased their feeling of responsibility toward themselves and progress toward their own goals.

I think it has made a difference in my way of looking at things. Now that I'm trying to help other people learn how to read and write, it kindly gives me more inspiration to learn more myself, and learn more about the ways I can help. You learn as well as you teach. While you are learning somebody else something, you are also learning yourself.

Listening to the stories of the most involved students, a kind of progression emerges in their leadership development. Students often don't immediately see how they can contribute to their class, the organization, the community. But as they begin to have positive experiences, they seek more involvement and want to have more experiences. Mary Ann talks about how she feels when she is able to help her reading students learn new skills. The reward makes her want more opportunities to work in the community:

> *I can't express the feeling. You talk to other people, and you tell them about it, and they try it out. It's like food, you want more and more and more of it.*

As they have more opportunities, students begin to accept more responsibility. *I was learning to do stuff. How to set meetings up. How to be responsible for other people besides myself. I got to talk to people and ask for things we needed,* Debbie said. Students depend on others to help them have good experiences, and to help them do well the tasks they accept. Other students and particularly teachers and administrators stay alert for the next most challenging steps that students might undertake.

With the support of others they trust, adult education students are less afraid to take risks. In telling her story, Sharon talked about reaching the milestone of believing in herself enough to risk the censure of others in order to be true to herself.

Now I'm not afraid to speak up. Now, if I got something to say, I say it, whether it be right or whether it be wrong, because it's my voice.

As adult education students learn by doing, get support from others, take risks and grow, other opportunities open up to them, some of which hone critical thinking and problem solving skills. As we heard earlier from Sarah, her experience on the Board helped her develop as a leader and as a critical thinker:

It's helped me to understand bigger problems. I've learned a lot about the poverty in Fairmont County and just how bad it is. Through the board I've been able to assess different programs and listen to people's opinions of these programs and meet the people who participate in these programs.

In fact, Sarah's story in itself is a study in having affirmative experiences in a community-based adult basic education program, seeking out responsibilities as she grew, contributing to the community, and developing her leadership capabilities. Her experience is shared by many other students at MCU.

Barriers and Deterrents to Success at MCU

What do students say are barriers and deterrents to their success in this kind of adult education program? Students mentioned three things that sometimes stood in their way: work schedules; occasional instances of not being treated respectfully; and fear of failure or feeling they had been inadequate to the task. I do not think of these

as themes, since so few students had anything negative to say about their experience at MCU. Instead I regard these as a listing of obstacles mentioned by one or more students.

Work schedules are a problem. One of two students interviewed who was employed said that work schedules were a problem, and prevented him from participating in community service projects as much as he would like.

> *I haul coal. I drive a tractor and trailer. I put in a lot of time too. At MCU they have a dinner or go on a trip or go do something for somebody, a lot of things I miss because of how I work. I work right at the foot of Bird Mountain in Raymer County. It's an hour and a half drive from here.*

Being treated respectfully. Some events that caused students distress seemed unavoidable, such as the loss of funding for the ALM project, or the lack of enough money to do all the service projects that Team Leaders wanted to do. But perhaps the most distressing events experienced by students engaged in community work was the occasional instances of feeling that they were not being treated respectfully, as with the telephone incident concerning ALM tutors. But even those occasions were pretty much taken in stride, and balanced against the many good experiences. One student said:

> I *have a lot of disagreements with MCU. But then again I also uphold them and I value what they do, because they do good, not just adult education, but different things for the family and community. Everyone benefits.*

Fear of failure or feeling inadequate to the task. "There's too much paperwork!" was a complaint often voiced by ALM tutors, Teen Center participants, and particularly Team Leaders. It seemed that just about all students, regardless of their literacy skills, were pained and overwhelmed by the paperwork. Sometimes a student mentioned that some step they took toward leadership did not turn out positively. One GED student, who was deeply involved and felt very successful in her Teen Center and service project work, did not feel good about her term as an MCU board member. It is interesting to note that just as in her classroom and project work, this woman felt supported by other students, but ultimately still frustrated, as a board member.

> *They was a lot of board member stuff that I didn't understand. Now Debbie, she was good on it. She was. She knew what they were talking about. She could agree with them or she could disagree with them. But now a lot of the stuff, I didn't really understand what it was they was talking about. Debbie, she always rode with me, and we always went to the board meetings together, and we'd come back together. And we'd always have our papers with us when we left, and we'd always go over them before we left, a day or two before we had to go be there, and we'd go over them and look at them. Debbie helped me understand a lot of that board member stuff. Because now they was a lot of it, I couldn't even detect what they was talking about.*

Some team leaders continued to feel unsure and fearful about their responsibilities. Sometimes a student would talk about feeling unprepared or untrained for the work, or would express frustration and talk about a lack of support

from the organization. The Team Leader evaluation, discussed earlier, brings up this issue.

It seems that the more hours per week that students spent at MCU, the more successful and supported they tended to feel regarding service projects. The OWEPs, for instance, who spent 80 hours a month at MCU, might speak of an occasional project flop, but overall they were generally confident that the next one would be better. Perhaps the extended time spent gave them informal training and advice through better access to the staff and other team leaders. Maybe it helped their confidence to see that all team leaders had ups and downs with the work.

It is difficult to say more about the students' identification of barriers to their education at MCU. The instances of identification are too few and the comments too sketchy to provide a credible basis for analysis.

Summary

The students interviewed had overwhelmingly positive experiences in the community-based program at MCU. They reported that participating in community-based adult education at MCU helped with skills in their everyday lives; changed the way they relate to others; changed the way they think about themselves and their lives; helped them find their voices; and developed their leadership capacity.

Students easily described the factors that accounted for their success at MCU. They reported that having a strong relationship with the teacher; having fun in classes

and in the variety of the program work; having a class structure that helps academic progress and at the same time permits building strong ties to others; and having the opportunity to contribute to the class, the organization, and the community, and to take on responsibility and be recognized were all important to their success.

Students had a much harder time identifying barriers or deterrents to their success in the community-based education program. When assured that the study really needed to include these factors in order to be valid, three kinds of barriers were offered by a small number of students. These included the difficulty of juggling work schedules and participating in community projects; occasional instances of not being treated respectfully at MCU; and fear of failure or feeling they had been inadequate to the task of carrying out community responsibilities or decision-making tasks within MCU.

The fact that so few negatives are reported raises concern about whether students were telling their whole stories. It is also worth noting that I interviewed current students who were most involved in the variety of MCU community work, plus two former students who were also highly involved while they were at MCU. The method of choosing students to be interviewed-mainly identification by the Participatory Research Group of those who had been most active in the community-based adult education activities we had chosen to study-likely led to us to the most involved, most satisfied students. So in this study we do not hear from students who dropped out because of dissatisfaction with the program, were uninterested or unwilling to become active in community work, or had bad experiences at MCU.

I believe that for the most part, the students interviewed really did feel successful and very positive about their program, partly because of how "success" is understood. To the students I talked with, success is only partly associated with gaining academic skills. The students are not bound to concepts of academic success that include constraints of test scores or speed of obtaining credentials (although many do have GED as a stated goal).

Success mostly means to them differences in their everyday lives, being able to do things they need to do better, feeling more confident and more satisfied with themselves, coming out of isolation and relating to others in positive ways, enjoying new experiences, having fun, accepting responsibilities, and being a leader.

The next chapter includes teachers' stories and also reports on teacher interview results. These results both support and differ from students' interviews, sometimes in surprising ways.

CHAPTER SEVEN

IMPACTS ON TEACHERS

In this chapter, I report the results of interviews with MCU adult education teachers. These results tell us how the teachers view impacts of a community-based approach to adult basic education on themselves and on their students. These interview results also show the ways in which teachers' perspectives differ from students' perspective.

I interviewed six MCU teachers as a part of the 1995 Participatory Research Group interview and then later in individual interviews. Four of the six were a regular part of the Participatory Research Group. The other two were occasional participants in the research group as their responsibilities changed from primarily adult basic education to primarily health outreach and education.

This chapter is divided into four sections. The first section presents two teacher's stories about their own lives and educational experiences, how they see MCU's work, and how they view the teaching and learning process. The second, third and fourth section present the results of teacher interviews. The second section is an analysis of how teachers see the impacts of a community-based approach to adult education, on students and on themselves. The third section is an analysis of the

factors teacher say lead to success at MCU. The fourth is an analysis of the barriers to success that teachers say are present at MCU.

As with the student interviews, I pulled out large portions of some of the teacher stories that seemed representative of most of the teacher interviews. These stories are presented here, with only minor editing for clarity. The stories give us a feel for how teachers' own educational experiences and other life experiences are interwoven with their beliefs about teaching and learning. Presenting these two teachers' stories as a whole make it possible to better understand the totality of influences on a teacher as she approaches her work.

The first teacher who tells her story is Jessie, a white woman who at the time of her interview was 48 years old. Jessie tells of difficult childhood schooling experiences and reports that many times "books were hard for me." She began to have more positive experiences as she grew, but her education was interrupted by marriage. Later, as an adult, Jessie experienced quick success upon entering MCU and earned her GED in a few short months. She began teaching MCU classes right away.

Jessie's Story

Well, on my first day of school I was scared, because I had my step-grandpaw for a teacher and he was sort of mean. I didn't like him very much. But I made it through the first grade and the next year I got a little better teacher and I learned a little bit from her. I had about five or six different teachers when I was in grade school. We went to a one-room school. And it's different from a big school. You're waiting for your class and you're setting there and you have to be real quiet while the

others are up in front, having their class. You hear all the lessons. I think you learn more through them one-room school houses than just when one grade goes through. I wasn't too interested in the books. Seem like they were hard for me. But then when I got up about the seventh or eighth grade, well then I started learning the things I didn't learn when I was little. I was really scared and I didn't learn too good. When I was in, I think it was the sixth grade, we got a teacher, he was a real good teacher. His name was Buford Collins. And then three or four years later, he got kicked out of school, he turned into a drunk. But his first year of teaching, he taught us, he was real good. He was one of the best teachers I ever had. He was real kind to us. We were real poor, but he didn't make us feel like we were. He made us feel like we could do anything we set our heads to do. That's one thing I've told my students they can be anything they want to be, but they have to want to be it. So after that year, I learned fast, and I had a lot of teachers, I even had my step-grandpaw again for three months, but I done real good in that class too. And then in high school, I went a year and a half. I was in tenth grade, and then I quit. I got married. And then my problems began.

I had three children before I was eighteen. And when my husband, he was twenty-two years old, and he was in a car wreck and he got crippled. It's been hard. About the only way we had of living then, cause there wasn't hardly no jobs, was to take and sign up on welfare. And that's what I done, signed up on welfare. You can't live on welfare alone. So I done work for neighbors whenever I'd get a chance to, and took care of my kids and took care of Lloyd.

When he first was in the car wreck, he couldn't move his legs or anything. I exercised them for three times a day, for an hour each time. And finally he got where he could just barely move them about like that. I just kept exercising them, and he finally got to where he could move them. He got to where he could move one of them pretty good. The other one he kept trying and trying to make it move, and then about six months later it got to where it would move like the other one. He started improving with it.

Then about 10 years later I had another kid, it was a girl. And then another boy. I've got 5 kids in all. I done a lot of different kinds of work. I dug ditches for pay. I canned food for people, mostly for Lloyd's aunt. I worked tobacco. I hoed it and suckered and stripped it and I loaded it. I got $15 dollars a day for that, more for loading it.

They come up with this JOBS program...I went down there, I went to the first meeting, they talked about the volunteers, and everybody would have to come, but right now they wanted the people that would volunteer to go. So I volunteered and then they called everybody that had been with me but they hadn't never called me so I would go down there and I'd get onto my worker, and I'd say, now I want to go. So he said ok, he filled me out a paper. He said you take this within the next ten days and I said I'm not waiting, I'm going right now. So I took it down there and I signed up and Pearl was my teacher. I went in and I signed up in her class.

When I started at MCU, Janice would come to our class about once a week. She would come to our class, and she had us working on the teen center, and I loved it. It would give me a chance to learn different things and to be with different people. I think it's good. I think it's good to do other things besides book studying, because you get bored.

I was ready to take my GED just about when I first went in, I just had to study a little bit. But every time they'd schedule me to take the test, we'd get rained out or it'd come a big snow storm, either a flood or a snow storm every time. Finally I got to take it in April. I heared from it the last of May. I passed it and I started teaching.

When I first started Big Creek, I don't think none of the girls over there really got out, they just set right at home, and everything, then after they started coming to GED class, seem like they started talking to each other. Seemed like the first month they didn't hardly say anything. Then when I started each month, giving them a little birthday party, the ones that had it, then everybody would bring a cake or something, and we started having little birthday parties, and then everybody just started talking, I can't shut them up now!

I feel like my students get a lot out of working on [community service] projects. I feel that it don't matter what kind of education you have, if you can't get along with other people and work with other people, you will never get a job. It is more important to learn to get along with other people than to bring your grades up real fast. And I think the projects help people get along with each other. When I started over there at Big Creek, nobody wouldn't even talk to each other hardly. A lot of them couldn't get along with each other. They just couldn't get along with each other. One, she's real religious, seems like she thought that she's better than everybody else. She thought she was going to heaven and the rest of us wasn't. But she come a long way. She's even getting to be pretty likable. She has come out of it a lot.

So many of my class get their GEDs. And I give them a TABE every month. As long as they are making progress, I don't worry about spending time on projects. We do lots of discussion about things, not as much book studying. That way it's more interesting and they remember more. Like when we do math problems, everybody will be right there at the table. Somebody would ask, well how do you do this. Everybody there at the table hears it, and they all talk about it. And sometimes they try to figure it out on their own without any help from me. They all discuss and by the time the problem gets worked, everybody knows how.

Sometimes we have projects at Big Rock and before I ever write out the 54A to get the money, I'll make them figure out how much stuff we need for each person and how much it would cost for each person and how much the whole project will cost. And sometimes we talk about where the things we're using were made at. Really you can learn a lot of life skills.

But sometimes things gets in our way of doing more with projects and trips. Sometimes it's transportation. Sometimes it's not having enough time to sort of prepare things and think it out. Thinking it out is important. And another thing is

other people wants to talk, sometimes there's jealousy when you say, well, we've done this, and we're doing that, and this other class, their teacher maybe don't do as much with them. Jealousy gets in the way and they talk and it makes it harder for you. I've had that problem. They get jealous. The students even get jealous. Then they start putting you down and then the other teacher will start putting you down. But I try not to let it bother me.

I've had some students, a couple of men, they come to class and they want to take their test and just learn what they had to learn. They would sometimes go to the library where it was quiet and I would talk to them before they would go and show them what they needed to study. And they got their GED, did really good on it. I haven't had a problem. If someone comes in and says they just want to study, not do projects, I see to it that they get to just study. But usually after an hour or so, they are up joining us. Too much fun to just sit there!

Jessie's experience as a student at MCU gave her a basis on which to make her own evaluation of the role of community-based activities in adult education. Her own life experiences and those she observes in her students seem to reinforce the analysis and interpretation of student interviews presented in Chapter 5.

Lydia's story has much in common with Jessie's. Lydia is a white woman, also 48 years old at the time of the interview. Like Jessie, she also reports learning difficulties, but they seem much more pronounced and intertwined with other early experiences at school. Lydia was also a student at MCU, but has not received her GED. She no longer attends classes herself, but teaches a literacy class at MCU. Her unique and effective way of relating to community people suggested that she would be very successful in recruitment and education outreach efforts. She has proven her value to MCU over and over again, and is now employed full time there in health outreach and education.

Lydia's Story

I went to a one-room school over on Fall River. I ended up with an alcoholic teacher. And my teacher, she would have bad days and she'd say, you all go outside and have recess. So we'd go outside and have recess. When she got outside, she'd say, you all go inside and have chapel. So that's what I had for like three years, recess and chapel. I was the one that was chosen to go draw the water and pack the water into the school. I had to walk to school about two miles each morning. And I remember my dad wouldn't let us wear pants then because he was kindly religious and he didn't believe in women wearing pants, until I was way up in my teens. And anyway, we'd walk to school and we had this creek that you'd walk down, mostly in the road [and it] would freeze into ice. We'd get on that and I'd slide down and I'd fall through and I'd walk to school and I'd be stiff as a poker.

The school house burned down whenever I was in fourth grade. Then they sent us from Fall River to Big Rock to a bigger school. I had a teacher and she was very, very mean and hateful. And the second day I was there a little boy didn't get his lesson. And she rubbed soap in his mouth. And she tore his mouth. Well I didn't know anything. I couldn't read, I couldn't do anything in school. Cause all I had was recess and chapel. But anyway, I was so scared and so nervous that every time I'd go to school, I'd go to the front door and I didn't want to go no further in. So I just knowed I couldn't get my lessons because I didn't know how. And I knowed I'd get the same thing as him. So two days after she did that, the police came and arrested her and she never did come back any more.

So we ended up with a new teacher and it was a man teacher. Well, I was scared of a man. But he would make me sit in at recess and I begin to learn. And it was real hard because I had to struggle. And a lot of times Dad couldn't afford to buy paper and we had to use brown paper bags to get my lessons on. And people would make fun of you, the children in school. Mom would make our clothes. I'd also be made fun of because of what I wore because she'd make them out of flour sacks and feed sacks. Most time I'd just get hand-me-downs from the older ones.

They was ten of us in all. I was the third one. I loved to get out and I would milk the cows and feed the hogs and the pigs and all this stuff and I'd milk two cows every morning before going to school. And I'd have to wear these galoshes and I'd run to the branch and wash them off and pull them off before getting on the school bus but even though you wash you kindly smell, I know I probably did.

I can look back now and I can see all those things, but I enjoyed doing it. That's how we got our meals. We raised all our food. Maybe once a month Dad would buy hot dogs and we'd have a big celebration. We hardly ever come to town. So you could say I was one of these kids that lived up in a holler and was kindly isolated. So I graduated from the eighth grade and went into high school.

First year into high school I had another alcoholic teacher and this guy sitting behind me was talking to me and the teacher came in. It was in math class. He took

the math book, and hit me on the head. And I seen stars. So I get up and I threw my book right at him and it hit him right in the face and knocked his glasses off. So he grabbed me by the arm and took me to the principal's office. I went into the principal's office. He said go see the principal. So what I done, I went and seen the principal, I looked at him in the door, and turned around and come back. He said, did you see the principal. I said yes. He said, what did he say. I said, I don't know, you didn't tell me to talk to him. So he grabbed me by the arm then and dragged me in there. He said, did she come to see you? He said, yes, she came to the door. So after that I quit school. At that time I was 15, [and in the] ninth grade. I quit then and I left. I never did go back to get a GED or anything.

I left home and started working in Indiana. From there to Ohio. And then I came back. And then I got married. And then I started working at Ben Franklin. And I've been working ever since. But in between time I have picked up a lot of stuff and I've learned on my own. But it's been hard because I've had to go at it the long way around. You know, seems like it was always hard for me to learn different things because of the experiences I had in school. And I know I get frustrated with my paper work sometimes because I don't feel like I'm doing it right, even though I may be doing it right. I feel like I'm not doing it the way it should be done. Because I feel like someone else can always do it better. So that's been kind of my experience.

I could be better at a lot of things. I am very poor at English when it comes to periods and commas and stuff like that. And I've always been a poor speller. I have to look up a lot of things. But my strength is that I try to encourage people because I have a lot of experiences that I have went through. Some of them that I have taught to read, in the class that I do, is because they came from the same situation that I did. They were all placed in TMR [trainable mentally retarded] classes and they felt like they wasn't a person. I try to encourage them and tell them that they are just as good as anyone and if you set your mind to it you can do lots of things. And I do encourage them to do that and make them feel good about themselves when they do accomplish stuff. Even if it's on a field trip. We do a lot of field trips, just learning different types of rocks, designs in rocks, and different kinds of trees and leaves, and going to old cabins. And when we go and look, always when we come back, even though they couldn't write, they would tell the story. Then Joyce [another teacher]would join in and she would write it down while they were telling the story. And then we would get it typed up and make books out of it and it made them real pleased. And then when we'd finish one thing we were doing I would always give them a reward for it. And when I'd go to their homes, you would see it sitting on the mantle, they were so tickled with it. Those things, those things that encourage them to keep going. And it's been four years, it's pretty good to keep the same group. Same people. And they are not required to come or anything.

We started out with CDL [test for commercial driver's license] and they couldn't read at all. But since they drove a school bus they had to get it or they wouldn't have a job. It depended on it. So we had different classes, four different classes. They would follow me to all four classes so that they could learn. So I did oral reading over and over and over to them. And then we'd do questions, and when

they went to take their test, they were scared to death. I had two that were a little braver than the others so they went to take the test first. They come back and they had passed it and made a 96. They were tickled to death. They all passed it and made anywhere from 92 to 96. And I said, if we can pass this test, will you start learning to read and come in and we'll work with whatever you like to work with. And we did that, and so when they passed the test we started class.

And we started out with doing little games. And I had to get to know them so they would feel comfortable with me. And when I made a mistake, and they'd say, is that right, are you sure? And I said, I don't know, I'll have to look it up. And sure enough, I made many mistakes too. They felt good about that because I wasn't perfect. I just love to be able to help someone else, to pull them above from what they are, because I know I've had to struggle a long time and had a hard life. Then when I started working with MCU, Janice [director] would do all this encouragement and so that helped me.

We done many different things. When we did things to help the community, me and Joyce would take our classes and we would team up. And we had one project where they helped paint a lady's house, because she had her baby taken away and she had to clean up a little bit. She never did understand what the social worker was telling her to do because she would use these big words and she didn't understand. So me and Joy went in and we told her what she had to do. She couldn't afford it. So we took our night class and they helped clean up the house and paint it. And we'd go on field trips, we would go to caves.

We would go to Tate County to caves. We would take a little something to eat. And we were in class one year and we had a party for them and got a band to play music and stuff and they celebrated that way. And we'd take them out to eat. And that was one of the things, it really dawned on me. We had took them to the Ponderosa to eat supper. But before we took them, we had worked on menus in the classroom. Like how you would order something.

We went there and we got in and I said just go ahead and order whatever you like. Well, Joyce went first and I went second. You know, every one ended up ordering the same thing we did, because they didn't know any other. So when I come back and set down at the table I apologized to them. I should have went over that menu with them and told them what it was. So I didn't make that mistake no more. Any time we went out, the first thing we would do is go over the menu and tell them what it was and kindly describe it. And I asked them how did they ever learn to order from restaurants and things. Sometimes we just sat and talked about the experiences they had. And they said, they could always see because there was a picture of a hamburger or something on television. They would watch advertisements. You know when they advertise McDonald's they know this big man is here, and that's where you can get the big hamburgers and stuff. They knew then what were the places they could stop at to get a hamburger. As far as eating other things, they said they never would ask in a restaurant because they didn't know what they had. Or be with someone else when they bought something, so they could do that. Me and Joyce would do a story and use different words to help them learn. Like "timid" is a word you

don't never use, so we'd make up stories and use those words in it. And let them learn what it was, and when they read the story they could kindly tell, did that mean a shy quiet person or something? They'd love the stories you would write yourself and let them read them to learn the words. We never did hardly use any books at all. And I used index cards. We started out with two-letter words. And I played games with them. They always learned to win things all the time. And they could win things they could use, like shampoo or deodorant or something. And I'd have index cards with all these words on them and what I'd do, I'd pull them up real fast and I said, first one says it and gets the word right, gets to hold the card. And whoever has the most cards at the end gets to win this right here. And so I'd play that with them and they loved that. And now they are all the way up into five-letter words now. And I got two hundred index cards with words on them. They can say them real fast. They learn to say them, to spell them, and speed up on saying the words. So we worked many times with that.

We would do role plays and everything. It gives the students we work with an opportunity to learn. See, feel, touch. It's also because, when they were raised up, they really didn't have a person to say, feel this, touch this and see how it feels, or you know, see how it's made. You know the background they come from because it was more isolated, they played in the hills and around, and they really didn't play with other children. And it kindly give them an opportunity to get out and face the world.

We went on a trip to Fort Boonesborough too. And they saw them making soap like their grandma did. And that tickled them to death. Things like that, I feel like it's a lot more important. I know books are important, don't get me wrong, [you can use them] so many hours, but not all the time. They do need to get out and communicate with others, meet someone and just talk to them.

And me and Joyce, since we started working together, we've depended on each other. Just like if a student would work with a student in a classroom, they depend on each other. And as we work as a group we found out that some of them get real nervous when they try to read and they can't figure it out. But then when they have someone they know sitting there with them, they'll kindly get stuck on a word and I won't even say a word and this other person will help them out on a word and it's like a family, pass me the bread or whatever. And when they run into a problem, they just help each other out. It's because they work so close together and they know each other. And they feel real comfortable with each other. That's how Joyce and I feel real comfortable with each other. If she doesn't know something she'll ask me and if I didn't, I'd ask Joyce. We worked so close together it's turned out to be just a fantastic classroom.

We built a handicapped ramp for a girl, just the mother and the girl at home, and we built it for them. We had got the money through Children First Foundation to do a project with the community. The guys went ahead and they volunteered to donate the 2x4's and the other one some plywood and each one of them something so we could save the money and have a Thanksgiving dinner here. We took the money and had a Thanksgiving dinner here at the Learning Center and they brought their

mothers and their families out to eat. It was fantastic. That's some of the things that they like to do.

Like whenever Janice had a bunch of books here. Well, we set them all out and we asked them if they knowed of anybody that would like to have some books. And we didn't ask them, if you want the books, take them, because that would make it sound like if you want to improve your reading you can read. So we didn't say it that way. We said, we've got a bunch of books if you know somebody who would like to have some of them, you can take them to them. So they ended up getting a whole bunch of books for themselves. And finally, they come in and they'd say, you know some of them books, I kept them. I said, well, that's wonderful. And we would work with them just like that, by encouraging them.

They helped us take books to Mission of Grace, they loaded two pick-up trucks with books and took them to Wheeler's Mission at Piney Creek. They helped us put screen wires up in houses to keep flies out of homes. They helped us mend a porch once. That's what they did for the community. And we helped clean off the cemetery. And that's an education right there. Because when you look on tombstones on the cemetery, you say, that person had the same last name as me. Reckon he's kin to me? And count how long they've been passed away, and when they were born. And then they go back home and they'd ask their parents, do you know of so-and-so? And first thing you'd know, [they] found out someone was related to them and they didn't even know it.

Yeah, they's problems you run into. Transportation when you're taking them places. And then this one person wanted to go and we had to sit down and work the time out because they couldn't go on a certain date or a certain time and you run into that. Trying to get the money to go on was a problem. And most of the time me and Joyce would end up paying for it ourselves out of what we got paid, we would turn it back into them. But there are some times we would run up on problems maybe with the children wanting to go too. And you have to wonder, you don't want to say no, your children can't go, but maybe you can take some of the biggest ones to this one, and work out something where the little ones can come. So you always run into some kind of problem or barrier, never something that works out perfect. You always run up onto something.

There's a fear there. If they are going to the doctor and know they will have to fill out a form, they will tape up this finger and say they can't write because they broke their finger. They use the excuse to keep from saying, I can't read, or fill out a form. In talking with them, I tell them, it's not a shame because you can't. Just up and tell them. It's amazing now how they can go in to the doctor and tell them, you have to fill that out because I can't.

When they first came, all they wanted to do was learn to read. They didn't want anything else. They didn't want no math, they didn't want anything. Just learn to read so that they can be able to read a book to their children. Cause their children were getting school age. And they wanted to be able to read a book to them. One of them said, "mine's already got a book and said, read this to me Daddy. But I just read it from the pictures. But when he gets to reading himself, I can't do that.

Cause he's going to know." Because they want to learn. They are so determined to learn to read that they just stuck with it.

When you start off, don't give them something real hard. Give them something easier. It's the attitude we have in our class. We share things and if they get tired and we're working on something they want to learn more about, well then what we do is plan a trip. Get out. Go. Find out about that you know. Like I told them, we're going to have class tonight and I'm going to teach you all this. And at the end of it you all are going to teach me something. And I always change it back and forth, because if they feel like they can learn me something, it's a benefit for them too. I don't know anything about cars. I said you can learn me how to change oil or whatever you want to tell me about.

And then I guess I know them by name and now I know them, it's just like a family. If one gets sick, or one has problems, they even bring their problems. If one has a form to fill out and they don't know how, they'll bring it to me. And I will sit down and help them with it.

All of the students I started with four years ago are still in, except for V. and he's now down in the big class. Every one of them. I had one that went on into June's class and he got his GED. I had another one that went into Judy's class and he's still downstairs. He moved up in the level. And I have one that just quit coming.

Because after we had these guys in, we encouraged them and they started bringing their wives in. So we ended up wives, husbands and brothers. That's when we grew so big and I give Joy some of them. They have come up. They started at zero level. And they are now up to 4.9 and 4.7 and I've got one that is 3.7. I think the world of them too.

If I had somebody that just wanted to study from the books, I'd let them. I would let them go ahead and study, but in the meantime, I'd also want to let the group that went somewhere to come back and tell the person what all they did and what an experience it was. Because that person might have been scared and that's the reason they really didn't want to go. Or they may have been afraid, people is afraid you might point them out and call upon them and it would embarrass them because they can't do certain things. And usually they have a reason why and what I try to do is talk to them enough to see if I can get a feel, see if I can understand what the reason was, is what I would do. And then maybe the next time, I would ask that person, is there anything you would really love to see, and if he did, we'll go that place, and we'll get the others to go with us.

I've changed about 95%! And I guess it was because I growed up in a family kind of isolated. When I first started working in the public, I kindly didn't know how to be with people. People could just run all over me and use me as a doormat. Finally, I had one person say you got to stand up for yourself. And even though a big knot comes here when I have to say no, when I finally I started doing it, which I'd feel guilty about. But I've come a long ways and now I can say to the person, but say it in a nice way, you got to learn how to talk to people without hurting their feelings. And say to them in a nice way, no, I don't want to. I've learned how to say

yes and no. I've learned how to handle people without getting angry or mad. Kindly encourage them by the way I growed up and how I feel. My experiences did learn me a lot. How hard it was to overcome this.

When I started, I never did presentations or anything before in front of a group because it always scared me to death. My voice would tremble and everything. So when I started working for Janice and MCU, in '91, I had to do lots of presentations. And each time I went to do them it kept getting easier and easier. So I come a long way. I used to couldn't even speak in a group. One-to-one I was fine, but you get more than one-to-one, it just tore me all to pieces.

Doing the presentations and getting up and telling a little bit about my job and what I did helped. And one thing that makes you more able to do that is working at a job that you love to do. You give everything you got to it. And you don't have to come up with things that are not real. You can just come off with it just like it happened. That made me feel more comfortable each time I would get up to do a presentation. And then I got to meet many different people all over the United States. If they would come in here, we would do a presentation. And then Janice would put us on a plane and we would go to Washington D.C. and meet with a group we'd never met with before and we'd have to do a presentation. Each time I would get really scared and really nervous and still today I get a little nervous. But I've come a long way with that. Today I can get up and say it.

And it's all because Janice didn't force me into doing it, she would ask me, and just say, if you don't feel comfortable, you don't have to. I knowed I had a choice, if I felt like the people was way above my head and I couldn't get across to them. And another thing I guess too is our language that we have. The words that we say. It doesn't sound, it sounds kindly funny I guess to other people that's away from here. In presentations, it's been referred to certain words that I didn't say correctly that I should have by the group. But then when they said that, by working with Janice and everything she's encouraged me to do, it give me enough courage that I could say, I keep going on, it didn't matter. I say the word the way I was taught to say it, and the only way I knew how to say it. And I just go right on and I can say, whatever it is, and just let it be. I don't get angry at things. I can take a lot, you can push me a lot, but I can get to a point where I'll say, I'm sorry, no. So I have learned a lot of that by working at MCU.

I've worked at other places but I never had to do presentations in front of a group. I could just work one-on-one and just make home visits maybe and go out and talk to mothers and fathers. I could do that easily. But it was having to meet with a group that always just tore me all to pieces. But I've overcome a lot of that now. I can get up no matter where and do presentations.

My biggest goal is to get my children through college. I only had one sister to get to go to college. And as I worked, I helped send her to college. I bought her clothes and food and she went through college. She says without you, Lydia, I never would have made it. So she's a teacher now. That's the only one graduated college out of all ten of us.

Positive Impacts

Every teacher interviewed saw potential in the community-based approach. Every one said they had seen times when it worked well. Some were enthusiastic about it without qualification. Others talked about the difficulties of making it work well, and had differing degrees of comfort and experience with the approach. As seen in Chapter 5, in the example of making and taking crafts to the nursing home, two different teachers had two totally different perspectives and experiences, and viewed the impact very differently.

One teacher thought it was a plus that MCU had other activities available for the students who wished to participate, but that they should be mostly be separate from "book-based" education. And some teachers seemed to modify their viewpoints between the time of the group interview in mid-1995, and the individual interviews in late 1995 and early 1996.

Teachers' Perspectives on Positive Impacts for them and their Students

Some people you can reach easily with just books...a lot of people you can't.

In the interviews, teachers report positive impacts of MCU's community-based approach that emerged as four themes, three having to do with their perspective of students' experiences and one relating to the teachers themselves. The impacts reported included: better attendance and better retention because students enjoy the

variety and kinds of community-based activities we do; many students learn better by using a community-based approach; a community-based approach allows students to learn and develop skills they would not have the opportunity to develop in a traditional program; and just as with students, being in an organization that is immersed in many activities and issues beyond ABE gives teachers opportunities for leadership development, which in turns helps them develop skills they would otherwise not have the opportunity to gain.

Better attendance and retention. Among the several positive impacts on themselves and their students, mentioned most frequently was the belief that the community-based approach results in better attendance and retention. This literacy teacher weaves many service projects into her class.

> *I think that a lot of people, you have to reach them in different ways. Some people you can reach easily with just books. But a lot of people that I serve you can't. And I don't know how familiar you are with the JOBS programs. But a lot of schools have had a great problems with attendance. I can't stand that. If I've got ten students that are supposed to be enrolled in my class, then I want my ten students here. You know I don't want five and I don't want six. I want my ten. So I think if you can find something that really interests people, and then you work on that, you build on that, then eventually you build up their self-esteem. You build up so many things and you get them to wanting to come to school. Everyday we do something different.*

Students learn better. Several of the teachers firmly believe that many students learn better by using a community-based approach. This teacher describes how she approaches a field trip and bases instruction on opportunities it provides.

A couple of weeks ago, when the leaves were really pretty, I took them to Tucker Lake State Park. I mean we don't just get out and it be a free day. They have to do things, like, they have to bring back twenty-five different types of leaves. They had to get out in the hills and they had to find these different types of trees and they had to match. They were in two different groups, and this team had to match this team. See if they both had an oak leaf, of if they both had a dogwood or they both had a maple or a sycamore. And all these different leaves. And then they had to write about it. And we kept the mileage so they had to subtract and see how many miles it was round trip...I think that there's just so many different ways of learning. A lot of people you have to reach them in different ways. Some people you can reach easily with just books. But a lot of people you can't.

Students develop different skills. Teachers talked about ways that community-based approach allows students to learn and develop skills they would not have the opportunity to develop in a traditional program. Opportunities to go places, to speak out on issues, to be listened to helps develop skills and confidence in a way that traditional programs generally don't.

You take the particular student that worked so hard but never got her GED. She got to do all these things and go all these places that she had never been, and when she went to Washington D.C. and made a speech, that was just as important as the GED. She got more experience and no GED, I don't think, would have made her feel as good about herself, as the accomplishments she made in the community. And she can still come back and get her GED.

Even something as simple as cooking a meal together can be a learning experience and can help students build important connections to each other, this teacher points out. She believe that activities such as this, woven into more standard classroom fare, can provide meaningful opportunities for social learning.

My class loves to cook. We don't have money. So we usually cook around the first of the month when everybody gets their food stamps. Everybody brings something and we just put it all together and have a fantastic meal...it helps their social skills and how to get along. When we first started, if somebody said they were going to bring something, and they didn't, you know the others would get real huffy that they didn't do that part. And I said, you know sometimes things come up that you can't, but you really should say, "I was going to do this but such-and-such happened and I couldn't." Usually if you explain things people understand.

Teachers get opportunities for leadership development. Teachers acknowledged benefits of being a part of a community-based organization that views education broadly which accrue to them as well. Just as with students, being in an organization that is immersed in many activities and issues beyond ABE gives opportunities for leadership development that helps teachers develop skills they would otherwise not have the opportunity to gain. Teachers particularly pointed out their own growth, and gave examples of how they found their voices as a part of MCU work. This teacher echoed Lydia's experience of growth:

Lord, I've changed 99.9%! Connie, do you not remember me? I was so nervous. I as just foolish nervous. Unless you was me, you'd never know what experience I went through during that time. My self-esteem was so low. When I'd talk one-on-one, I could be me. But in a group, when I had to talk, I couldn't. At one time I would rather have done anything than get up and speak in front of a crowd. You've heared of clearing a new ground, ain't you? I'd been willing to have done that. I would sweep the streets of Jonas Ridge - anything! But Janice gave us an option. She would say you don't have to, and that would make me feel better. But then I would think, I have to show her that I can. So I would sit by Lydia, I could talk a little because if I got nervous, she would pick right up and go with whatever I was saying. Now I can sit anywhere and talk, but it's according to where we are going. When we go to Washington D.C. I am still a little nervous.

Negative Impacts

It will not help them in that room when they sit down to take a GED test.

What are the drawbacks to this approach? What are the negatives from doing adult education with a community-based approach? Some teachers reported no negatives. Others described four kinds of negative impacts they have observed: it disrupts class; students resist it; some of the work was invented, not real, and some of the projects weren't useful; and it prevents some students from accomplishing their goals, like getting the GED.

Some of these negatives seem to apply more to the way things were done at MCU, rather than to community-based learning in general. It is difficult to tease apart those two elements.

Community-based activities disrupt class. The teachers who mentioned problems with the approach talked about it disrupting class and taking time away from studying. *It depends on the person. They is some of them that have no interest in the outside things and when you disrupt class for that it hurts them.*

This was a clear difference among teachers. The teachers who were most wedded to the community-based approach thought of those community-based activities as the class; the class wasn't disrupted because those activities constituted an important, integral part of the curriculum.

Students resist a community based approach. Several teachers mentioned that some students did not want to do anything that appeared to veer away from a straight path to the GED.

Some students want to focus on their books. A lot of them. They come to get their GED and that's all they want to do. They are very resentful if anything interrupts them.

Interestingly, even one teacher who used field trips and service projects as a part of her class said that as an MCU student, she might have resisted extra activities. The MCU GED class she attended as a student did not do very many community activities, and she was not sure if she would have participated even if they did.

I know there are some students who don't want to participate. That's just the way some people are. It's according to how they've got their goals set in life. Whenever I came to class here, I came for one purpose: to learn and get my GED. If an opportunity had come up, say let's go somewhere, I don't know if I'd wanted to, cause I was that involved in my studying.

The work was invented. A couple of teachers talked about how some of the community-based work done by students was "invented" work, not real. One of the activities adult education students were involved in during the formation of the Teen Center was choosing a van to provide transportation. On the face of it, it seemed a great way to integrate learning basic skills with a real-life activity. The students discussed the transportation needs of the Teen Center, made calls and visits to talk with dealers about vans, compared prices, and discussed the best deals. But according to some teachers, the decision had already been made about the van. It

was wasteful of students time, and disrespectful to them, to act as though they (the students) were making the decision, teachers said.

> *I don't want to just go do this, do that, go pick out a van. My God, that was just ridiculous! When the van had already been picked out.*

In a later interview, the same teacher pointed out significant questions about the usefulness of some of the community service projects.

> *Maybe it's my own belief that it's not worth anything that made me so negative about it. What can we do for the people in the nursing home besides drowning them in homemade gifts? Don't take them popscicle stick houses, take them shampoo and conditioner and perfume and lotion, you know, grooming kits and things for them. We were told there's no money for that. Well our families can go and sit with them as we deliver it and the money we've spent on popscicle sticks to make these crafts, we could have bought shampoo.*

Students don't reach academic goals, like getting the GED. Perhaps the most troublesome issue with some teachers was the question of whether the community-based activities hurt or helped students achieve academic goals. Teachers who were critical of outside activities pointed to two particular students who were at MCU for several months and "should have gotten their GED", and would have, teachers thought, had they not been so involved in the Teen Center and other activities. One of the students left when she got a job offer. The other left to take care of her mother, who had become an invalid. This teacher commented:

They should have gotten a GED with their time at the Learning Center. And they didn't. And they may never. They gained a whole lot of experience, that I know. And a whole lot of good came out of it. But was it the same good they were after, is what bothers me. The fact that they wanted that GED. They wanted the Teen Center. And they got that Teen Center. But they didn't get the GED.

Some of the MCU teachers felt there would might never be another point in these women's lives when they could focus on preparing for the GED. They felt MCU had taken their prime opportunity, used up their best energy, and left them without a GED.

The students here, not only did they do the Teen Center, it was other things, like the team leader role pulled them out of class for meetings. They were in class less than one full day a week. It was every meeting, every presentation, they were Board members, it was everything that MCU had going, those students were in. And they really wanted to get their GED and it was unfair.

Although several teachers thought the community-based work and extra activities were useful to students in many ways, including academically, other teachers disagreed and raised important issues about best use of time.

The goal is that through an alternative curriculum they can learn just as much as through a traditional method. That may be so. They learn more life experience, but it don't help them get GEDs though. It will help them in life, I will agree. it will not help them in that room when they go sit down and take a GED test.

Factors Leading to Success with Using a Community-Based Model at MCU

What factors are important in teaching at MCU, using a community-based approach? What does a teacher need to do in order to have success with this approach to teaching? The teachers who believe and practice community-based approaches most enthusiastically had much to say about these questions; those who were less enthusiastic, or rejected the approach, of course had less to say.

Teachers list five factors important to good teaching using this model: working in groups is essential; treat students fairly and don't put yourself above them; build on field trips, service projects, and other activities to extend learning - don't just let the experience be an isolated event; use every opportunity to let students know their culture is ok; learn from a role model/mentor who uses the community-based approach.

Working in groups is essential

They work together and build and help each other.

No doubt about it: teachers who enthusiastically embrace community-based approaches structure their classrooms, curriculum and activities so that there are many opportunities for group work. Teachers said working in groups helps students break their isolation and helps them realize that many people struggle with the same challenges they do.

I've had students who really needed one-on-one. I didn't feel like I was the one to say, we need to work on this, just me and you. Because to me, I felt like it would be a big letdown for that student. I wanted them to feel as important as whoever else. I had this one student who needed one-on-one. I did give him special attention, but not to where anybody else would know it. I didn't want him to feel like I've felt before. I didn't want him to be separated from the group. I wanted him to be a part of the group.

Teachers believe working in groups helps students learn. The students learn from each other, and the teacher is able to get more accomplished.

I have thirteen students enrolled in my class. And I have probably, I have thirteen students enrolled in my class. And I probably, out of those thirteen, two students on the same grade level. I really don't have time, and I find, that by putting them in groups, they can help each other. Of course after you work with a person for two or three months, you pretty well know what level that person is on without having to review their tests and all that stuff. So what I try to do is put them with somebody who is like a grade level or two ahead of them. And then that way, if they start falling behind and I don't have time to get there when they need this extra help, then there's someone in that group that can say, okay, this is the way we do this. Without it really offending anyone.

Teachers said group work gives students a chance to have leadership development opportunities. It's important to find roles for students in the group, and to rotate the roles. The teacher quoted below feels that it's also important to change groups around, so no one gets the label of being in a "slow" group. Students have the opportunity to interact with many different people.

Another thing I try to do is to not keep that same group for a long period of time. It's almost like when we elect our officers in here. I don't want one person to be secretary all year. I don't want two people to be janitor all year. I don't want one person to be president all year, or treasurer. I think they need to rotate it. And it's the same way with the groups. If you keep them in this certain group, then they tend to start stereotyping. And then one group will think, well, this group is better than that group. But not if you rotate and pull them out. Like in this class, I have three people that have really achieved this year. I mean they have really come a long way. So if I rotate those three really good students and move them about from table to table and shuffle the other ones, then nobody really feels left out and nobody feels different.

Groups help level social status in the classroom. Working in groups give students the chance to see each other's strengths, and have their own strengths recognized.

That's the thing I like about it, they don't really feel like that there's big chiefs and little chiefs in here. There is no big chiefs and little chiefs in here. We are all equal and we're all the same. And one may know more about social studies than math, but this other person may know more about math than they know about social studies. So they just work together and build and help each other.

This teacher noted that she saw problems when her class stopped working in groups.

And I don't know, I think they were probably getting jealous of each other. And they had drawn apart where used to they worked in groups more. But they had been working more like individually. And I think when I took them out of their groups and put them back working individually I think its...it just kind of drifted away. So

now we'll be back in our groups. I think they get along a lot better and they have more respect.

Treat Students Fairly and Don't put Yourself Above Them
If I can do this stuff, they can too!

Teachers felt that it was essential to treat students fairly, and not put yourself above them. Teachers said that students see their mistakes, their uncertainties, their humanity.

I sit down and work with them and I make mistakes and I say, well, let me look it up. And they see that. A lot of times in schools, in public schools, they feel intimidated because they know this person has got all this education and they know I don't have all this education. And they think if I can do this stuff, they can too.

Another teacher talks about how important it was to her as a student at MCU that her teacher not put herself above the students, but be accessible.

Well, when you think of school, you think of going into a classroom teacher. If I'd come into that situation, a classroom setting and with a teacher looking like a typical teacher and acting like a typical teacher, like they're it, you know, I would never have gotten my GED. I would never have come back. When I came in the door, and Pearl was just this normal person, she was like me! And we just started talking and she was so nice to me, it made all the difference in the world. It made a lot of difference, when you come in and you find out that they're like you, they are at your level.

Build on Field Trips, Service Projects, and Other Activities
Like when we went to Dollywood...

Several teachers pointed out that it is essential to integrate the field trips, service projects and other activities with other, more "book-based" education. Build on activities to extend learning, they advised. Don't just let the experience be an isolated event. It's important to weave the experiences into academic work. It gives students a real-life reference point for learning, which seems to be very effective.

> *Like when we went to Dollywood, they had to call the office and find out how much tickets were. Then they had to count their money and see how much they had and which expenses they were going to have, how much gas they were going to have to put in the van for us to go down there. They had to do all this research. So, it's not just a free trip. They have to really work in order to do these things. And map skills. They have to do map skills. Do we travel north? Do we travel south? Do we travel east or west? Then we take an atlas and I work with them and we find us a route. And then when we go, somebody will watch for the sign to Knoxville. How many more miles do we have to go? How many miles have we traveled so far? And then when we got there, some people were in charge of the trolley, trying to figure out where it was at, and where we got on it and where we got off.*

Use Every Opportunity to Let Students Know Their Culture is OK
A lot of them can picture themselves in those books.

Teachers believed it was essential to use every opportunity to let students know their culture is ok. Though teachers acknowledge that some of the ways their students were raised make their lives difficult (such as isolation and lack of experience with interacting in the public sphere), several of them also made it clear

that it is important to hook into positive aspects of students' culture. One teacher does this by encouraging students to read Appalachian authors. The class keeps records of the books they have read by Jesse Stuart and Vernie Mae Sloan.

> *What I tried to do was find things that interested my students. Janice sent a form over here, we had a 50 dollar grant, so that we could get some of Jesse Stuart's books. So I went down the list and I tried to picture all of my students, and I tried to think after working with them three or four months, what they would like to read. When the books came in, I couldn't keep them. I mean they were checking them out just like everything. And right now, I think I've got 2 girls that have read over 60 books. But I think it's because they can relate to what Jessie Stuart, or Vernie Mae Sloan writes about. And a lot of them can picture themselves in those books. I try to read them first before I sign them out to the students. And I know when I've read* What My Heart Wants To Tell *by Vernie Mae Sloan, it was like back when my grandmother was alive and she told me all these things. My grandmother didn't want me to forget how to dry apples or how to fix dried beans or how you preserve meat. My grandmother thought it was so important that us children never forgot how to do that. And she instilled it in all of us kids. And I think that a lot of my students remember that in their ancestors. I've got one girl that has written three stories and sent to Appalachian Women's Alliance and got those published and she is really good. I had a couple of students who got their stories published in* Slices of Life *this year. I think the reading has made them want to write more...I think a lot of it has to do with Appalachian authors.*

At MCU, this valuing of culture is key to recruiting success also, using traditional stories, music, crafts, tales of home remedies, reports of successful neighbors and kin to encourage participation. Lydia talks about visiting with a woman on Johnny's Branch who believed she was too old to come to adult education classes. Lydia related a parable to encourage her.

I told her this story. Once upon a time this old man and old woman lived together in this house. The old man smoked a pipe and he said, old woman, he says, I've learned all I'm ever going to learn, I'm just going to go ahead and pass on and just die out. The old woman stepped over to the fire place and put some ashes in her hand and put a lighted coal on top and carried it over to light his pipe. He said, well how in the world did you carry that fire in her hand? She said, well I put a little ashes in under it. See there, I told you, you never get too old to learn!

A Role Model or Mentor who Uses the Community-Based Approach Helps *I want to be like that!*

Several teachers reported that seeing a role model/mentor use the community-based approach helped them use it well with their students. The way they learned was an important determinant in their own teaching.

I learned a lot from Janice. If it hadn't been for Janice, I would have thought it should have been all book learning. And then this summer we went through a week's training, it was the Foxfire approach, on letting the students make the decisions about how they want to learn things. But mostly I learned from Janice. When I first started down there at class, I seen her a time or two. I didn't know who she was, but she fascinated me. The way she would stop and talk to you, even talked to me, and I was a student and she didn't really know me. And I felt special. I thought I want to be like that!

Several teachers mentioned that peer-to-peer learning from other MCU teachers was the best way for them to develop teaching skills themselves.

When I had my class, I tried to follow in Pearl's footsteps. And I wanted them to feel like the way I felt the day I walked into the Center and met Pearl. You have to teach them and be with them as an adult, not as a child. I learned a lot from Lydia too, because she had been a teacher and I kind of observed her class to know.

Barriers and Deterrents

What gets in the way of a community-based approach to adult education, according to teachers? The "negative impacts" reported by teachers and discussed earlier in this chapter again apply here: It disrupts class; students resist it; some of the work was invented, not real, and some of the projects weren't useful; it prevents some students from accomplishing their goals, like getting the GED. In addition to those, teachers also mention four elements that describe difficulties associated with the approach: it costs money to fund most service projects, field trips and extra activities; it requires planning; it requires special skills; and sometimes the projects don't go well.

It Costs Extra Money to Fund This Approach
There's not always money...

Almost every teacher mentioned money as a problem. Financial resources are required to fund most service projects, field trips and extra activities. Several teachers acknowledged that money was a barrier to many of the community-based activities they wanted to do with their students.

> *The only barrier that I've found is finances. There's not always money to do the arts and crafts. We're very fortunate to have some people donate a lot of stuff like magazines and things like that. But when it comes to the craft supplies like the fabric and the threads and the*

patterns and things like that, sometimes its hard if you don't have the money. And they keep cutting back on the budgets.

This Approach Requires More Planning
It's too much like a school.

Teachers point out that these activities and their integration into the rest of the curriculum require planning. One teacher who talked about the approach requiring too much planning said that she likes to plan in detail only the first hour of her class, and then be led by the mood, preference and energy of the group for the remaining time. Figuring out how to fit extra activities, planning how to do it, and making prior arrangements did not fit her preferred style of teaching. She felt that having a rigid schedule was counterproductive.

I'm not too much of a planner. If I've got something that they can work on the first hour, then I can plan on from there. Because it's too much like a school. If you go in and you have to do this and you have to do that.

It Requires Special Skills
I'm in over my head.

Some teachers felt that they did not have the skills required to do community-based adult education well. This teacher said she didn't have the particular skills needed to do successful community service projects.

I feel like I don't have the skills to do the projects well. Therefore I can't get my students to do a good enough job. I don't see myself as an organizer. If something is already organized, I can pitch in and do my part. If I have to create these projects, or if I have to organize these projects, either I think it out too much or I don't think it out enough, and I'm in over my head either way it goes.

Sometimes the Projects Don't Go Well

It was the biggest mess I ever seen in my life.

Teachers seem genuinely hurt and disappointed over failed projects. One teacher talked about the difficulty she had in getting participation. She was attempting a Children First Foundation project, which required families to volunteer together.

They'd be there to paint, and we were going to have a pizza party for them and their kids after we painted and everything. I had like three students show up with their kids. I had about 7 show up without them. They will come. But they will not bring their family.

This teacher speculated that the Learning Center and related activities were her students' refuge away from home and family, and that was why she had trouble getting them to bring their children to the service project.

While doing community-based work helped some teachers develop leadership skills, others had unsuccessful experiences that only made them feel badly about themselves. Another example teachers offered of service work turning out poorly was a Christmas party for a group of children.

We tried to do a Christmas party for the same group of kids and it was chaotic. It was the biggest mess ever I seen in my life. It was the most disorganized mess. I keep looking back and trying to figure out what went wrong. I was so disheartened. I walked out. I mean I was just heartbroken.

Summary

Teachers were divided in their assessment of impacts of community-based adult education. Most felt very positive about the benefits of the approach, while a few reported concerns.

The positive impacts mentioned by teachers included: better attendance and better retention because students enjoy the variety and kinds of community-based activities we do; many students learn better by using a community-based approach; a community-based approach allows students to learn and develop skills they would not have the opportunity to develop in a traditional program; and just as with students, being in an organization that is immersed in many activities and issues beyond ABE gives teachers opportunities for leadership development and helps teachers develop skills they would otherwise not have the opportunity to gain.

Some teachers reported negative impacts of this approach. Four different types of negative impacts were discussed. They included: it disrupts class; students resist it; some of the community work was invented, not real and some of the projects weren't useful; and it prevents some students from achieving their goals, such as getting the GED.

Interestingly, the negative impact that worried teachers most, the possibility that students might become so engrossed in community work that they neglect their studies and fail to get a GED, didn't come up in student interviews, even those in which very involved students had left the program without a GED. On the other hand, teachers regularly worried about this and discussed it repeatedly. They staunchly defended their positions on both sides of the issue.

Teachers also tended to value community service projects and field trips e mostly because they believed a variety of activities enhanced learning. While students also mentioned this, they were much more likely to say that the activities were fun. "Fun" and "enjoyment" were key for students, but not emphasized as much by teachers.

Teachers discussed five factors that contribute to the development of programs that integrate literacy and community development: working in groups is essential; treat students fairly and don't put yourself above them; build on field trips, service projects, and other activities to extend learning-don't just let the experience be an isolated event; use every opportunity to let students know their culture is ok; and a mentor who uses the community-based approach helps.

Teachers also reported some barriers that get in the way of community-based adult education. The "negative impacts" reported by teachers and discussed earlier in this chapter again apply. In addition to those, teachers also mentioned four elements that describe difficulties associated with the approach: it costs money to fund most

service projects, field trips and extra activities; it requires planning; it requires special skills; and sometimes the projects don't go well.

We've heard from both students and teachers. In the next chapter we'll get the perspectives of others involved in MCU.

CHAPTER EIGHT

IMPACTS ON THE ORGANIZATION AND THE COMMUNITY

Grass-roots organizations in Appalachia contribute significantly to their communities. They have done important work to strengthen families and communities, given opportunities for members to grow, develop and contribute, and at times have helped support or bring about lasting change. Sometimes community-based organizations impact communities directly and dramatically. At other times the organizations may be less influential in the local community, but build strong leaders who contribute knowledge, skills, and talents to the area (Fisher, 1993).

Often, community organizations are marginalized. They lack the resources to be stable in terms of staff or program. Dedication to leadership development means that emerging leaders-without fully developed skills or experience-are often depended upon to do tasks for which they may not be ready, and for which the organization has not provided training or support. Political beliefs that challenge powerful people and institutions, and confrontational tactics that community organizations sometime use are often seen as threats by local and state government, and tend to scare off a number of potential participants. Yet these organizations often accomplish amazing things, including direct assistance to needy individuals, access to services the community

needs, and/or organizing victories that help enable people to challenge injustice and better their lives (Fisher, 1993; Bingman, 1995).

What happens organizationally when community groups take on adult basic education? Sometimes, the adult education program is isolated from the rest of the organization, and looks just like any school-based literacy efforts. Sometimes, the other work of the organization, such as fighting for clean water after their community has been poisoned by a waste-producing industry, is too compelling and plans for an adult education class wither away. (Bingman and White, 1994).

But, at MCU, this did not happen. Adult basic education became an important part of the work and other efforts in the organization were enriched and strengthened by it. Still, by the time adult education had woven itself throughout the organization, it was clear that the history was checkered by both achievements and challenges. It was also clear that administrators and teachers saw the history in different ways. What organizational factors lead to a successful adult education program? What organizational factors were barriers to success?

The communities in which organizations exist are vital; in fact, the communities are why organizations exist. What difference did MCU make in the communities of Fairmont County? How were they impacted? What did students, teachers, volunteers and administrators of MCU say were the impacts? What did I see as I watched MCU and the communities in which it worked over the last five years?

This chapter contains two sections: the first concerning the organization, the second concerning the community. The organizational section contains four parts. After these introductory remarks, an MCU administrator tells the story of adult education at MCU from her perspective. Parts two and three are an analysis of the results of administrator interviews, the first focusing on six organizational factors leading to success in community-based adult education efforts, and the second dealing with organizational barriers to success in community-based adult education efforts. The fourth part is a comparison between the administrator's perspective and what teachers say on similar questions of organizationally-related barriers.

The Organization

The interviews that provide most of the data for this section are from two administrators who are very involved and invested in adult education at MCU. The small number of interviews is problematic, but they are supplemented and both confirmed and challenged by my own field notes and journal reflections, as well as notes from participatory research group meetings where teachers and students discuss similar questions.

Janice tells the story of adult education at MCU from her perspective as an experienced administrator involved in the formation and supervision of the adult education program. She also speaks from the perspective as a participant in a community organization whose first concerns were around involvement of parents in

Head Start and in the schools, school reform to allow more parent-driven involvement and decision-making, and other efforts to take power from established institutions and put it in the hands of parents. Adult basic education was an add-on to the group's agenda, but the organization enthusiastically endorsed it as consistent with their mission and goals.

Janice's Story

I think it goes all the way back to when we started adult ed. We didn't start out as teachers trying to teach students in a class situation. We started out as community people who weren't certified teachers and actually had never taught before. We were trying to figure out how to help people learn things that they really wanted to know.

There never was that hierarchy of a person on one level as a teacher and another person on another level as a student. It was more like people sitting around the table, there is this problem, how can we find ways to deal with it.

So our first class started. Nobody had ever taught before. We didn't have any books. We didn't have any particular places to meet. We didn't have any curriculum or any idea how to teach. We just asked people what they wanted to learn instead of trying to go through a text book. We said, what do you want to learn? And then we tried to figure out ways of helping people learn what they wanted to know.

I remember one [school system] administrator telling me that adult education was just like a school bus-it belongs with the school. They said, "you wouldn't expect us to give you a school bus, would you? Why would you want us to give you the chance to run adult education? Adult education is the same things a school bus. It belongs there. It's owned by it. It's operated by it. It's the same thing. One's on wheels, and one's on feet. But they're both are the property of the school system.

After a while it became important to us to show other people who constantly put us down and said that we couldn't do it, that we could. And that there was more than one way, and it was just as important for our teachers to learn as our students to learn.

There was that sense that we may only be a few pages ahead of the students that we are working with, like if they're working on one thing, we'll try to learn it the night before. We'll try to look at fractions or something like that, so that there is this learning process going on all the time. It was almost like the teachers studying as much as the students were. It was real important to them that their students saw them

as being helpful. And if it's your mom, or your preacher, you don't want to show up and not be prepared, because they are looking to you. There was a lot of emphasis in that early time, about 1986 when we started. It became very important that people who had never done any teaching at all and never thought of themselves as teachers to find ways to learn things so that they could help other people.

The second year, on our JTPA contract we had [students who earned] more GEDs than any program our size in the state of Kentucky. With only one year's experience. Arthur sometimes says that was our best year because everybody was so determined and there was such a good team spirit and no matter what we didn't have, we had the desire to learn and the willingness to help each other. From the very beginning it was the group working together in some way. Then too we didn't have any building in Fairmont County or any special place for teachers to put their things. They all had crates and they hauled everything around in their trunk.

Nobody ever taught our teachers how to teach. They didn't have any training whatsoever, which was real hard in some ways. In other ways, they just had to find what worked and what didn't work. At that time, nobody had ever had a class in education. Nobody had ever had a college class. So it was more like a family or community or church. Relationships held it together through rough times. I think we've gotten away from a lot of that now. We are really being pushed into curriculum being approved and designed and standardized. Even our own staff and our own teachers kind of feel like that in some ways they would like to be more like other teachers, especially certified teachers or college educated teachers. To some extent they are wanting to prove that they are able and capable and knowledgeable and skillful so they don't get looked down on and treated second class. From my way of looking at it, you don't get better at something by trying to be more like somebody else, who really aren't all that successful at it anyway.

Organizational Factors Leading to Success

What is the role, the strengths and challenges of community organizations such as MCU which offer adult education and connect it to issues in student's lives and in the community? What organizational characteristics help? Which hurt?

Both administrators were very much alike in their assessment of what an organization needs in order to do adult education in this way. There was only one area, financial resources, in which their views differed.

The two administrators interviewed named six factors leading to success: the organization is made up of the people it is designed to serve and they provide the direction and decision-making to guide the organization; the organization develops a shared culture that has respect for students and their ways of life at its base; organizational support is given to teachers to try out new things, make mistakes, and learn; the organization provides encouragement for organizationally-sanctioned group efforts toward the development of community-based curriculum and methodology, and training and support for those efforts; the organization provides resources to support community-based activities; and encourages support from and connection with others of like mind.

Made Up of the People it is Designed to Serve

Administrators believe that the most important factor in MCU's success is that the organization is made up of the people it is designed to serve.

> *One of the biggest strengths is that they are in the community. They live there, they know the problems, they can identify with the people. They are not somebody in a suit coming in saying "This is what you should be doing" or "Let me tell you what to do." They are people who live there and gossip there and you just know. You understand better.*

Develops a Shared Culture, Respect for Students and their Ways of Life

Administrators say that it is essential to have an organizational culture that has respect for students and their ways of life at its base.

> *One of the things that's always been important is that we start with an attitude of respect for the people that we work with, if that's not there, if it's not genuine, if it's not real, it's a hard row to hoe from there on because you almost never can make up for it. And respect for our culture. Not just respect for individuals, but respect for a people. There's a certain culture here and it's ok too. You don't downgrade it or badmouth it or be ashamed of it.*

Provides Support for Teachers to Try Out New Things

Administrators acknowledge that there must be organizational support for teachers to try out new things, make mistakes, and learn.

> *They need some sort of confidence that they can learn in a supportive environment. And that learning is a process where you try something, not that you are always right. You give yourself permission to find ways to do what you need to satisfy you. I think that the support needed is often another person, not just a method or a book or a class. You've got to feel like you really know it. I bet Pearl could have read a dozen books but it wouldn't have been as supportive and helpful as Arthur sitting down with her.*

The other administrator also acknowledges this:

Personal support, as you try things out and they don't work. Especially some folks who are set in their ways about what they teach. Trying something new is really hard and really different. Kentucky has seen that with KERA [Kentucky Educational Reform Act]. It's being sabotaged from the inside. There's just too many teachers who aren't going to change the way they've been teaching for 20 years. So personal support I think. You know, it's ok to make mistakes, it's ok to try something out.

Provides Support for Community-Based Curriculum and Methodology

Administrators recognize that carrying out adult education programs in participatory, community-based ways is not the norm, not the kind of school we see as elementary and high school students, and not what conventional adult basic education teachers expect to do as they begin teaching. This makes organizationally-sanctioned group efforts toward the development of community-based curriculum and methodology, and training and support for those efforts vital. The desire and effort to do things in a different way has to come from somewhere. In MCU's case, the "somewhere" is connected to the experiences offered inside a grassroots community-based organization that uses group analysis and decision-making.

Teachers need training and support. I think that having the workbook in front of you and all that is a security blanket. Somebody said that this is the way to do it, and here are the right answers, so I must be ok kind of thing. Coming up with your own and designing your own takes an incredible amount of self-esteem. It's hard to develop that. And that's why having the group develop it is so important.

We can have time set aside for the teachers where we can meet and talk about what it is that they need. I don't think you should sit down alone and write a curriculum in a little room. That should be something that's developed with the people who are teaching it and the people who are benefiting from it. And I want time to have those meetings together. So that we can decide, ok what makes a better parent? What kinds of things do you need to learn to be a better parent? What kinds of things do you need to learn to be a better citizen? And develop the curriculum from there. But we need time. We need the time to do that.

Provides Resources to Support Community-Based Activities

Resources to support community-based activities are essential. Interestingly, one administrator's perspective was that MCU had adequate resources to carry out community-based approaches, while the other felt that getting resources was always a struggle, and there was never enough. In the portion of the interview quoted below, she is telling about her conversation with a group of adult education practitioners from other places who were visioning an ideal community-based program.

And the teachers were talking about doing a lot of field trips, and I said, where are you going to get your money to do field trips? Well...there's money in the program to do that kind of thing. And I said, maybe in a city there is, where you can walk next door to something. But when you're talking about a rural community, and I have to spend gas money and food money and that kind of thing, that's not feasible.

The Organization Encourages Support from and Connection with Others of Like Mind

Administrators said that encouragement from others who support community-based adult education was not only desirable; it is essential.

> *It is helpful for teachers and administrators to be with a group of other people who are talking about it, absolutely, always. If nothing else, it helps your self-esteem to realize well, gosh, I'm not the only one who has to deal with that. The ideas that get bounced around. The fellowship is there.*

Barriers to Successful Community-Based Adult Education Programs

Again, the two administrators were very similar in identification of barriers that prevented organizations from implementing community-based approaches. The one exception to this was a difference of opinion about whether organizational or structural problems were sometimes barriers.

The four barriers to community-based adult education identified by administrators include: pressure for exclusively basic skills or GED-centered activities from the outside (regulatory agencies, public opinion), and pressure for exclusively basic skills or GED-centered activities from the inside (students or teachers); staff who are reluctant to try community-based approaches; organizational or structural problems; and unrealistic expectations by staff.

A Push for Exclusively Basic Skills or GED-centered Activities

Administrators identified pressure for exclusively basic skills GED-centered activities from the outside such as state or federal regulation and from the inside, such as expectations of students, as the largest single barrier to building an effective community-based adult education program. Both administrators comment here on the difficulty of responding to outside pressures from regulatory agencies that seem to value only the GED:

> *If your performance standard is only how many GEDs or grade level gains you made this year, it's not going to matter how many people you got to vote, or what they are doing in their community.*
>
> *What we are trying to say is that there is more than one goal, and passing the GED is not the end-all goal in terms of the time we spend together.*

Both administrators comment on a pervasive image of adult basic education as being very much like K-12. That influences students to expect a book-based, classroom-bound, narrow focus on skills. Pressure on the teachers is then imposed from the inside, from students who question the value of community-based experiences in their adult education program. Some students who want to pass the GED as quickly as possible worry that a broader interpretation of education and the addition of community-based activities will slow down their progress toward a GED.

I think a lot of time they [teachers] feel pushed toward helping somebody get their GED. When somebody comes in, they try to respect the goals of the person. When they say, I want to get this piece of paper as quickly as I can. So I think they believe when they are doing those kinds of activities, they [the teachers] aren't helping them pass the GED.

You do have people in class who say, What does this have to do with the GED? It was more students than teachers. Some students would get up and leave. Talk about teacher's self-esteem, I mean, maybe they are just fearful of it.

Staff Who are Reluctant to Try Community-Based Approaches

Administrators mention that some teachers are reluctant to try community-based approaches. This wasn't their idea or expectation of adult basic education before their association with MCU. They worry that they aren't equipped to do adult education in this way. Speaking of a particular teacher who has not fully embraced the idea of community-based education, this administrator says:

She feels uncomfortable if she doesn't feel like she knows, if something might come up that you aren't ready for. All her lessons are lined out and she's real comfortable. The risk is low that something might throw her off. With this community-based or life skills curriculum, you don't know what might happen.

Organizational or Structural Problems

One administrator believes that organizational or structural problems sometimes get in the way of building an effective community-based adult education

program at MCU. She believes that teachers are sometimes not given enough time or support to develop, integrate, reflect on, and evaluate community-based approaches.

> *MCU is able to come up with all these great ideas and then they just hang out there and nothing ever gets done with them. It's a time issue.*

The same administrator points to structural constraints, like beginning and ending times of classes and pressure to create a uniform schedule that fits with transportation vendors, that holds the organization back from implementing alternative curriculum and community-based activities.

> *We have this great crafts curriculum that no teachers are using now. Part of it is the format it was in-it is made to spend a whole day at a time...an all-day Friday kind of thing. People found it hard to use it all once. There were structural problems.*

Unrealistic Expectations by Staff

Administrators also mention that unrealisticly high expectations for community-based adult education programs sometimes set up those the organizations for failure, at least in the minds of the most involved staff.

> *[Sometimes] you are comparing yourself with what you want to happen, not looking at what actually did happen of value. There's this*

disappointment or frustration that it failed, and somehow or another, it might be your fault. Or it might be their fault. I'm constantly looking for grassroots groups that have a big target membership and are constantly doing what they consider first-rate work, and expect 100% of their members to participate in high quality ways. But it's real hard to find. And I think, how many of these other organizations have all low-income boards that might have students on them, who are literacy level, who will tell you themselves that they don't feel comfortable reading reports and discussing the things we do. You expect too much.

Differing Perspectives

Not surprisingly, there were some clear differences between the perspective of the teachers and the perspective of administrators. In individual interviews, some teachers expressed the difficulty of incorporating community-based goals and activities into the curriculum, when students expect a GED-driven basic skills program, just as administrators said. Looking again at notes from the Participatory Research Group, teachers' list of things that get in the way of doing their best job reveal several barriers which may be organizational. A couple are physical barriers: lack of materials for students and for teachers; lack of privacy/rooms close together/hard to concentrate; not able to make decisions on my own; not knowing what's expected; very stressful; can't plan-everything is too spur of the moment; other organizational priorities (not mine) get in the way.

Students and other participants of MCU have their own perspective on organizational questions. The more active participants become in the organization, the more they see it in another perspective. They are no longer solely students or

participants in the MCU programs, they are leaders (as Board members, team leaders in community service projects, Teen Center coordinators, ALM program managers and tutors) and even at times quasi-staff. They begin to experience MCU almost as a place of employment.

Excerpt from Field Notes, 4/18/95
Job Culture: "Passing" in a job-literate world

I've been thinking about the processes, habits and culture of being an employee or even an active volunteer of an organization like MCU about as long as I've been watching the ALM tutors and the team leaders for community service projects do their work. I've been thinking a lot about the obstacles these adult education students must overcome when they do not have the experience of having a job, but are expected to fit in as if they do.

The expense vouchers that the ALM tutors fill in are an example. The tutors were very upset when they learned they would have to sign a form saying they received $5.00 reimbursement for expenses related to a tutoring session. For a period of time, some even refused to turn in the form and forfeited the expense money. I know that the question of the expense reimbursement getting in the way of other benefits was an issue, but everyone was reassured that they wouldn't affect those benefits. It seemed more that the tutors were insulted that they should have to sign for the reimbursement. And the thing with the tutor's students' social security numbers...it was so important to the tutors that they not have to give those. They had promised their students that they would not be identified in any way. To most of us that information is pretty impersonal and routine, but not to them.

It seems to me that the tutors were drawing off of cultural experiences, expectations and values in these situations. They did not have the job experience that would have provided another set of experiences, expectations and values. If they had that set of job-based experiences, they might have drawn off them. Their responses may have been what many consider more typical. I think it's another question which set of responses are actually "better."

With team leaders carrying out community service projects, there was sometimes inadequate organizational support and a lack of clarity about how to do the tasks they were being asked to do. In the Teen Center, participation of adult education students was sometimes problematic for teachers because of a lack of clarity about how much time students could miss classes, when, and under what circumstances. With the ALM tutoring program, as noted earlier, adult education students were sometimes treated as peers, sometimes not. There were contradictions in the organizational structure not fully supporting student empowerment.

The organizational informality, warmth, and comfortableness that attracted adults to the MCU adult education program also seems to nurture a kind of laissez-faire (or at least ever-changing) organizational attitude toward procedures and policies. This affects the organization in many ways, and possibly had something to do with the hesitancy of adult education students to embrace managerial sorts of responsibilities for the student-led tutoring program.

Excerpt from Field Notes, 3/3/95
Tutor Training

Maybe that hesitation tutors seem to have in knowing how or what initiative to take also partly explains why it has been so hard to get the most seemingly inconsequential things done-like ordering materials, going to buy supplies at Walmart, etc. It also may have to do with the internal chaos always churning at MCU, I think. Who has the authority to do it? What's the process? Who is responsible for getting it done? What approval is needed? Who'll take the fall if we do it wrong? The answers to those questions are in a constant state of flux and uncertainty.

Monthly training sessions like those for ALM and for the team leaders were provided by the organization (and facilitated by me), but seemed inadequate to meet the needs of active students and former students learning to "fit" with organizational expectations.

Community

Pearl's Story

Sometimes I get to feeling like, well, we don't do anything. You know we don't do anything. But I don't think anybody can come and sit in the GED classes over two months where they walk out without a GED or never come back that their lives are not touched in some way. That they've not benefitted. The Teen Center. Little kids that never had a chance to go anywhere. To call anything theirs. That they've been here and the guidance that they've got from MCU. Resource mothers, what Lydia and Joyce did, and the hard work that they did with these teenage mothers, it just couldn't be measured. The mammograms in Mountain Scout, the women I know they was two, that when they got their mammogram they had breast cancer. Maybe their lives were saved. Children First Foundation, the projects that they do and the parents, and we used to have the dinners and parties when people didn't have anything to go to, like Christmas and Thanksgiving. We kind of got away from it, because we've just had too much, but that was such a fun time for family. And the GED classes, so many people have gotten their GEDs that would have never gotten them. And they've gone on to college or got jobs or able to help their kids with their homework. Look how many people have come to class that can work fractions and divide that they couldn't before. And then June's literacy class, she is so fantastic with her literacy class and people that have learned to read. I don't think anybody can be associated with MCU and not benefit.

Impacts on the Community

When participants were asked what difference it made that MCU exists and does its work in Fairmont County, these community impacts were mentioned: MCU is an educational resource, in both a formal and informal sense; MCU offers resources and enrichment for the community, in the form of the Teen Center, a community tutoring program, and encourages neighbors to come together to form relationships and strengthen the community; shows a model of acceptance of all people across boundaries of race and class; and offers opportunities for community members to learn and grow.

There are other, perhaps less obvious ways that MCU contributes to the community.

An Educational Resource

The community has an educational resource that helps adults meet educational goals, including literacy and preparation for the GED, as well informal learning opportunities in a broad range of subjects and activities. MCU demonstrates ways to meet traditional learning goals through involvement of students in community issues, giving rich opportunities to its participants to develop skills such as building relationships with others, learning group skills, problem solving, and critical thinking.

Martha talks about the ways that participating in MCU community activities has helped her children expand their thinking and reduce prejudice, strengthened her relationship with her kids, made her a better parent.

> *It's brought us a lot closer. They talk to me about things they couldn't talk about before, like what it's like being with different ages and different colors. They've learned black people have the same feelings they do. I can understand teenagers better.*

Offers Resources and Enrichment for the Community

The community has a Teen Center for its young people, a place where children and teens can feel a sense of acceptance and belonging, and where they can be a part of positive group activities.

> *I think the people in the community knows this is the place for kids to come, a safe lace to keep them out of trouble, try to teach them some skills and stuff. So I think it's very positive for the community. You can tell everybody's always on the street asking what's the next project, if we are going to have a basketball team, or are we going to take the kids skating and stuff, so it helps and the community likes it quite a bit. We're always wrote up in the newspaper, and the radio station is always talking about us and they call us live on the radio and talk to me or Joey or talk to the kids. I think the community feels like we are doing a great job.*

Through the team leaders' projects, the community has a resource that brings neighborhood people together to get to know each other, have fun, and work on problems of concern to them. Team leaders, as well as teachers and their students

provide many direct services in the community, such as home repair and painting. They also keep alive cultural traditions such as visiting the elderly and sick in the community.

Reading tutors trained and encouraged by the organization contribute community-based tutors who reach their neighbors and kin, the people often considered "unreachable" in a way that conventional school-based programs never can.

A Place Where All are Valued

The community has a place that values acceptance of all, regardless of class or race or gender or educational status. Although this value and ideal is not fully realized by every participant or in every interaction at MCU, still the community can see a good model, a place where attempts are made to put these values into action.

> *We have a good mixture of kids here. We have blacks, whites, we don't pay any difference. We try to get every kid the same. I feel like we accomplish that. Rich and poor, we see them all as kids. Most of the rich kids can't help if they are rich and the poor kids can't help if they are poor. They're just pure kids. We see them all as one.*

Many adults in the community, through participation in MCU activities, can better address problems of prejudice and intolerance. The community has a way for black and white to work together for a common good, and in so doing break down stereotypes and racial barriers.

I'm married to a black man and I thought people didn't want me around. The volunteer program is a new beginning. It's like opening a door I never thought was possible.

Opportunities for Community Members to Learn and Grow

The community benefits when its members have opportunities to learn and grow as staff members and volunteers. Residents may use this leadership capacity far beyond the walls of MCU. Their leadership will be a resource for the entire community. This twenty-year-old VISTA volunteer talks about his experience of leadership development.

Everybody says I'm way past my years, and I'm more mature than kids my age, but I really don't see it. Nobody ever guesses my age, they always think I'm twenty-five or twenty-six because of my job and how I accomplish it. I really don't see, I see everybody my age being about the same. If they just had an opportunity to work for the low income, or work for the kids, or work for the literacy programs. But a lot of people don't get an opportunity to like I have got. I'd say most of them would do it. Just makes me have a better outlook on life, thinking that I can make a difference. It made me a more mature person. It made me capable of solving problems, more than just one way. Thinking out problems, how to deal with people, and how to deal with large crowds, how to communicate with people, and how to keep talking it out instead of fighting. It just gave me a different outlook on life.

Those impacts and benefits to the community are mentioned in interviews. But there are other, perhaps less obvious contributions made by the organization to the community.

At MCU, ideas are created and nurtured in the supportive atmosphere of the group. New ways of looking at community development are accepted and explored. Not only has the organization provided dozens of paid jobs for Fairmont County, they also have developed leadership activities that can be a bridge to a job by providing experiences with job-related responsibilities. In the example below, Janice talks about alternative economic strategies for communities. The group discusses ways to bolster the economic reality of the community through a real valuing of the contributions made by AFDC recipients who perform community service.

Excerpt from Field Notes, 3/31/93
A different way to think about work

Staff Meeting: Almost all of the teachers are here today. Janice is talking about a different idea of work. She says that the JOBS students and others, like OWEPS, who must put in a certain number of hours of work each month in exchange for their welfare benefits could be training to be outreach workers. At MCU, outreach workers often do recruiting for programs, like the women who encouraged their neighbors and kin to have mammograms and PAP smears. The neighbor-to-neighbor approach, instead of the professional to lay person approach, is favored by MCU. So it does make sense that the JOBS students and OWEPs could train to do that work.

Janice says some of them can be real good outreach workers and don't even know it. Work isn't just getting a job at the factory and making money for some rich factory owner. Work can be looking at the community and seeing what the needs are. Work can be visiting the elderly. Work can be doing activities with teens.

I like the way Janice can help us get rid of our prejudices toward AFDC recipients by challenging us to redefine work. Why can't we as a culture learn to value work, and the worker, when the work is on behalf of the community? Doesn't it make sense that we should regard work done for the community, for all of us, as just as important as work done for profit?

Excerpt from Field Notes, 3/31/93
Continued

What does this say about jobs created by MCU, like the numbers of adult education teachers and outreach workers? I'm not so sure that there are necessarily many jobs for outreach workers here except for those created by MCU, which may always be a limited number. But aren't there as many outreach worker jobs in this county, as say, beauticians or car mechanics? Most vocational schools charge right ahead in training for those occupations. So why shouldn't a community group be supported to train people for community jobs?

How does all this translate into public policy-for adult education, job training, and welfare reform? I'm not sure, but I believe the questions are important.

MCU has learned important lessons about how to encourage involvement. The way the organization does its work accepts the culture and ways of life of the community. The organization is made up of people who represent a range of residents. MCU purposely includes people with the lowest incomes, the lowest educational attainment, and makes concerted efforts to help many grow into leadership positions.

MCU does not, for the most part, approach community members by telling them they ought to change. In its best moments, the organization finds ways to draw people in by valuing their knowledge and experience.

Excerpt from Field Notes, 4/18/93

I was struck by the similarities between what community organizers learn about citizen participation in government, and how Janice talked about what MCU has learned about parent participation in schools.

We see in community organizing work that most residents fail to participate in decision-making in public life and government. But when we have an organization or group of people to relate to, some help with learning about how things are done and how we might contribute or bring change, as well as support and encouragement and appreciation of our efforts, then the odds of citizen participation are much greater. At it's best moments, MCU is like that for parents.

Janice said "When parents don't come to a PTA meeting after receiving a notice about it, it doesn't mean they don't care or don't want to be involved. It might mean they don't feel comfortable in that kind of organization, aren't sure how they can contribute, don't feel needed and wanted in a personal way. They are used to their knowledge and experience not being valued." She went on to say that parents will often be a part of school life if they are offered opportunities that make it clear they are wanted, needed and their contribution will be valued.

Janice talked about drawing people in through story-telling projects in school, and in the herb project in adult education classes. In that project, adult education students are interviewing people in the community about uses for herbs that grow in the area. The students will tape the interviews and take a photograph of the community person they talk with. Later they will write a summary of what the person said and assemble all of the stories and photographs into a class book. This helps adult education students and helps build relationships with others in the community, who know their knowledge is valued.

Summary

Administrators identified six organizational factors leading to success in community-based, adult education efforts: the organization is made up of the people it is designed to serve and they provide the direction and decision-making to guide the

organization; the organization develops a shared culture that has respect for students and their ways of life at its base; organizational support is given to teachers to try out new things, make mistakes, and learn; it provides encouragement for organizationally-sanctioned group efforts toward the development of community-based curriculum and methodology, and training and support for those efforts; the organization provides resources to support community-based activities; and encourages support from and connection with others of like mind.

The four barriers to successful community-based adult education identified by administrators include: pressure for exclusively basic skills or GED-centered curriculum and activities from the outside, (regulatory agencies, public opinion) and pressure for exclusively basic skills or GED-centered curriculum and activities from the inside (students or teachers); staff who are reluctant to try community-based approaches; organizational or structural problems; and unrealistic expectations by staff.

Teachers' lists of organizational barriers were similar in some ways and different in others. Teachers, just as administrators, said that students' expectations of adult basic education as book-based, classroom-bound schooling conflicted with the organizational vision of community-based education. But teachers also identified some organizational barriers that administrators did not mention. Teachers said that organizational barriers like: not able to make decisions on own; not knowing what's expected; stress; inability to plan because organization is chaotic; and organizational priorities (not their own) get in the way.

expected; stress; inability to plan because organization is chaotic; and organizational priorities (not their own) get in the way.

Actively-involved students also ran up against organizational barriers, such as trying to adapt to procedures and policies which they did not understand, and that seemed ever-changing. There was no easy connection between their own experience, values and expectations which were culturally-based, and what was expected of them at MCU as quasi-staff. Neither the procedures and policies that they needed to follow at MCU, or their own upbringing and habits, were necessarily at fault. There seemed to be no obvious way to bridge the differences. Training efforts, such as Team Leader Training and ALM tutor training were not adequate to fully address the need.

Other important impacts of MCU and its work happened in the community. MCU was recognized an educational resource, in both a formal and informal sense; MCU provided resources and enrichment for the community, in the form of the Teen Center, a community tutoring program, and ways of connecting neighbors and strengthening community. MCU demonstrates a way of accepting all people across boundaries of race and class; and offers opportunities for community members to learn and grow.

Perhaps less obviously, MCU contributes a place where ideas are created and explored, such as alternative forms of thinking about jobs and economic challenges to the area.

Many organizations and public institutions say they want involvement of all, but MCU really acts on it. The organization demonstrates ways to encourage involvement of community people through approaches that value their knowledge, experience and culture.

CHAPTER NINE

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter, I return to my research questions: *What is community-based adult education, and how is it practiced? How are students, teachers, organizations and the community impacted? What factors contribute to the development of programs that integrate literacy and community development and organizing?*

What is community-based adult education, and how is it practiced?

The current understanding of adult basic education assumes that it is all about individual credentialing, and about economic impacts, such as a better-trained workforce. The push for GED-only activities, seen as problematic at MCU and many other community-based adult basic education programs, is really about values and assumptions: what is the role of education?

> What is education, and who is it for?...is education's major purpose to produce a work force - diligent and competent workers who will meet the needs of business and industry? Is education's primary purpose to produce an informed and empowered citizenry? (White and Merrifield, 1990)

The MCU example shows us that education can be for many purposes, including strengthening the community and encouraging literacy learners to be full participants in civic life.

I drew from my field notes, journal and interview transcripts the following list of characteristics of community-based literacy education as it is practiced at MCU. This list is similar to the descriptors offered by Garber-Katz and Watson (1991) and others who have been a part of community-based literacy programs.

Characteristics of community-based education as envisioned at MCU:

(1) Recognition of the importance of community context is vital. Recognition of context in an adult education program means that learners' culture, their ways of living, their values and their experiences are respected, and when possible, are built upon and used as a base for learning.

(2) Students learn and grow in a supportive web of relationships with teachers and other students. Classroom work and community experiences are structured so that people work in groups and solve problems together.

(3) Opportunities for student leadership are consciously identified and their efforts purposely nurtured in positions such as volunteer staff, board members, community tutors, project team leaders, citizen-lobbyists, and spokespeople.

(4) Teachers are close in class and culture to their students. An ethic of equalitarianism between teachers and students is maintained. Students have a say about decisions in their class, and to some degree, in the organization.

(5) Curriculum is drawn from community issues and issues in students' lives. Education is not book- or classroom-bound. Education is not separated from life. Teachers and students recognize that there are many ways of learning. Practical learning and learning by doing are emphasized.

(6) Community-based education meets community as well as individual needs.

Students had a different understanding of success than what we commonly define it to be. At MCU success was only partly associated with gaining academic skills. Students did not necessarily translate test scores or speed of obtaining credentials as academic success. If they believed their skills were improving, that was enough to feel academically successful. The students did not measure their success only in terms of academics.

Success in adult education also meant to them differences in their everyday lives, such as being able to do things they need to do better, feeling more confident and more satisfied with themselves, coming out of isolation and relating to others in positive ways, enjoying new experiences, having fun, accepting responsibilities, and being a leader.

The results of this study are consistent with Beder's work (1991). Similar to Beder's study, the students at MCU held negative associations with schooling, but not education. Learning was valued, but the regimented schedules and classroom-bound experiences of school were not. Students felt bored and unsuccessful in learning experiences which depended only on books or lecture. They valued "doing" over "thinking". "Fun" was very important to them, and their positive evaluation of their MCU experience almost always rested on opportunities to form relationships with teachers and other students, and to have "fun".

Most of the time, the organization and its' activities and participants used a *literacy as practices* understanding in their work (Lytle and Wolfe, 1989). The social context of literacy is recognized. The lives of the participants often form the base for program curriculum, goals, and methodology. The organization clearly fits in Fingeret's (1992) description of *community-oriented* literacy programs.

But there were some actions and discussions at MCU in which staff, students and others examined critically the elements of the community and the larger world that prevented them from moving out of poverty. These activities sometimes moved the group toward Lytle and Wolfe's understanding of literacy as *critical reflection and action*. The critical reflection and action was closely connected to the organization, but not as connected with MCU's adult education classes and curriculum.

Complex levels of the organization (participants, the board, administrators, teachers, students, volunteers) have different understandings of the mission and goals of the organization, and the place of literacy education in it.

How are students, teachers, organizations and the community impacted?

Students. The students interviewed had overwhelmingly positive experiences in the community-based program at MCU. They felt their experience at MCU was life-changing. Often students remarked that they had been transformed.

The students' statements have a particular importance to those interested in retention. At MCU, in order for adult education students to stay in the adult education program, they need to feel a sense of progress, to enjoy being a part of the program and its activities, and feel that they have something important to contribute. Students can and do feel a sense of progress over the long term without obtaining a GED or other standard credential. They feel a satisfaction that comes from relationships with teachers and other students. They feel they are learning and contributing in ways that policy makers and program administrators often don't even see or count.

It seems that having many opportunities to excel and contribute, besides "book work", is key. Students develop confidence over time that they are competent, especially when given a variety of opportunities to be successful. Students who have had these kinds of opportunities over a period of time grow and develop skills and confidence about their place in the world. Even adults who describe themselves as "slow" or "hard to learn" nevertheless believe their contributions are important and valuable, that they are competent people in many areas of their lives. They do not confuse academic aptitude with virtue. When there are ways to accomplish important

things outside academics, everybody has a chance to feel successful. Because the group, and the organization, supports the value of many ways to contribute, learn and grow, students can more easily feel good about themselves, and find things they are good at doing.

The experience at MCU suggests that we should not assume that students can easily leap from the position of not having much power (a student in an adult education program) to being able to think of themselves as organizers of community service projects, managers of a literacy program, or other efforts with many responsibilities. Leadership development for students is a step-by-step process, and there are some obstacles to overcome. Students (and all of us) need opportunities to try out small steps, to get help when we need it, to discuss and evaluate what we've done, to take bigger risks in a supportive environment, to learn and grow over time.

Teachers. Teachers need a way to talk to each other about the successes, and most particularly the things they try that don't come out the way they hope. This applies especially to community-based curriculum and program development. There are few teachers and programs who try out these methods, so it is hard to find support from other teachers, widely-available professional publications, or conferences. But teachers need that kind of sharing of ideas and support to view "failures" as steps along the way, instead of signals that they should go abandon the effort.

There was not agreement among teachers about the value of the approach, or enough opportunities to talk with each other consistently about ways to implement the

ideas. Teachers need to be more involved in decision-making regarding community projects. They can work their teaching around the projects and feel less like their students are being pulled away. Teachers need help on ways to connect community activities and projects to basic skills, so that those skills are not taught in isolation, but integrated into a life activity. They want assistance in becoming more able to use a context, such a community education project, as a way to learn and strengthen academic skills.

Teachers and the whole organization need to think about opportunities to do critical thinking and problem solving, especially around the family and community issues they confront.

Teachers need time for regular reflection. They need a chance to talk about why the organization uses a community-based approach to literacy. Teachers need additional opportunities to connect to their values to the work, throughout the organization and the adult basic education program.

Concern about using community-based approaches may come from the way the approach is done, rather than the approach itself. Teachers should be a part of the decision-making about how and when students will work on community activities, and how those activities will be integrated into the rest of the class work. When teachers are not fully empowered, they are not able to fully support empowerment of students. Teachers need to "own" the community work, too. When it is thought of as class work, then they are much more likely to be positive. They can plan for the student time away from books, and they can plan activities to integrate the learnings. When

they are as involved and excited about the community work as the students, then teachers will also be positive about figuring out ways to build on the out-of-class activities.

Organizations. Connecting to the community and its' values and needs is made easier by embedding adult basic education in a community organization with several other programs, goals and purposes. Access to programs, participants and organizational experience is facilitated.

At MCU, the well-being of the organization was very important to the success of the students. Grassroots organizations are often started by a strong visionary. He or she typically is charismatic and attracts people who believe in similar ideals but who need the support, structure and encouragement of an organization to act on those ideals. As the group grows, the work and the organization become so large and diverse that it can no longer be managed by the original leader. Sharing leadership and creating intermediate staff positions that allow students better access to support becomes very important. The informality of organizational procedures should be balanced with students' and staffs' need for clear-cut job descriptions and daily support. Organizations also need to balance the compelling needs in the community and their desire to address all of them, with practical considerations of the amount of work that can be taken on. Organizations often try to do far too much with too little resources, spreading themselves too thin. In their dedication to meeting human needs, community organizations often miss the importance of being strong internally, with well-developed systems of planning, support, and evaluation. This is the point at

which many organizations suffer crises in developing shared leadership, effective internal systems, and a strong infrastructure.

Still, many grassroots organizations are unable or choose not to use their energy to address these issues of internal development. Their work is so compelling and so needed that it is difficult to turn away from it in order to pay attention to the internal health of the organization.

Even the most effective grassroots organizations are usually marginalized, when they confront power systems and challenge the way decisions are made. (See Introduction in Fisher, 1993). The organizations do important work, but it has been difficult to make the work add up over the years, partly because of fragile internal systems and lack of resources (Bingman and White, 1994).

These issues of under-developed internal support systems, difficulty in sharing leadership, lack of resources, marginalization, and attempts to take on massive amounts of work have all been concerns at MCU. Yet despite these problems, the organization persists and makes a positive difference in the lives of many in Fairmont County and beyond.

Not surprisingly, the most involved students came up against these organizational barriers as they did community-based work. Although few students directly addressed organizational barriers in their interviews, observations over a period of five years revealed how the organization was both supportive (as reported at length in Chapter 6) and not supportive of students, often due to inadequate staff support and undeveloped internal systems. The organization continually struggles

between promoting the informal, supportive atmosphere and establishing more permanent, structured, efficient systems for carrying out its work.

If organizations want students to think of themselves as contributing members, they have to treat them as such. The staff needs to respect adult education students doing community work as peers. It is not possible to go back and forth between treating students as adults, then children - as trustworthy in one situation but not in another.

In a community-based program with a weak infrastructure, everything about a student-led tutoring program or community service projects is going to be harder to get done. Even the simplest tasks of purchasing materials and supplies is time and energy-consuming. It is difficult to know how to implement policies and procedures, or sometimes to even know what they are. Processes for planning and evaluating programs are not developed, and planning may be piecemeal and last-minute. Overall coordination of the program was sometimes lacking. If an organization doesn't have a strong infrastructure, and especially people available to help, adult education students or other volunteers will not be as successful and will not feel as good about their work.

These contradictions of organizational structure not fully supporting student empowerment are widespread in community organizations (Bingman and White, 1994). Though the belief in student empowerment is there, organizational obstacles often make it difficult to fully operationalize those ideals.

Despite the problems and challenges that grassroots community organizations face, without them, many needs would go unmet and many injustices unchallenged. Multi-issue, multi-goal community organizations have an ongoing presence and many ties to the community, and a history of active work. The most effective organizations have developed webs of connections that are deeply embedded in families and kin and shared history and culture and a sense of trust, so that the work can be done. Rarely do schools or local governmental bodies have these connections, and that limits their ability to do work with the people they call "hard to reach."

Organizational commitment to a vision of more just and equitable communities is necessary. That commitment enabled organizational decision-makers at MCU to view issues that arose - such as racial tension within the adult education program - to be an almost-necessary step along the path toward growth, instead of "trouble" that indicated they should retreat from efforts to break racial barriers.

Community. The commitment to more just and equitable communities meant that community involvement and participation in decision-making was encouraged at MCU. It allowed organizational decision-makers and participants to accept collective action for social change (such as participation in demonstrations, rallies and actions at local, state and national levels) as a natural outgrowth of their adult education program.

If we accept the work of Putnam (1990) and other social capital theorists, then we must conclude the work of MCU strengthens the community. All the community-based activities built and strengthened the person-to-person networks,

helped connect community residents, deepened relationships, provided leadership development opportunities and practice in work environments, and earned the organization and its participants much good will. Although the classroom and community activities did not systematically and consistently promote the kind of critical perspective that Borgas, Cortes and others in socially progressive movements encourage, some of its work was clearly critical in nature.

What factors contribute to the development of programs that integrate literacy and community development and organizing?

If organizations want student outcomes to include being able to work together with others, solve problems, and participate in community life, they must offer experiences that help them learn those things. In lecture (or workbook) dominated classroom, students do not have the experience of working together to solve problems, building on each other's ideas and taking small risks in a safe place. But these are the kind of experiences that prepare them to be active participants in community life. If a desired outcome is a fully-participating citizen, who cares about the community and is willing to work on its behalf, then experiences must be integrated into the class and the organization that permit their development.

The MCU example suggests the need to shift away from a GED-only emphasis in adult basic education. To do that, we need wide-spread recognition that there are many purposed for education. We also need to create other ways to determine progress on a variety of goals learners may have for themselves and their

communities. Efforts such as the Civic Participation Standards Project and the National Center for the Study of Adult Literacy and Learning's goals for developing a broader array of assessment tools are positive steps.

"Develop" or "organize"? Social action in adult education has a strong historical basis in approaching literacy skill attainment not as a goal in itself but as a tool for addressing larger social and economic issues. Both Freire and Horton worked toward demonstrating ways that this could be done. At MCU, the community-based approach allowed them to consider questions which arose about equality, human rights, the nature of work, and access to decision-making, among others.

But MCU did not systematically and consistently connect reflection and action on these issues to their curriculum and classroom activities. Those opportunities to reflect and take action were sometimes found in the organization itself, in community-based activities done outside the classroom and in leadership development experiences as a participant at MCU.

Borgos' (1996) questions about civic connectedness and building community apply here. The relationships formed by MCU participants in their community service work were valuable to them and to the web of inter-connectedness in the community. But usually the community service work did not address institutional inequities and root causes of problems such as poverty. Often there was not the critical perspective identified by Borgas (1996), Alden (1982), Gaber-Katz and Watson (1991) present as a vital part of action and reflection.

Even though in the same region as MCU exist strong citizen's organizations such as Save Our Cumberland Mountains (SOCM) and Kentuckians for the Commonwealth (KFTC) that systematically encourage and develop this kind of critical perspective and action-reflection approach among members, there have been only limited interaction between MCU and the other groups. Differences in the approach, the areas of concern, and the habits and ways of working seem to prevent a closer relationship. In organizations like MCU, with a "community development" approach, a concern for meeting direct human need, and a funding mechanism that demands the group not stray far from mainstream politics, an "organizing for social change" approach does not seem to easily fit.

Despite visionary leadership and strong student participation in the community, MCU and other community-based organizations with literacy programs often have difficulty in integrating a critical perspective with adult education work. And, organizations such as SOCM and KFTC do not usually see adult basic education as part of their mission, though certainly there is appreciation for the broader scope of adult education that often happens in social justice organizations.

Few organizations seem able to put social action and adult basic education together. This is particularly frustrating when we consider the unique position and the potential these organizations have to uncover and speak, and act on connections among education, poverty, the economy, and the community.

But when the literacy program "lives" inside a healthy, democratic community organization, there are many more opportunities to work on community issues, to

integrate learning with life, and to accomplish positive social change. Education can become the "ticket in" to the community, not the "ticket out."

Part of the answer may lie in forming relationships between social justice organizations and community-based adult basic education programs. Each has much to give the other. Community-based adult basic education program staff and students can learn ways that social justice organizations do their work, and the popular education methods they use. They can learn more about community issues and about regional activism and ways to participate. Social justice organizations can understand the ways in which low literacy skills blocks the participation of many in community organizations, and some ways to remove those barriers. All can learn from the examples of community-based adult education offered in Chapter Two in which curricula is systematically developed with students around the community issues with which they are concerned.

Practice, Research and Policy Implications

Current adult education policies emphasize individual credentialing (GED) and economic impacts of adult education. This narrow focus serves to limit our ideas of what "success" is, and how it can be measured. The MCU example gives us a glimpse of another way to do adult education, and another way to think about what the impacts can be. It has significant implications for teacher training, curriculum development and program organization. It suggests that we need to rethink policies

on assessment and performance accountability, so that policies allow us to embrace community-based literacy education as one valid approach, among others, in the field.

The MCU example points toward the need to refine our understanding of what motivates learners, and why they stay, and create programs that respond to those reasons. Although they may come to learn to read or to get a GED, in the case of MCU students, they stayed because they had fun, because they had a chance to form strong relationships with teachers and with other students, because they had the engaged in many different kinds of learning, including experiential. Policy changes are needed to reflect these shifts in our understanding.

Summary. At MCU, a community-based approach to adult education was successful at helping students build and strengthen the community by encouraging their own and others' involvement. It promoted much thought, discussion and effort among students to identify and try to rectify human need on an individual basis. It promoted attention to relationships and a valuing of each other. It led to greater participation in the life of the community. It also provided experiences that led some students to persevere in their adult basic education programs through opportunities to learn in more practical ways that emphasized "doing" along with "thinking".

For those who engaged in leadership-developing activities, in which their voices, opinions, and decision-making mattered, and especially for those who took on extra responsibility and accountability, this approach was very effective. It helped them find their voice and develop their leadership capability. This approach helped students demonstrate to the community that, though they do not fit the middle class

stereotype of volunteer, they have real contributions to make that are important and valuable to the community.

However, in this place, at this time, most students did not move from involvement in meeting individual needs to analyzing institutional causes of social injustice, or to organizing for social change. Due to pressing immediate needs, and sometimes due to organizational challenges, there were few opportunities for critical reflection and limited action to address root causes of inequities.

At the same time, almost all participants valued the importance of the community service work that met direct human need, encouraged the best in all of the community, and drew people together to work on community concerns.

Important literacy education occurs in families, in relationships, in local organizations and in the community. Community-based literacy education experiences permit students to use "hands and mind" together, solve problems in their communities and strengthen their literacy skills at the same time. Sharon is right: *It ain't all about the books.*

EPILOGUE

I hope to share with readers not only the conclusions I reached, but also reflections on the process of doing the work. I am particularly struck by the importance of the Participatory Research Group to this study.

I learned some things about participatory research that surprised me. I hadn't expected that our relationships inside the group would prove to be such a motivating force. It seemed that the group's primary interest was in helping me get this job done, because of the good will and concern we feel for each other, not necessarily because the research questions were so compelling to them. It was the relationships that drove us to persevere during hard times.

The group helped me be a better researcher. Whatever discipline I drew from in order to do this dissertation came from the group. In the process of getting the work done I was forced to think out plans and alternatives because we had a scheduled date every month to talk about it, and make decisions. I knew they were going to ask me about my progress on the work, so I was pushed to accomplish piece after piece of work. The image in my head of group members asking me what I had done since we were together last kept motivating me.

Because of the groups' involvement, I was forced to take seriously issues of confidentiality. And because they were there, I had interested people who would tell me if they thought I was going down the wrong path with some idea, interpretation, or information.

And I was humbled by the group, who freely chose to leave in the things about themselves and their organization that were not one hundred percent positive. To see the group come to that decision was an inspiring experience. If they had chosen honesty, how could I do anything less?

When the "together" part of our work was over, and it was time for me to write, I definitely missed the group and wished we still had a regular, systematic way to talk about the work. It was then that I remembered an image from a poem written by Amy Horton and given to me by my friend Juliet: a dissertation is like a long, lonely walk across the dessert. During my time of working without the group, I did feel lonely. I did feel the burden then, more than the joy, of the work.

I know that connecting myself to the group made a big difference in the kind of study I did. I had an "insiders" point of view, because they welcomed me and my research - again, I think, because of our past relationship.

To have had an "outsider's" point of view would have strengthened my work in some ways. I would have been freer to talk with members in the community who were unrelated to any of MCU's work. Perhaps it would have been easier for me to hear criticism of the organization and its participants.

But I think my study would have lost an important perspective of the ones most involved in the literacy work - primarily the learners themselves, and their teachers, who for the most part knew me and trusted me.

The participatory research experience made research seem a lot like life - both take place in the noisy, confusing world of contradictions and uncertainties and

tentative conclusions. Struggling over the hard parts...disagreeing...working things out in a group...getting impatient...learning from each other...accepting differences...feeling cared for and supported. Some days are cold and gloomy and filled with the thought: does this work matter? Will it make a difference? But other days are so beautiful it takes your breath away, with the knowledge that we are contributing, we are adding our part.

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Vita

I was born in Loudon,Tennessee in 1954 and raised on my family's farm in the Cave Creek Community of East Roane County. I went to elementary and high school in Kingston and then attended Roane State Community College. I received a Bachelor of Arts Degree from The University of Tennessee in 1974. For the next seven years, I worked as a social worker , a counselor, and as a community educator. I went back to school in 1981 and earned a Master's Degree in Special Education in 1983. I taught elementary and middle school special education classes until 1990. During those years I was also a volunteer literacy tutor and GED class assistant. In 1988, I began taking adult education classes part-time at the University of Tennessee. In 1990, I accepted a graduate student assistantship at the Center for Literacy Studies and entered the adult education program full time.

I was also working and learning alongside others in community organizations such as Save Our Cumberland Mountains, Southern Empowerment Project, and Tennessee Industrial Renewal Network, and non-formal education centers, such as Highlander.

I now live on the farm where I was raised, along with my husband Mike Easter. We live happily with our assortment of cows and dogs and other interesting animal and plant life. I continue to work with the Center for Literacy Studies, never lacking for challenge, inspiration, or the help of good colleagues.